PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 72

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1984-85

COMPRISING PERIOD
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IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 72

SIXTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1984-85

House of Commons

Monday 28 January 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Coal Industry Dispute

1. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of the National Coal Board regarding the present dispute.

5. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the strike in the coal mining industry.

6. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current situation in the coal mining industry.

7. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will now take steps to seek to resolve the present dispute in the coal mining industry.

8. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the dispute in the coal mining industry.

10. **Mr. Eadie** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current situation in the mining industry.

11. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the dispute in the coal mining industry.

12. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the current dispute in the coal industry.

13. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the coal mining dispute.

15. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Engery whether he will make a statement on the current dispute in the coal industry.

18. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the latest position in the coal mining industry dispute.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Peter Walker): I have had frequent discussions with the chairman of the National Coal Board upon the many problems facing the industry as a result of the unnecessary industrial action taken by some sections of the NUM.

This morning, of the 174 pits, there were only 13 without men present. Coal production was substantially increased, particularly in Scotland, Yorkshire, the north-east and north Derbyshire.

During the 19 working days of 1985, more than 10,000 further miners have returned to work.

Coal stocks at the power stations have remained at a very high level. The CEGB has reiterated its assurance that with present coal stocks and supplies there will be no power cuts due to coal shortages during 1985.

Fifty-two coal faces, including 30 working faces, have been lost since the start of the dispute.

Tomorrow, officials of the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers will meet to establish whether talks can be restarted.

The Government hope that, with the National Coal Board having offered a substantial investment programme, good pay for miners, a closure procedure better from the miners' point of view than any previous closure procedures, generous early retirement provisions and substantial resources to bring new enterprises and business

to mining communities, the damaging industrial action which has taken place without a ballot will swiftly be ended by a negotiated settlement.

Mr. Powell: As the dove in a Cabinet of hawks, will the Secretary of State ensure that the eagle does not get her claws on tomorrow's talks about talks? Will he also give serious consideration to the termination of the contract of Ian MacGregor as chairman of the National Coal Board? He has caused the most disruption in the industry for 11 of the 17 months since he was appointed chairman. The strike was initiated by him and the Government.

Mr. Walker: There have been seven rounds of talks, and we know the eagle that has done the damage to every one of those rounds. It certainly has not been Mr. MacGregor, who has made an offer to miners which is better than any offer since nationalisation. He has offered better closure procedures, a bigger capital investment programme and the first ever guarantee that there will be no compulsory redundancies. It is a great tragedy for the industry that, without a ballot, the dispute has taken place.

Mr. Canavan: As it has been part of the Secretary of State's propaganda all along that no miner who wanted to remain in the industry would be forced out of his job, will the right hon. Gentleman repeat that guarantee and extend it to the 500 striking miners who have been sacked during the dispute? If the Thatcherite hawks are really looking for blood and for heads to roll, would it not be better to roll in the plastic bag the head of the person whose political appointment provoked the most damaging and longest strike in British industrial history, at a cost of more than £2·5 billion to the taxpayer?

Mr. Walker: A great deal of blood has been lost in this dispute by violent picketing of the worst sort. Judgments on whether people should be sacked are matters for the National Coal Board; but, with any employer in this country, people who commit criminal acts cannot expect to continue to be employed afterwards.

Mr. Proctor *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: A failed banker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: A unit trust man.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must tell the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that if he persists in this behaviour, it will be unfortunate for him.

Mr. Skinner: We know the score.

Mr. Proctor: In what appear to be the closing stages of this dispute, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government's attitude will not be in any spirit of revenge or victimisation, but, rather, of looking to the future for the achievement of an efficient, productive and profitable coal industry as soon as possible?

Mr. Walker: Yes, Sir. The first objective should be to get an agreed settlement as swiftly as possible, and thereafter to concentrate on getting a united industry with united mining communities, and with the industry advancing so as to take advantage of the considerable prospects that lie before it.

Mr. Pike: Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that, for the first time in this dispute, the Government will play a positive role in trying to resolve it rather than take the negative approach, which they have taken all along and which was shown clearly in last week's statement by the Prime Minister, when she revealed that she was after not just victory but crushing the NUM? May we be assured that the Government's attitude will now be positive?

Mr. Walker: There cannot have been a more positive approach than the Government's willingness to put in thousands of millions of pounds for a capital investment programme, hundreds of millions of pounds to guarantee no compulsory unemployment, a good pay offer and, for the first time, a new enterprise company designed to bring new businesses to mining communities. Throughout, therefore, the Government have been totally positive.

Mr. Eadie: As the right hon. Gentleman has given a resumé of the history of the negotiations, will he bear in mind, on the eve of talks about talks, that this dispute could have been settled on three occasions had there not been Government intervention? May we be assured that there will not be Government intervention tomorrow? We have had enough of what one might call the fingerprints and riding boots involvement of the Government. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the way to end this dispute is for the NCB and NUM to reach agreement in principle for an honourable settlement without the involvement of a third party, by which I mean the Government?

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman understates the number of times when there could have been a settlement of the dispute. There could have been a settlement on 6 March if a ballot had been taken by the NUM. On seven occasions since then it could have been settled, and it certainly could have been settled at ACAS when it put forward a compromise proposal. One man has always stopped a settlement being reached.

Mr. Adley: Further to the last point made by my right hon. Friend, has not one of the saddest features of this whole dispute been the cowardice shown by the Leader of the Opposition, who failed at the beginning of the strike to call for a ballot—*[Interruption.]*—bearing in mind that, if a ballot had taken place, that would have avoided the necessity for the Leader of the Opposition to hurl insults at the Prime Minister and would probably have avoided the strike?

Mr. Walker: It is true that when the dispute started one third of Britain's coalfields decided, in the normal tradition of the NUM, to have a ballot, and they balloted nearly 70 per cent. against strike action. It is also true that when Mr. Scargill changed the rules of the NUM on balloting the Leader of the Opposition said that it brought a ballot nearer. Never since then has he urged the NUM to have a ballot, and that has been a great pity.

Mr. Douglas: Will the right hon. Gentleman reflect a little on what he said today in answer to supplementary questions, particularly about the unity of mining communities? Does he accept that those, like myself, who represent mining communities, particularly in Fife, realise that a vital factor in maintaining cohesion is the need to remember that if men come out together, they go back together? That means that any dismissal action on the part of the NCB must be a matter for discussion between the NCB and the NUM, and that the Government must keep their mouth shut about the dismissal of people or having

them remain outside the industry because of activities on the picket line. In other words, is the Secretary of State aware that this is a matter between the union and the NCB and that it should be settled by discussion on that basis? May we be assured that on that issue there will be no interference by the Government?

Mr. Walker: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is for the employer in any organisation, including a nationalised industry, to decide whether he does or does not sack an individual employee, and that employer has the same right as any other employer to consider criminal actions.

Mr. Hamilton: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a large number of Opposition Members have had the greatest of reservations about Mr. Scargill's behaviour and tactics since the beginning of this operation? Do the Government understand that there is a bright future for the industry, but that the miners have deep fears about that future? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the Prime Minister to treat these problems and grievances with much greater generosity and understanding than she has hitherto shown?

Mr. Walker: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the mining industry has a good and real future. It requires high investment and a sense of unity in the mining industry and communities. The Government over which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister presides have been willing to allocate enormous resources of public expenditure to ensure that that takes place. I regret the fact that during the last year that did not happen.

Sir William van Straubenzee: Since it has been necessary throughout this dispute to distinguish clearly between the mining community and the mining leadership, would it not be in the interests of the mining community and of getting the industry to work together again if the return to work were gentle, gradual and slow? That action would make the assimilation a little easier than it might otherwise be. Will my right hon. Friend therefore not necessarily be in too great a hurry to achieve a settlement?

Mr. Walker: I am in a hurry to achieve a sensible settlement because I believe that this dispute continues to cause tremendous hardship in mining communities, takes away potential markets and loses investment that could otherwise take place. One of the encouraging features of the past few months has been the fact that, in a number of areas in which a substantial proportion of the men have returned to work, fears of divisiveness and ill feeling in the pits did not occur to the degree expected. I hope, therefore, that if there is a speedy settlement there will be a quick sense of unity within this industry.

Mr. Dormand: Will the Secretary of State bear in mind that, although some miners have returned to work, thousands are prepared to stay on strike for a long time yet and that that—this is the important point—shows their determination to protect their jobs? When will the Government, and the Secretary of State in particular, take seriously the provision of new jobs in mining areas? Does the right hon. Gentleman not realise that the £5 million about which he keeps talking is piffling compared with the amount the miners would need if the Government's pit closure programme got under way?

Mr Walker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's anxiety. We set up the enterprise company with a capital of £5 million. The number of applications and inquiries during the first few weeks were very encouraging. Therefore, I immediately agreed to double the capital to £10 million. I made it clear at that time that we were imposing a £10 million limit and would review the amount required, depending upon the type of action that we could take. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I place great importance on that company's activities. There is not a £5 million limit. I have now made £10 million available, and that is not the the limit.

Mr. Andy Stewart: With expulsion hanging over the heads of the Nottinghamshire NUM members, if a democratic union has to be set up, will my right hon. Friend endorse the recognition of that union by the National Coal Board?

Mr. Walker: I do not believe at this stage that there is any point in suggesting what might occur in certain circumstances. All I can say is that during this dispute the Nottinghamshire miners have never had a desire to split off from the NUM. Their recent attitude has been affected not by their actions but by the actions of Mr. Scargill and the executive. I notice that the delegate conference that was to be held has now been put off. There is no point in speculating about what might happen in certain events.

Mr. Howard: Is there not already in existence an honourable agreement affecting matters at the heart of this dispute? Why should what was an honourable agreement for NACODS not be an honourable agreement for the leadership of the NUM?

Mr. Walker: That is interesting. I have heard no criticism from the Labour party leadership, the TUC or any other bodies of the NACODS agreement, which provides procedures for closures better than those the NUM has enjoyed under any previous Government. It has provided, as ACAS pointed out, an honourable settlement of the dispute.

Mr. Mason: Will the Secretary of State make representations to the National Coal Board, on behalf of miners who have been arrested on the picket line but not charged, to ensure that their future will not be impaired by the board? He should express the hope that there will be no victim.

Secondly, did the Prime Minister make her views known to the chairman of the National Coal Board when she stated that she expected a written guarantee from the NUM leadership that uneconomic closures should be on the negotiating list before any real talks could take place?

Mr. Walker: On the last point, the NCB issued a statement to that effect because, during the dispute, there have been seven rounds of talks during which the leader of the NUM has boasted that he has not moved and inch since March. Understandably, it wanted to ensure that these talks would be held on a constructive basis, where progress could be made.

On the first point, I shall convey to the NCB the views expressed by the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Rost: Does not section 6 of the Coal Industry Act 1977 specifically allow the Secretary of State to make further grants to assist the elimination of uneconomic colliery capacity, and was not the then Secretary of State the now discredited right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)?

Mr. Walker: I am not sure when he was discredited, but it is true that those words were used in the legislation when the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was Secretary of State.

Mr. Benn: Is the Secretary of State aware that the most significant part of his first answer was that he made no reference whatever to Government insistence that the NUM should agree in advance to the closure of uneconomic pits, despite the briefing from Bernard Ingham to all the press? Are not signs of the Secretary of State's recognition of the strength of the NUM that more than 140,000 employees are still on strike, that the pound is at its lowest level ever, that there is an increase in interest rates of 2 per cent., and that share values have fallen 30 points today? Have not the Government a strong interest in reaching agreement with the NUM? If not, NUM members on strike will not be prepared to return to work to see the butchery of their industry.

Mr. Walker: On the subject of uneconomic pits and the butchery of the industry, as the right hon. Gentleman is aware, during the period that he was——

Mr. Benn: Answer the question.

Mr. Walker: I am answering the question.

Mr. Benn: Answer the question.

Mr. Walker: The right hon. Gentleman will not like the answer. During that period 17,000 miners took voluntary redundancy on terms much worse than those offered at the moment. In 1978, one pit that he closed had 1·5 million tonnes of reserves and another had three to four years' reserves. Throughout this dispute the right hon. Gentleman has made wrong predictions at the expense of miners.

Mr. Sackville: Will my right hon. Friend take steps to preserve jobs in energy intensive industries by ensuring that such industries do not bear a disproportionate part of the costs of the dispute?

Mr. Walker: The cost of the dispute will depend on coal stocks and the need to restock at the end of the dispute. There are still substantial coal stocks at the collieries and the power stations. They are about three times what the Opposition predicted they would be. For those reasons, it is very difficult to calculate what the cost will be.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Whatever the terms on which the dispute is settled, there can be no victors. What is the right hon. Gentleman doing to inhibit his right hon. and hon. Friends from crowing over what they believe to be a victory—which is perhaps the most crass and insensitive behaviour of recent days?

Mr. Walker: I know of none of my hon. Friends who have crowed over a victory. I agree that considerable damage has been done to the industry, the miners and the economy by a totally unnecessary dispute. The important thing is to end the dispute as quickly as possible.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: My right hon. Friend has graphically made clear the generosity of the NCB's offer, which is the envy of industries throughout the country. Would it not be a betrayal of the miners whom I represent and who have consistently gone to work if further concessions were to be made beyond those agreed with NACODS?

Mr. Walker: Yes. We should constantly remind the House that miners in my hon. Friend's constituency and in similar constituencies followed the normal traditions of the NUM by holding a ballot, and they balloted overwhelmingly, at the beginning of the dispute, not to strike. They did so because of the generosity of the offer then available. That has been the reality of the dispute from beginning to end.

Mr. Barron: The NACODS settlement has been much talked about this afternoon. Is it not true that NACODS, after hearing statements by the right hon. Gentleman and by the Prime Minister, is saying that its settlement has been put under tremendous pressure and that at present, because of what the NCB is doing, it is not prepared to sit down with Mr. MacGregor? Is not the NACODS settlement in some doubt?

Mr. Walker: The NACODS settlement is in no doubt. If the NUM wishes to accept it tomorrow, it can do so.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Is it not true that very few people wish for an unconditional surrender by either side in the dispute? Is it not also true that, bearing in mind the cost to the country and the cost in other people's jobs lost because of the dispute, no agreement should be reached that does not accept the closure of pits that have outlived their useful economic life? Only the coal miners would gain by such an agreement. Everyone else would lose.

Mr. Walker: Throughout the history of British coal mining, uneconomic pits have always been closed. Throughout every coal mining industry in the world, such pits have been closed. It is not in the interests of miners that money should be poured into pits that have no long-term future of any description when it could be invested in the future of the industry. The issue that has kept this unfortunate conflict going has always been entirely bogus.

Mr. Allen McKay: Does the Secretary of State not realise that the strike started because of a lack of trust in the chairman of the NCB, and that that trust must now be regained? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should not interfere in or comment on the present delicate stage of negotiations? Does he further agree that during the past 11 months the Government have failed to provide time to debate the whole issue? Should they not have given the House a chance to discuss the situation and to highlight some of the matters which the right hon. Gentleman believes to be beneficial?

Mr. Walker: The reason for the dispute was very clear. The conflict started on a wrong issue and without a ballot. Mr. MacGregor put forward terms, and if there had been a ballot there would not have been a strike. As a well-known wet on such matters, when I discovered that the Leader of the Opposition felt that a debate would be embarrassing for the Opposition, I naturally felt for him.

Mr. Terlezki: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that when this political strike is over—let us hope that it will be over sooner rather than later—all the miners who have worked and kept the industry going, despite intimidation and threats, will come to no harm?

Mr. Walker: Yes.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Does the Secretary of State agree that if the NUM is now seeing the economic facts of life, a settlement of the dispute can bring about a long-term and successful future for the industry? In regard to political

interference, what role has Mr. David Hart played in relationships between the Government and the Coal Board? Has he liaised between 10 Downing street and the Prime Minister and the NCB?

Mr. Walker: No, Sir. As far as I know I have never met Mr. Hart.

Mr. John Townend: Will my right hon. Friend convey to the chairman of the NCB the message that the overwhelming view of Conservative Members is that under no circumstances should miners who are dismissed for violence and for causing damage be reinstated?

Mr. Walker: Sackings and reinstatements are matters for the employers to consider. I am sure that, like all employers, the NCB must take into consideration the criminal actions of any of its employees or former employees.

Mr. Redmond: Does the Secretary of State agree that he knows nothing about industrial relation? Will he assure us that, in the next two weeks, he will find time to learn a little something about industrial relations and, having that little knowledge, will avoid any repetitions of the dispute?

Mr. Walker: I always listen to the wise, shrewd and well-informed words of the hon. Gentleman with great interest. I noted every word.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it could not possibly be in the interests of the maintenance of the rule of law in Britain if those who have been convicted of serious criminal offences during the dispute were to be reinstated?

Mr. Walker: Yes. The NCB must take the same view as any other employer towards people who have committed grave criminal offences.

Mr. Lofthouse: When the Secretary of State next meets the chairman of the NCB, will he discuss the board's decision to discontinue its interest and investment in putting a drift mine down in my constituency, which would have coupled up Wheldale, Fryston and Glass Houghton collieries and given them a longer life? As 42 per cent. of all under-25s in my constituency are unemployed, and as they would normally have gone into the coal industry, if the Secretary of State fails to discuss that matter with the chairman of the NCB, will he advise them what employment prospects young men in mining communities can expect when pits are closed?

Mr. Walker: I shall convey the hon. Gentleman's views to the chairman of the NCB, but I cannot comment on any specific proposal. I am glad to say that, for any area where there are pit closures, for whatever reason, we have brought into operation an important company to assist in getting further businesses and enterprises into those areas.

Mr. Nicholls: Now that the inevitable bleating has started about allowing the NUM to cave in with dignity, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that there was no dignity for miners when they were defrauded of their right to a pre-strike ballot, that there was no dignity for policemen who were beaten up on the picket line and that there was no dignity for the families of working miners who were terrorised? Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that those factors will have to be reflected in any agreement that emerges?

Mr. Walker: There are many miners throughout the country who are also reflecting on those facts.

Mr. Welsh: The Secretary of State is aware that, since nationalisation, it has been the role of Ministers with responsibility for energy, and of other Ministers with responsibility for other nationalised industries, to hold the ring so that management and unions can discuss things and reach amicable agreements. In the past few months the Government and the NCB have been "two-oneing" the NUM. It is time that that finished. May we have an assurance that, if negotiations are entered into this week, the Secretary of State will go back to holding the ring and let the NCB and the NUM thrash it out and get an acceptable and amicable agreement?

Mr. Walker: In all previous arrangements Governments might well have been willing to produce the necessary finance to get a sensible agreement, but they have also always been dealing with someone who was willing to put up sensible proposals. In this dispute, seven times—on one occasion with ACAS holding the ring—the NUM leadership, against the wishes of all of the miners who voted, has gone on with this utterly unnecessary industrial action.

Mr. Leigh: In the light of the fact that this morning many miners were clearly dissuaded from returning to work because of the pending negotiations, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that at an early stage in the talks about talks the NUM accepts that pits should be closed because they are uneconomic, lest Arthur Scargill is given a further opportunity to prolong negotiations indefinitely, thus stemming the return to work and prolonging the strike?

Mr. Walker: Today's return-to-work figures are interesting. On the morning shift alone 840 people returned to work, which is an extremely high figure and in sharp contrast to all previous figures when talks were pending. The message to Mr. Scargill must be that by far the biggest return was in Yorkshire.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Secretary of State accept that the dispute is resulting in higher costs to consumers in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that if the dispute could be settled at an early date a decision could be made to convert Northern Ireland power stations from oil to coal, thereby securing future jobs for miners?

Mr. Walker: That is one of many examples of missed opportunities this year. In 1984 I had hoped that 1,000 firms would convert to coal. Alas, many firms which converted to coal are considering converting back to oil or gas. That is a great tragedy for the industry.

Mr. Eggar: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that when the dispute is over the Government will continue to invest in the coal industry to ensure that it is competitive, supplies energy at competitive prices and provides long-term jobs for miners?

Mr. Walker: With the quality of mining machinery and coal seams that we have, the coal industry has a good opportunity for years to come. It is the Government's great desire that the industry takes advantage of that opportunity.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is the Secretary of State aware that 18 fewer miners returned to work in south Wales today? I am sure that he will want to join me in congratulating them

on their solidarity and determination. Does he not recognise by now that those miners will not return to work until a proper, honourable and negotiated settlement takes place, which recognises the social and economic arguments for keeping pits open?

Mr. Walker: I know that the hon. Lady read that on the tape this morning. However, the number of miners working in south Wales is substantially higher than it was last Monday.

Mr. Holt: In the light of the comments this afternoon and the feelings throughout the country, does my right hon. Friend agree that if the 5,000 miners who have been found guilty of criminal offences were given the opportunity to go to industrial tribunals and claim unfair dismissal it would be time-consuming, a waste of public money and totally unnecessary?

Mr. Walker: I cannot interfere with the legal rights of individuals regarding industrial tribunals. Obviously, the NCB must be free to treat people who have committed criminal actions against its personnel and property as it considers fit.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to state how many power cuts or voltage reductions have taken place throughout England, Wales and Scotland because of the mining dispute? Will he ask the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board to give an accurate description of the cuts that have taken place as a result of the dispute, rather than always blame them on cable failures? Will the Secretary of State give the House an estimate of the increased cost of coal and oil imported to break the mining dispute? Will he comment on the story that appeared in *The Guardian* of today?

Mr. Walker: I read something in *The Guardian* last week that was totally wrong. Voltage reductions take place every year irrespective of power stocks, and there are normally about three a year. The last figure that I have shows that there has been one so far this year. We have plenty of stocks at power stations, and in 1985 there will not be any power cuts as a result of the present level of coal stocks.

Mr. Orme: Is the Secretary of State aware that we want to see a negotiated settlement that is acceptable both to the NUM and the NCB? In that regard, will he deplore the article in *The Times* of last Saturday, written by Mr. David Hart, who is an adviser at No. 10. He said:

"The time for a negotiated settlement is past."

Does the Secretary of State agree with that?

Mr. Walker: The right hon. Gentleman should withdraw that. Mr. Hart is not an adviser at No. 10. The view of the Government, and certainly that of the Prime Minister, is that not only do we want a negotiated settlement, but that we believed that when ACAS intervened we would have a negotiated settlement.

2. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many employees of the National Coal Board are currently at work.

14. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many miners are currently working.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt): I understand from the National Coal Board that today more than half of its employees are no longer on strike, of whom nearly 79,000 are members of the NUM, representing 42 per cent. of its membership.

Mr. Yeo: Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the courage and loyalty of those miners who have voted with their feet during the past 10 months? Is he aware that there would be widespread and fully justified outrage in the country if miners who were dismissed for engaging in criminal conduct were accepted back into the employment of the National Coal Board?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend's second point would be a matter for the NCB. As to his main point, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I use every opportunity to pay tribute to the courage and determination of those who have returned to work, often in the face of mob intimidation and violence.

Mr. Fallon: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the seven men taken back this morning by the Coal Board in the north-east have not been reinstated but re-employed? Does he agree that it would be wrong to expect working miners to work alongside those convicted of serious criminal offences?

Mr. Hunt: That is a very fair point, and I shall draw the views of my hon. Friend and others to the attention of the chairman of the National Coal Board.

Several hon. Members: *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In the interests of balance, I shall call two hon. Members from the Opposition.

Mr. Ryman: With respect to the reinstatement of NUM members who have been on strike, is it not utterly unfair for the Government to attempt to influence the chairman and area directors of the NCB when, for 10 months, the Government have flatly refused to intervene in this most serious industrial dispute?

Mr. Hunt: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, no, it is not unfair. On his second point, the Government intervened at the start of the dispute by underwriting the best offer made to miners since nationalisation.

Mr. Strang: Does the Minister accept that the international competitiveness of coal has been transformed by the fact that although the pound-dollar rate was 1·48 when the strike started, it is now 1·11? Why does he not tell the Coal Board to press ahead and take advantage of the new export markets instead of trying to implement a closure programme for which there was never any economic justification and which is now completely outdated?

Mr. Hunt: International markets depend upon the international competitiveness of British coal. That is why it was made clear at the beginning of the dispute to all those working in the industry that they had been offered the best possible deal for an expanding, competitive coal industry. Sadly, much of the momentum has been lost.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Accommodation

30. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will make a statement on the progress being made in providing additional office accommodation for hon. Members.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): In accordance with the design brief given to the architects in the Services Committee's third report of 1983-84, the design team has developed preliminary sketch plans for phase 1 of the new parliamentary building. These plans are now under consideration by the Services Committee's New Building Sub-Committee.

Mr. Dormand: Does the Leader of the House realise that the aspect of the matter that still puzzles most hon. Members is the time that it will take before the new offices are occupied? In those circumstances, will he give assurances that he will ignore the strident voices of some of his hon. Friends who want the development to be cancelled, and that there will be no reduction in the moneys already allocated for the work? What progress is being made in transferring staff from the Palace so that their accommodation can be made available to hon. Members?

Mr. Biffen: I do not belive that there is any likelihood of this project being cancelled. I shall see what can be done to ensure that the execution of the work proceeds according to the budgeted time scales and with the appropriate finance. To date, it is up with the forecast. As for the movement of staff from the Palace so that more places are made available for hon. Members, those numbers have already been given. I shall look into exactly what changes have taken place to date.

Mr. Dykes: After so much time has elapsed, is it not desirable that at long last we should provide better accommodation for visiting European parliamentarians — *[Interruption.]* — as do many other national Parliaments?

Mr. Biffen: That interesting and perceptive question goes somewhat wider than the question of the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand). I should have thought that the good-natured response to it shows that it is a matter of some delicacy.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Has the right hon. Gentleman ever investigated the possibility of providing some distance away from the House extra accommodation for research assistants? Although this is not an ideal solution, if the right hon. Gentleman has not carried out such an investigation, will he please do so?

Mr. Biffen: The Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) is looking at the main proposition that it would be appropriate that the Palace should be, as it were, repossessed by hon. Members, but if that were to take place I hope that hon. Members would not then complain that they were some distance away from their beloved research assistants.

Souvenir Kiosk

31. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Lord Privy Seal what were the takings at the souvenir kiosk in the latest year for which statistics are available; what were the takings in the four weeks to 24 December; what plans he has for the future of the kiosk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: The takings in the four-week period and the 12-month period to 21 December 1984 were £146,073 and £414,869 respectively. These figures include VAT. The Refreshment Department regularly reviews the range of products on sale at the kiosk, but there are no immediate plans for major developments.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend please convey the thanks of all hon. Members to Jean and Joe for their excellent service? Do not the remarkable figures that my right hon. Friend has given show that already there is a sufficiently wide range of goods on sale to attract enormous custom and satisfy hon. Members and visitors? Would it not be wholly wrong to set up a new supermarket in Westminster Hall selling anything from House of Commons champagne to parliamentary tinsel?

Mr. Biffen: The safest thing that I can do is to say to my hon. Friend that I shall convey those sentiments to the Catering Sub-Committee.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Does the Lord Privy Seal share my hope that it will be found possible to dispense with this eyesore, which is derogatory to the dignity of the House?

Mr. Biffen: I noted the comments of the right hon. Gentleman on 30 January 1984, when I took good care to hide behind the skirts of my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd). All I can say is that, again, I shall refer the comments of the right hon. Member to the Catering Sub-Committee.

Mr. McQuarrie: Will my right hon. Friend take note of the fact that, while the figures for sales that he has given are very satisfactory, there is a distinct absence of many items in the kiosks during the busiest parts of the parliamentary Session—in July and again at Christmas? Will my right hon. Friend take steps to ensure that adequate stocks are held during these busy periods so that hon. Members can obtain supplies for their constituents?

Mr. Biffen: I shall most certainly ensure that that point is further considered.

Mr. Heffer: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that during the period of the English revolution, when Parliament operated as a Parliament against the King, political pamphlets of various kinds were sold in Westminster Hall? Would it not be a good idea to return to that position instead of tolerating the present nonsense?

Mr. Biffen: Political pamphlets are normally pretty slow-moving stock. I am sure that in many parts of the House there will be sympathetic consideration of that viewpoint.

Mr. Heffer: They would not read the right hon. Gentleman's.

Mr. Biffen: No. I am not such a fool as to write them.

Statutory Instruments

32. **Mr. Beith** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he is satisfied with the present arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny of statutory instruments.

Mr. Biffen: I believe the present arrangements to be generally acceptable to hon. Members.

Mr. Beith: Does the Leader of the House recognise that in the time that he has been a Member of the House the amount of law made by statutory instruments has been increased dramatically and that the right of the House to debate and vote upon those statutory instruments has been

reduced dramatically? Would not the right hon. Gentleman like to be the Leader of the House who went down in history as the one who reversed both those trends by ensuring that the House took control of the making of law by statute?

Mr. Biffen: That is an interesting proposition, but, for example, as long as we have our present arrangements with the EC a growing body of our law will be made that way. Of course, I shall always look sympathetically at any suggestions that are made to improve upon present conditions.

Mr. Madden: Will the Leader of the House give an assurance that the Government will not in future adopt the procedure that was adopted when they introduced a charge for entry clearance certificates, which denied the House any opportunity to debate the matter? Indeed, the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments was also denied an opportunity to consider the introduction of that charge.

Mr. Biffen: In view of the parent legislation under which action was taken, what proceeded was entirely defensible, but I take at once the hon. Gentleman's point.

Parliamentary Proceedings (Televised Broadcasting)

33. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Lord Privy Seal whether he will arrange for the House to have an opportunity of debating and voting on televised broadcasting of the proceedings of the House.

Mr. Biffen: Members will wish to take account of the experience in another place before deciding upon a further debate on the televised broadcasting of proceedings of this House.

Mr. Canavan: Is it not a poor reflection on the House of Commons that even the non-elected geriatric House of Lords is seen as more of an open House than this comparatively exclusive club? If this place really is the people's Parliament, why should the people not be allowed to see just what exactly their elected representatives are getting up to? Or are the Government afraid of more publicity being given to ex-Tory Prime Ministers who expose the disastrous policies of this discredited Government?

Mr. Biffen: Ignoring the commercials and addressing myself to the substance of the question, I say to the hon. Gentleman that this is clearly a House of Commons matter and I think that the House will wish to proceed by taking account of the experiment now being undertaken in another place.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Will my right hon. Friend take note that many of my hon. Friends do not want a debate on the possible televising of this House, and, indeed, do not want to see their House televised at all?

Mr. Biffen: Of course I take note of that view, knowing as I do that the most rich variety of opinions will be expressed on this topic.

Dr. Owen: Will the Leader of the House give a commitment that he will definitely arrange for a debate once the experiment is over in the House of Lords and not just leave it in this rather vague way? The House deserves to know that there will be a debate.

Mr. Biffen: Yes, the right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. The House will wish to consider the matter further and I hope that I shall be in a position to offer time when the occasion arises.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend take due note of the attendance of the Lords spiritual and temporal once the novelty has worn off? There seemed to be a remarkably large attendance on the first day. It will be interesting to see how many attend from now on.

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that many in this House will monitor exactly what is happening in the other place.

Mr. Shore: If the House is to take account, as I suspect it will wish to, of the experiment in the other place, would it not be sensible if some arrangement were made whereby the Select Committee on Sound Broadcasting of this place was able to join the similar body in the other place to scrutinise and monitor the experiment?

Mr. Biffen: I suspect that that already falls within the ambit of the Committee, but I shall look at that constructive point further.

CIVIL SERVICE

Post Office Counter Services

35. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Minister for the Civil Service what plans he has for maintaining or increasing the use made by Government Departments of the counter services of the Post Office.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): Decisions about the use of post office counter services are not made centrally, but by the Department concerned, which, of course, seeks cost-effective and sensible ways of meeting its requirements.

Mr. Spearing: In view of the fact that the Government are committed to a comprehensive network of counter services, and bearing in mind that some transactions are inevitably more costly than others, is there not an obligation on the Government to ensure that the viability of the present network is not undermined? Therefore, is it not right that the Government should prevent the peeling off by individual Departments of individual transactions which may be convenient to them but which result in complete inconvenience to the public?

Mr. Hayhoe: That may well be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I know that she has answered questions from the hon. Gentleman on that score. It is not a matter that falls within the responsibilities of the Management and Personnel Office.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Is my hon. Friend aware that the DHSS is charged up to 38p per Girocheque passed over the post office counter? We in the House are always concerned about the gross extravagance and expense of such charges. Will my hon. Friend encourage all Government Departments to have bank accounts instead of using post office counter services?

Mr. Hayhoe: As I said just now, it is for Departments to seek cost-effective and sensible ways of meeting their requirements. My hon. Friend should address that question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Consultancy Inspection Review Services

36. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Minister for the Civil Service what representations he has received about the consultancy inspection review services in Government Departments.

Mr. Hayhoe: This efficiency unit report to the Prime Minister has been widely welcomed and more than 7,000 copies of the unit's briefing note on the report, called "Helping Managers Manage" are being distributed by Departments to their managers.

Mr. Eggar: Has my hon. Friend noted press speculation that the Government now attach less priority to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Service than they once did? Is that the case? Can my hon. Friend confirm that the recommendations of the report will be implemented?

Mr. Hayhoe: There was a report in the *Financial Times* on 4 January, the headline of which talked of the efficiency drive in the Civil Service "faltering". However, the headline did not reflect the contents of the article. Those of us who follow the work of sub-editors in putting headlines to stories know that that is not unusual. I can assure my hon. Friend that the efficiency drive is not faltering. The recommendations of the report will be followed through.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Minister undertake to find out which Government Departments have placed contracts with Zeus Security consultants and other private detective agencies?

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall make inquiries and write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Winnick: Is it intended that the review service will look into the ban on trade unions at GCHQ? Did the hon. Gentleman note, on the first anniversary of the ban, the huge demonstrations and protests? Is it not time that the ban on trade unions at GCHQ was lifted.

Mr. Hayhoe: I admire the ingenuity of the hon. Gentleman in getting in that supplementary question on this question. It has nothing to do with it. As the hon. Gentleman should know by now, matters concerning GCHQ are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

Mr. Soley: Are there not growing complaints from the public about the deteriorating quality of service from the Civil Service? Is not this a cost-cutting exercise designed to reduce staff numbers? Is not that resulting in a lower quality of service generally and, therefore, in false economies?

Mr. Hayhoe: It is apparent from that supplementary question that the hon. Gentleman has not read the report to which the main question refers.

Mr. Skinner: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Prime Minister has a bit of a cheek to talk about an efficiency drive in all the other Government Departments, bearing in mind that according to a question answered by her only a few days ago it transpires that the cost of running her office at No. 10 Downing street has gone up by more than 100 per cent. since she became Prime Minister? Is it not a fact that, despite this efficiency drive, she is spending money like water to spy on everyone else?

Mr. Hayhoe: No, it is not a fact. If anyone in the House has cheek, it is the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Dr. McDonald: Is the Minister aware that the financial management initiative has failed in its objective of tightening up Whitehall management and saving money and that the new consultative document "Helping Managers Manage" has merely added to the confusion? Is he aware, further, that no consultancy service can help the Government achieve their objectives so long as the Government sustain their attack on Civil Service numbers, opportunities for promotion and the level of pay and fail to resolve the bitter resentment about the trade union ban at GCHQ?

Mr. Hayhoe: The hon. Lady is wrong on every single premise of that question—absolutely wrong on every count.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dining Rooms (Smoking Ban)

34. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will initiate an inquiry into the desirability of prohibiting smoking in all dining room places within the precincts.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): No, Sir. I am not aware of any widespread demand in the House for a change in present arrangements.

Mr. Hamilton: Does the Minister recognise that there are ample facilities for smokers other than in the Dining Rooms? Does he further recognise that there is considerable inconvenience for non-smokers who have to sit beside smokers in the Dining Rooms? Will he treat the matter a little more seriously than he appears to be doing?

Mr. Biffen: I am happy to treat the matter seriously, because I understand how the hon. Gentleman feels. However, it is a matter for the Catering Sub-Committee, and I shall refer the hon. Gentleman's point to it.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Should we not, in fact, have reverted to energy questions?

Mr. Speaker: Having dealt with Civil Service questions, we revert to the questions immediately before them. If we had run out of those, we would have reverted to energy questions.

Mr. Yeo: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I draw your attention to the fact that no fewer than 11 questions were bracketed with question No. 1 this afternoon. As a result, question No. 2 was not reached until nine minutes past 3 o'clock. Can you persuade Ministers to exercise some degree of restraint in the number of questions that are bracketed together so that we do not again have a similar position to today, when question No. 18 was answered but five questions standing higher on the Order Paper were not answered?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's question, No. 2, was reached, so I do not think that he has any cause for complaint.

I judged that it was the wish of the House today to give a fair run to question No. 1, which is a matter of major

importance. I apologise to hon. Members whose questions were not reached, although I think that they will understand the special position arising today.

Frigates (Orders)

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Heseltine): As the House knows, I have been considering the results of a tendering exercise for two type 22 frigates for the Royal Navy. Cammell Laird, Swan Hunter and Vosper Thornycroft were each invited to tender for these warships—one, the fourth replacement for warships lost in the South Atlantic, and the other an addition to the naval programme which I authorised in 1983.

The tendering process has been unusually protracted, for several reasons. I have been concerned to obtain the best available prices and tauter contract terms than we have been accustomed to in this area of defence procurement. The earlier tender replies did not adequately contribute to this objective, and it was not possible to take a decision on the order before the validity of the tenders expired. A final round of tendering was initiated in late July last year. The results of this round met several of the concerns to which I have referred, and, as with the earlier rounds, showed that the competition had been close and keenly fought.

The House will be aware that the decision on the orders for the frigates has important implications for each of the competing yards. I have considered the implications carefully, in consultation with my ministerial colleagues.

At this point, I should say that the deplorable and unnecessary industrial action which occurred last summer at Cammell Laird would, as I made clear at the time, had it continued, have excluded the yard from further consideration in the competition. The courage and determination shown by the moderate element of the work force at Cammell Laird, in the face of the intimidatory behaviour of their former work colleagues, has averted the almost certain closure of the yard at an early date.

The cheapest solution from the point of defence procurement would be to place the order for both ships with one yard, but, in the light of the wider and relevant factors involved, I have decided that an order for one type 22 frigate will be placed with Cammell Laird and for the second with Swan Hunter, and I am prepared to authorise the necessary expenditure. This offers the prospect of survival of Cammell Laird as a major warship builder; without such a contract the yard would have closed. I hope that the yard will succeed in obtaining other business in the short as well as the long term.

Swan Hunter, which is a much larger firm and is implementing a large redundancy programme at the moment, could face further substantial redundancies even with the order which I have just announced. The Government wish to do what they reasonably can to prevent this. Last autumn we embarked on the construction of a new class of frigate, the type 23, and negotiated a first order at Yarrow on the Clyde. I have decided to negotiate an order for the second type 23 frigate at Swan Hunter as soon as this can sensibly be done, and subject to satisfactory agreement on price and other contract terms. I will expect the price for this frigate to reflect the economies obtainable with an order for two frigates rather than one; and to be competitive. In order to establish this, tenders will be invited for the third type 23 order in the same time scale from all United Kingdom yards capable of carrying out the work.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The Secretary of State's statement will obviously be welcomed both by the Royal Navy and by the two warship yards which have been given orders to build the three new frigates. It will be welcomed especially because it seems likely that this will be one of the last statements on major equipment orders in defence which the Government will make in this Parliament. From now on it is likely to be cancellations all the way.

The statement has an air of desperation about it. The Secretary of State is desperate because the Treasury will demand, if we read the public expenditure White Paper correctly, larger and larger cuts in defence. He is desperate also because the cost of Trident over the past months has increased by about £200 million a month. For the Secretary of State to talk about "tauter contract terms" is cynical and ridiculous. When are we to see tauter contract terms for Trident, the costs of which have doubled under the Government?

Why was there delay in placing the order, especially for type 22 frigates, the first one of which will be a replacement for the one lost in the Falklands war? Why does the Secretary of State not make it clear that the delay stems from budgetary problems in his Department and not from industrial problems at the yards? What will be the cost of a type 23 frigate? Some of us remember that one of the reasons for closing Chatham dockyard was that type 23 frigates would be disposable vessels and would cost about £70 million. What is the cost of a type 23 frigate now? If the type 23 is not to be disposable after all, is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that the Royal Navy, after he and his business partner, Mr. Levene, have finished with it, will have the necessary dockyard facilities to refit the types 22 and 23 and all the other warships of the Royal Navy?

Mr. Heseltine: I suppose that the House will sympathise with the right hon. Gentleman for talking about everything except the subject of the statement. I shall answer the relevant questions that he put to me. The delay of which he spoke has nothing to do with any budgetary problems in my Department. Anyone who has any idea of the considerations that have been brought to this matter will know that. The approximate price of a type 23 frigate now is about £110 million. We shall ensure that there are adequate servicing and repair facilities. Our problem is one of over-supply of facilities, rather than under-supply.

The House will perhaps judge the sincerity of the right hon. Gentleman's contribution to my statement against the background of the Government having increased defence expenditure in real terms by £3 billion a year, while the Labour party was committed to reducing it by a third as soon as it came to power.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that most of us on the Conservative Benches will welcome his statement, which will certainly end the uncertainty about these matters? When are the type 22s likely to go into service with the Royal Navy? Similarly, when will the type 23s, which will be following thereafter, go into service?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. As a rule of thumb, one can broadly assume that an order takes four to five years—probably nearer four years—to complete. That will give my hon. and learned Friend and the House the answer to his question.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Has the Secretary of State seen the statement attributed to Admiral of the Fleet Lord Hill-Norton about a scandal behind the selection procedures for Her Majesty's ships, particularly in relation to the Osprey? Is the Secretary of State confident that these procedures are proper?

Mr. Heseltine: I read the newspaper report this morning and I have asked to be kept fully informed about the matter, but I understand that the story carried in *The Times* this morning is a very long way from the truth.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): My I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the fact that three warship yards—Vosper Thorneycroft, Yarrow and Cammell Laird—are classified as lead warship manufacturers, and, therefore, maintain appropriate design staffs? What implications does my right hon. Friend's policy have for Vosper Thorneycroft, and what expectations can the yard have of further Royal Navy orders?

Mr. Heseltine: I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern. The capacity of Vospers is well known to my Department and the yard will be able to compete for the third type 23 order to which I referred in my statement. Of course, it is competing now for other ships for the Royal Navy.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): As it appears that Swan Hunter has not had to tender for the type 23, can the Secretary of State tell us whether the same sort of situation would apply to Vospers, which is a yard with a fine record of achievement, but which now faces heavy redundancies? Can the right hon. Gentleman also tell us the price for the type 22s, following the keen competition for them?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will know that we do not announce the detail of contract prices that have been negotiated in any of the work for the Ministry of Defence. However, broadly speaking, the cost of the type 22—on the same basis as the cost of £110 million that I gave for the type 23—is about £140 million. I am sympathetic about the position of Vospers, but I did not see how I had the capacity easily to help that situation. I very much hope that Vospers is successful in some of the competitive negotiations that it is now undertaking.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, after a delay of 16 months, those of us who have Vosper Thorneycroft in our area are very unhappy about his decision? Will he make it a little easier by publishing the rules of tendering, about which there has been considerable doubt—especially on how overheads are spread—and the comparative costs that he received? It has taken so long that most of us have grave doubts about the integrity of my right hon. Friend's tendering procedures.

Mr. Heseltine: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, but I cannot add to what I said. The Ministry does not customarily produce a list of prices at which contracts are awarded or the list of those who have tendered but not won contracts. The position that the Ministry faces is that all three yards are subsidiaries of one company, which is sponsored by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. That company is more likely to lay down the rules under which tendering takes place than is the Ministry.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): As a former senior shop steward at the Cammell Laird shipyard and a Merseyside Member who has many shipbuilding workers in his constituency, may I tell the right hon. Gentleman that we welcome the decision to have one of the ships built at the Cammell Laird shipyard? That is good news for Merseyside.

However, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that it was unneccesary for him to attack the workers at Cammell Laird, who were fighting for jobs—rightly or wrongly? The fact that they fought for jobs and went to prison because of it may have helped to determine that the order announced by the Secretary of State should be brought to Merseyside.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): No.

Mr. Heffer: My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) says "No." That is a matter for him. I have given my opinion. I believe that it is vital that all workers should fight for jobs, because Merseyside has been battered more than any other area in the country.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has put to the House his interpretation of the events that led up to my statement today. I must tell him that he is categorically wrong. Nothing was more likely to close Cammell Laird than the action of those who occupied HMS Edinburgh, which is under contract to the Ministry. The idea that any Secretary of State for Defence would place another order with a shipyard that was occupying a ship under construction is unthinkable, and I said so at the time. The men who must be praised are those who have crossed the picket lines against the abuse and intimidation of a wholly unrepresentative minority. That minority has done so much to bring to Merseyside the reputation which it should shed at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Can my right hon. Friend inform the House at this stage which points defence system has been selected for the last two type 22s and two leading type 23 frigates as an effective defence against sea-skimming missiles, which proved to be the main requirement for frigates during the Falklands war?

Mr. Heseltine: The vertical launch Sea Wolf system.

Mr. Frank Field: I thank the Secretary of State for his decision. His statement will be a relief to the men and women in the yard. All five hon. Members who represent Wirral constituencies have been equally active in pressing the needs of Cammell Laird. So that unnecessary myths are not manufactured locally, will the right hon. Gentleman again take the opportunity to stress what would have been the result of his decision today if the action in the yard of 37 people had been successful against two mass meetings at the yard which opposed that action?

Mr. Heseltine: I praise the local Members of Parliament on both sides of the House for drawing the attention of the Government to the problems that face Merseyside, and Cammell Laird in particular. I can state categorically that if there had not been an order for Cammell Laird that yard would have closed within this calendar year and 1,700 jobs would have gone.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): Is my right hon. Friend able to say which yard put in the lowest tender, which put in the second lowest and which put in the highest? Is he able to confirm that Vosper Thornycroft was beaten on tender price? Is he aware that, if he is not

able to confirm that, there will be a suspicion in Southampton that Vosper Thornycroft has been punished for being able to obtain some overseas orders?

Mr. Heseltine: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern. I am bound by the conventions of the Ministry, under which we do not provide commercial in-confidence information. No Government have ever done so. We do not provide details of prices at which contracts are let or the list of prices that fail to secure contracts. However, I can give the House an interesting figure, in that we have concluded an arrangement, in terms of the procuring of the two frigates, at a price which is lower than that which we first received on the first tenders.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I, too, welcome the fact that a decision has been made on these orders. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the type 22 order is placed as early as possible with Swan Hunter, for without that order there will be further redundancies? Will he also ensure that the laying of the keels of these ships is not delayed for as long as the orders were? Has he any news about the auxiliary replenishment tankers, for which Swan Hunter is urgently waiting?

Mr. Heseltine: I have nothing yet to say about any further orders for which we are currently awaiting or considering tenders. However, it is my Ministry's intention to press ahead with the orders for the type 22s as urgently as we can.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): Will my right hon. Friend say why Hall Russell of Aberdeen and Scott Lithgow of Greenock were denied the opportunity of tendering for these vessels? Can he also say why he decided not to place the second order at Yarrows but instead to give it to some other yard in England?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will understand that we must make judgments about where orders are sought, and I believe that the facilities at the yards to which he referred might not have been adequate for the job that we had in mind. This is not a matter which one should try to divide between England and Scotland. We had a difficult decision to make and we hope that in the new round of tendering for the type 23 there will be a wide and competitive opportunity for firms on both sides of the border.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Secretary of State be more forthcoming about orders for the type 23? I understand that he proposes to keep Yarrow as the lead yard and have the second order go to Swan Hunter. How does that reflect on the loading of Yarrow, which is designed to produce three type 23s simultaneously? Will he reflect on the employment position if further orders for type 23s are not placed there, despite the present tendering position of British Shipbuilders?

Mr. Heseltine: The position at Yarrow is not, as the hon. Gentleman will understand, a responsibility of my Department, so with some hesitancy I trespass on the preserves of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. As I understand it, Yarrow has a substantial workload which includes the construction of the first class type 23. The opportunity to tender for the third type 23 to which I have referred will be available to Yarrow as it will be to other United Kingdom yards. That aspect, together with the fact that Yarrow has tendered for additional mine countermessure vessels, which will add to the potential workload, puts Yarrow in a relatively better position than some of the other shipbuilding yards.

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): Although the largest shipyard in the United Kingdom was not involved in this tender, can the Secretary of State none the less confirm that Harland and Wolff Ltd. will be retained on the list of shipyards that are invited from time to time to tender for Ministry of Defence contracts?

Mr. Heseltine: Harland and Wolff is certainly considered for Ministry of Defence contracts, and has such contracts, but the firm is not a contender for this type of ship.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I congratulate the Secretary of State, at a time when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is busy dismantling regional policy, on showing his firm conviction and belief in that policy and sending two projects to areas of very high unemployment. We welcome the triumph of Stockton over Thatcher.

What exactly did the Secretary of State mean when he said that British Shipbuilders was more responsible for the tender terms than was the Ministry of Defence? I thought that the Ministry of Defence was the purchaser in this matter. It would, therefore, lay down its criteria, in the terms of the tender, that have to be met, and would not do so via British Shipbuilders. When does the right hon. Gentleman expect these ships to come into service?

The Secretary of State said that he would look at the problem as urgently as possible and view fresh orders. Does that statement not reflect the squeezing of the Navy's budget? That budget has been squeezed and squeezed for Trident, and we will be very lucky to have any more orders for these frigates in the next two or three years.

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to clarify what I meant when I referred to the ability of British Shipbuilders to influence the tendering procedures. Of course, the specifications are laid down by the Ministry of Defence. We are the customers. The actual decisions within British Shipbuilders about the rate of profit and rate of overhead recovery are taken by British Shipbuilders on behalf of the subsidiaries within its control. To that extent, there is a limit to the degree of competitiveness between the yards that would occur if those yards were within the private sector. I hope that that point clarifies the position.

The hon. Gentleman asked about service. I answered that question when I said that it takes between four and five years — nearer four years — for these ships to be constructed. If one takes the order date and adds that period of construction, one comes close to an answer to the question.

On the hon. Gentleman's last point, there will be more orders from the Ministry of Defence. We have substantial available cash resources to spend in part upon the orders for the Royal Navy. The Opposition's forecasts on this matter will prove as ill founded as their forecasts on everything else.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it arise from the statement?

Sir David Price: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In view of the totally unsatisfactory explanation by my right hon. Friend

[Sir David Price]

the Secretary of State on why Vosper Thornycroft has been so harshly treated, I give notice that I shall seek the earliest opportunity to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Business of the House

3.53 pm

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short business statement.

Following discussions through the usual channels, I have agreed to table a motion to exempt the business on Wednesday on the inspector's report on the airport inquiries 1981-83 for a period of two hours. The motion relating to the Immigration Appeals (Procedure) Rules will now be taken on a subsequent occasion.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): May I ask a question, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member may do so later if he catches my eye.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): As the Leader of the House has made one announcement to change the business during this week, will he take the occasion to tell the House when he intends to arrange for either a debate or a statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer so that we have an opportunity to hear the latest chapter in the decline and fall of the pound sterling and the further failure of the Government's economic policy?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to stop the shadow Leader of the House, but this statement relates to the business on Wednesday and the inspector's report on airport inquiries. The right hon. Member will have to find another occasion—not on this statement—to raise that matter, please.

Mr. Shore: We are talking about the business of the House. I am inviting the Leader of the House to consider more widely whether he can make changes in the business to meet the urgency of the nation's problems.

Mr. Biffen: I believe that the precedents are that I confine myself to the rather narrow point that I have raised. I take note of the important issue that concerns the right hon. Gentleman, and I shall convey his anxieties to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and the rest of the House that we must deal with the statement that we have before the House.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. With respect, when the business statement is made by the Leader of the House, he is questioned on this week's business. It is not for him to determine upon what he will be questioned, nor, with respect, Mr. Speaker, do I believe that there is a precedent for you — [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] — to confine the questions, provided that they relate to the business of the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the right hon. Member looks up the precedents, he will find that he is not correct about that. If we do not keep in order in this place, we may prejudice subsequent debates. The statement was about a motion to exempt the business on Wednesday for two hours. It was not about business generally, which is announced on Thursdays.

Dr. Owen: The House is not managed for the convenience of the official Opposition or the Government. It is managed for the convenience of all hon. Members. The fact that we are not to have a statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer today on the substantial increase in interest rates is open to serious question. It is open to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) to question you, Mr. Speaker, as I intend to question the Leader of the House, as to why there will not be a debate on Wednesday. The Labour party may not wish to challenge the Government's economic policies, but we do, I believe that we are in order to do so, and I should like your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I wonder whether the right hon. Member is aware that his hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) has already given me notice that he intends to raise the matter under Standing Order No. 10. It would be wrong for the right hon. Member to seek to widen the statement into something different. The precedent is well established.

Dr. Owen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am surprised that you think it is possible that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) would raise the matter under Standing Order No. 10 without having discussed it with me.

I believe that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) was in order in seeking to question the Leader of the House as to why there is not to be a debate this week on the Chancellor's statement. The Labour party may have given up using the rights and duties of the House, but I should like a ruling, Mr. Speaker, on whether you are saying that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney was out of order and that I should be out of order in making a similar point, which is that instead of having a debate on Stansted, we should have a debate on the economy.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Winnick: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. One at a time. The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) raises an important point, but he and the House know that I am bound by Standing Orders and precedent. I draw his attention and that of the House to page 346 of "Erskine May", where it says, in relation to supplementary business statements,

> "On other days only business questions relating to the business of the day, or to any change in the business for the week already announced, are permitted."

That is why I ruled as I did.

Mr. Winnick: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) should try to raise a quarrel with you when you are clearly acting with the authority of the House.

On future occasions, would you consider the possibility, when the Leader of the House announces a change of business at a time when there is great economic news, such as the change in interests rates, of asking him to arrange for a statement to be made in the House? There is a great deal of anxiety about the effect on jobs and so on, and we would therefore be glad of an opportunity to ask the Leader of the House for a statement to be made as soon as possible on the increase in the interest rate to 14 per cent.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that I may be able to be of some assistance to you. As you quite rightly said, when there is a business statement on a narrow item, it is important that the leader of the Social Democratic party, if he wishes to get in on another matter ——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: I am coming to the point. It should be open to the right hon. Gentleman to use a little ingenuity. If he had said that perhaps it would have been better for the House to devote an extra two hours to the state of the economy and the fall on the stock exchange instead of to a debate on Stansted, you would have ruled him in order, he would have complied with "Erskine May", and he would have been a little wiser. However, when someone is a one-man band, power sometimes goes to the head.

Dr. Owen *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I always get a little apprehensive when the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says that he is being helpful to me. However, in this case, that is correct.

Dr. Owen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In the light of what you read out from "Erskine May", that can hardly be a ruling as to precedent. Will you consider the matter in relation to what has happened in the past?

Mr. Speaker: I shall certainly do that.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Is this another point of order?

Mr. Wilkinson: No, Mr. Speaker, it is a question on the statement of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. Is the matter to be debated on Wednesday for the extra time to be considered a party matter, or, as far as the Government are concerned, is it not?

Mr. Biffen: Whipping is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary.

Coal Industry Dispute

4.3 pm

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the Government's involvement in the mining industry dispute."

The Government's actions during the past week have left the country in no doubt that they are trying to impede the resumption of negotiations. It is in terms of that specific matter that the House should be able to debate the mining dispute once again.

There cannot be a single Member in any part of the House who does not regard the matter as important. Each week that the Government prolong the dispute they are spending an estimated £80 million in their attempt to break the strike and the National Union of Mineworkers. Today there has been another increase in interest rates, which is not unconnected with the dispute. Meanwhile, miners and their families are suffering increasing hardship in their struggle to maintain their jobs and ensure a future for their communities. The matter is increasingly urgent as a result of the Government's intervention this week. Recently both the chairman of the National Coal Board and Mr. Michael Eaton stated that they believed that the only way to resolve this dispute was through a negotiated settlement. Even more recently, the leadership of the NUM has called for a resumption of negotiations without preconditions.

Despite the statements of both sides in the dispute, the Government have blatantly interfered to prevent negotiations. Last week the press briefing from the Prime Minister's Office was fully reported in the national press, and had the effect of scotching any immediate resumption of negotiations. On Saturday, Mr. David Hart, a close adviser of the Prime Minister's wrote in *The Times*:

"Any true negotiation now would represent defeat for the coal board . . . the time for negotiated settlement is past . . . they must be defeated".

The House must hear from the Secretary of State on this matter. The Secretary of State should make it plain to the House what the attitude of the Government is and not leave hon. Members and the country to guess from conflicting press reports. The House should have the opportunity to discuss this long and serious dispute and the implications of the Government's actions.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the Government's involvement in the mining industry dispute."

I have listened with great care to what has been said by the right hon. Member. As he knows, we had a long discussion on this matter at Question Time today. I have to take account of the fact that it is hoped that negotiations are to begin tomorrow.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, my sole responsibility in exercising my discretion in considering applications under Standing Order No. 10 is to decide whether they should have priority over the business already set down for this evening or tomorrow. I regret that I cannot find that the matter that he has raised meets those criteria, and I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Mr. Orme: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand the views that you have expressed, and I am not challenging them. However, I speak as someone who has made exhaustive efforts to promote negotiations throughout the dispute. As such, I say that it is not negotiations that are to start tomorrow, but talks about talks. The situation is one of great significance both to the Labour Opposition and to myself. If the talks were to fail, or if the negotiations did not start, I must advise you on behalf of the Opposition, that I will immediately raise the matter in the House again.

Mr. Speaker: I fully understand, and fully accept, the right hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In referring to the same matter on 24 January, you pointed out:

"I am bound to have regard to other opportunities in the House to raise these matters."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1985; Vol. 71, c. 1145]

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will bear in mind the great difference between discussing a matter for three hours, as under Standing Order No. 10, and having a full day in which to discuss it, which gives wider opportunities, especially to Back Benchers, to take part. If the matter were the subject for an Opposition day, it would be open to us to discuss it for a full day.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The choice of subject for Opposition days is not a matter for me.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is with some trepidation and apprehension that I raise this matter with you. I am aware of the difficulties that you must have in trying to arrive at a conclusion, but many of us who are actively involved in the dispute are aware that we have not had an opportunity to discuss it on the Floor of the House, no matter how responsibility for that is apportioned. My fear and, I believe, that of many other Opposition Members is that if there are pressures on the negotiations, the Government have opportunities, through their offices and links with the NCB, to influence, for good or ill, the course of the deliberations. The House, however, has no opportunity to ventilate the feelings of the whole nation about the dispute. I trust that you will keep that in mind in any further representations that are made to you.

Mr. Speaker: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I keep that matter very much in mind. I think that the House should have an opportunity, at the appropriate moment, to discuss this issue.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East) *rose*——

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): It is nice of the hon. Gentleman to look in—he has missed his question.

Mr. Nellist: I spend more time here than you do, sunshine.

Mr. Speaker: Order. My name is not sunshine.

Mr. Nellist: It seems to be one of those days.

Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In your ruling a few minutes ago, Mr. Speaker, you explained that the only criterion by which you are allowed to judge an application under Standing Order No. 10 is whether it should take precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. Would you expand on that explanation slightly, because the business that is set down for today

—the Education (Corporal Punishment) Bill — has already been delayed from last week. On the day on which the Bill was supposed to be debated last week, you turned down an application under Standing Order No. 10 for a debate on the miners' strike. If the Bill was not sufficiently important to be discussed last week, could it not be postponed again so that a crucially important debate on the miners' strike could take place today?

Mr. Speaker: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to Standing Order No. 10, which sets out my discretion fully.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a different point of order, of which I gave you notice——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take that point of order later. It is a different issue. Let us deal with all this first.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is this another attempt to be helpful?

Mr. Skinner: I try to do that all the time, Mr. Speaker. In regard to the criteria by which you make a decision, you referred to the fact that there might be negotiations and gave the impression that if the House debated the matter, that could necessarily hamper the negotiations. There is a bit of a problem there in that, although the House might keep its collective mouth shut, the Government continue to open theirs. The Government feed the media in all sorts of ways and the idea of having a debate is to provide some balance. That is important and I hope that, when an application under Standing Order No. 10 is made again, you will bear that in mind.

Mr. Speaker: I most certainly will.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Although I do not wish to challenge your ruling on the application under Standing Order No. 10, are you aware that the mining dispute has now gone on for more than half of the life of this Parliament, that, so far, only one application under Standing Order No. 10 relating to it has been granted, that more than 23 have been made, that many people outside the House find it unbelievable that the mining dispute should be discussed everywhere else and affect everyone's life in some way and cause great hardship to some, although less to others, yet the House still does not give time to debate the matter? I trust that you will look favourably on a further application under Standing Order No. 10.

Mr. Speaker: I repeat what I said last Thursday. I am not responsible for the organisation of business in the House. That is done through the usual channels and with all the parties concerned. The Opposition have at their disposal an Opposition day, broadly once a week. It so happens that this week there is not an Opposition day, and I shall certainly have to take that into account if applications are made in future.

Secretary of State for Transport

4.14 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the failure of the Secretary of State for Transport to respond to a court decision of 11 January 1985 that he had acted irrationally, improperly and unlawfully in compelling the Greater London council to pay a sum of approximately £50 million in excess of the sum properly required to finance London Regional Transport."

The matter is specific because it relates to a court judgment, as I have outlined, and to the judge's comments about the conduct of the Secretary of State and his subsequent inaction.

It is important, because Ministers are surely not above the law, and there are rumours that the Government are considering a change of the law and, in so doing, introducing retrospective legislation to make lawful what the judge called unlawful. The Government constantly demand respect for the rule of law of others and regularly campaign, without much evidence, as the law and order party.

The matter is urgent because as long ago as 14 January the Secretary of State claimed, while refusing to answer questions on this matter, that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks):

"will know that we have appealed against the judgment, and therefore it is sub judice." — [*Official Report*, 14 January 1985; Vol. 71, c. 2.]

I am informed that, despite the Secretary of State's comments in the House on that day at column 2, as I have quoted, and at column 11 and column 13, to the effect that the Government intended to appeal and that he would therefore not answer questions on this matter, no such appeal has so far been received by the court. In view of the rumours that the Government are to seek a change in the law in attempt to justify the Secretary of State's disgraceful conduct, might I press you to approve this application?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the failure of the Secretary of State for Transport to respond to a court decision of 11 January 1985 that he had acted irrationally, improperly and unlawfully in compelling the Greater London council to pay a sum of approximately £50 million in excess of the sum properly required to finance London Regional Transport."

I have listened with great care to what the hon. Member has said, but I regret that I do not consider the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10, and I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Interest rates

4.17 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the rise in interest rates which has taken place today."

This is a specific matter because it concerns a 2 per cent. increase in the base rate, which will have a profound impact on the economy and the Government's policy.

The matter is important because the rise will substantially increase costs to industry—they have risen by over £1 billion since the beginning of the year—and almost inevitably lead to substantial increases in mortgage interest rates for householders and others who borrow money. The rise will undermine the foundations of the Government's economic policy.

The House should give urgent consideration to the matter, not least because there will not be another opportunity to consider it in the near future. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that when a smaller increase in interest rates took place only a short while ago you allowed a private notice question and the Chancellor of the Exchequer made a statement to the House. We have had no statement today and no opportunity to discuss the issue.

I hope, Mr. Speaker that you will accept my application to provide the House with the opportunity to have a short debate on the Government's economic strategy for the future, what reserves are being used to bolster the pound, what the Government's exchange rate policy is and what will happen to interest rates in the future. I hope that you will provide the House with an early opportunity to discuss the matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the rise in interest rates which has taken place today."

I have not today received any application for a private notice question, possibly because the news came after midday. I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10, and I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Sub Judice Rule

4.20 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise a matter about which I gave notice to your office shortly after 10 o'clock this morning. I hope that you will rule on it, possibly tomorrow, when you have had time to reflect on the matter. It is the delicate and difficult matter of the sub judice rule.

In answer to a question, the Secretary of State for Defence said that a report in *The Times* was without truth. I am not concerned with the report, but simply with a quotation from a Member of Parliament, for such is Admiral Hill-Norton. In the paper of record he is reported as saying:

"One cannot help feeling that, like the Clive Ponting case, they are doing it to suppress something which may be damaging to the reputation of Government Ministers and officials. The whole thing stinks."

The House will realise that I could not personally take exception to that comment. Therefore, I feel easier about raising the matter as a general issue of principle. Someone somewhere will have to sort out what is sub judice and what is not. The rules are extremely elastic.

Last week, many points were raised with you. I spent the morning at the Old Bailey and can only report that hardened court reporters had never before seen anything quite like that comment from a Member of Parliament. Will you, Mr. Speaker, reflect on the issues raised, and possibly rule tomorrow?

Mr. Speaker: I shall certainly do that.

Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the 11 motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the draft Redundancy Payments (Variation of Rebates) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Specialised Agencies of the United Nations (Immunities and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (Legal Capacities) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Waterways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Glasgow Underground (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Alcan Aluminium Limited and Lochaber Power Company (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Scottish Electricity Boards (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Gas Corporation (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Railways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Telecommunications plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*.

STANDING COMMITTEES ON EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Documents Nos. 9182/84, 11388/84 and 4096/85 (replacing 9469/84) concerning wine be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*.

Orders of the Day

Education (Corporal Punishment) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.22 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The objective of the Bill is to secure compliance with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in February 1982. Under article 2 of the first protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, states are obliged to respect the philosophical convictions of their citizens. The court's judgment means that a parental conviction against corporal punishment in schools comes within the terms of that article.

The United Kingdom Government ratified the convention in March 1951 and undertook to abide by the decision of the court in any case to which they were a party. There is no provision for appeal, and the court's judgment in February 1982 is therefore binding.

The question for the Government, therefore, was to decide on the means of compliance. One way of complying would be to legislate to abolish corporal punishment in state schools. That is not required by the judgment, which was concerned with respect for a philosophical conviction, and the Government reject that option. The Government are opposed in principle to forcing abolition.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has encouraged gradual elimination of corporal punishment on a voluntary basis. For many years that has been the policy in Scotland, where the circumstances are different from those in the rest of the United Kingdom, and where the process of voluntary elimination has largely been completed. The Government are at one in rejecting enforced abolition.

Outside Scotland, there is no prospect of a consensus on abolition. Many parents and teachers see a place for corporal punishment in schools; for example, last year a sample poll in England and Wales showed more than half of the teachers interviewed to be in favour of retention, compared with more than a third in favour of abolition. Therefore, a state ban on corporal punishment is not called for by the European Court's judgment. The Government are not prepared to ride roughshod over the views of the millions of parents and teachers in this country who see a place for corporal punishment.

It is all very well for the Opposition to adopt a centralist posture and say that they will ignore the views of millions of teachers and parents who believe that they should have a voice in the decision whether corporal punishment in any school should be ruled out of order. Once again the Opposition have espoused a policy of imposing their views on the country. We are going as far as we can to consult parents and teachers by the means described in the Bill.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Since the Secretary of State is so keen to give powers to parents,

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

will he explain how the Bill deals with the position in which one parent believes in corporal punishment and the other does not?

Sir Keith Joseph: In compliance with the judgment of the court, we must give priority to the view of the parent who has a philosophical conviction, or who expresses a wish consistent with a philosophical conviction against corporal punishment.

The second option for the Government was to adopt what might be called a dual system. The Government therefore considered the possibility of a dual system of schools, some where corporal punishment was used, and others where it was not. In theory, such a dual system would allow parents to choose between the two types of school.

However, there would be enormous practical difficulties and it could be hugely expensive. The practical difficulties would be greatest in rural areas, where choice is limited by the sparsity of population. In all areas, however, there would be administrative complications for the allocation of pupils to schools. It would be expensive because of the need to provide additional schools to maintain existing patterns of choice between different types of school. Altogether it would be a wasteful use of resources. Since no parent must be penalised for seeking respect for his or her philosophical conviction, the existing provision of schools would virtually have to be doubled. Therefore, the Government rejected a dual system option.

The remaining option is that embodied in the Bill.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): My right hon. Friend spoke of the remaining option. Will he explain why he did not consider a fourth option, which is to do absolutely nothing?

Sir Keith Joseph: That is an attractive option, but for the one overriding factor that the country does not break its treaty obligations. The country subscribed to the rule of court in 1951. In 1966, under a Labour Government, the country widened its undertaking to comply from those cases where the applicant was another state to those where the applicant was an individual. Since 1966, the Government have confirmed their compliance with the treaty every five years, and the latest date of such confirmation was 1981. I am sure that many hon. Members find aspects of the Bill distasteful, but most hon. Members will agree that it would be even more distasteful for the country to fail to comply with the judgment of the court and with the treaty to which the country has subscribed.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Although I welcome the Government's commitment to trying to enforce the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, does the Secretary of State agree that there is a wider obligation upon the Government to respect the convention which, under article 3, provides that inhuman and degrading treatment shall not be administered? Does he accept that article 3 was considered in the court's judgment which the Bill seeks to enforce and that, although the circumstances were held not to require the invocation of article 3, it remains the case that if corporal punishment is inflicted in schools, on the facts of some cases, the British Government may once again be hauled before an international court? Is it not extremely undesirable that Britain should once again face the possibility of a judgment against the Government because the Secretary of State has not sought to abolish corporal punishment?

Sir Keith Joseph: I understand that some cases under article 3 will come before the court. The Government will defend their position. It is not obvious to the Government that corporal punishment, especially when one considers the breadth of definition of that phrase, represents degrading or inhuman treatment. The hon. Gentleman should not make judgments before the court does.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): My right hon. Friend said that some aspects of the Bill might be distasteful. Does he find distasteful the fact that, in consequence of the measure, the principle of in loco parentis, and with it the authority of teachers, head teachers and governors of schools may be seriously undermined?

Sir Keith Joseph: If that were true, I would respect my hon. Friend's concern, but I am advised that the in loco parentis position of the teacher is not undermined. It is slightly reduced in connection with this Bill only, but in all other aspects of responsibility in school it remains undiminished.

The Government have adopted the only other course available—an exemptions scheme. It may not be ideal, but it is better than abolition or a dual system. In short, it is the least objectionable solution. An exemptions scheme allows parents whose children would otherwise be liable to corporal punishment in school to exempt them from such punishment. Where schools have abandoned all forms of corporal punishment, or to the extent that a school has abandoned it—I am thinking of a school with an infant class as well as junior classes—the Bill will not affect them, and there will be no obligation to consult parents. Where schools use corporal punishment, in any of its forms — I must emphasise that a slap would constitute corporal punishment—the Bill gives parents a choice. They can leave the matter to the school, in which case the child will be liable to corporal punishment, or they can opt the child out of corporal punishment.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Will my right hon. Friend make it crystal clear to me and to the House whether this is an opting-in or opting-out system? My facility to read legislative documents is not as strong as it could be, but the first part of clause 2 refers to

"maintaining registers showing those pupils who are not to be exempt from corporal punishment",

which suggests to me that the onus is on parents to opt in if they wish their children to be subject to corporal punishment.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Bill is an opting-out measure. The children whose parents do not opt them out will remain on the register; it is the children on the register who will remain liable to corporal punishment. I was about to explain that with my next sentence.

Under the system to be introduced by regulations, parents who do not reply to an approach from the school will be deemed to have consented to the use of corporal punishment on their children. In effect, it is an opting-out scheme. Unless parents take the trouble to return a form to the school saying that they opt their child out, a teacher

in any court action will have the defence of acting in loco parentis. The initiative of asking the question, "Do you or do you not agree to corporal punishment for your child?" lies with the school. The responsibility for saying no lies with the parents.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is that not made clear in clause 2(4)?

Sir Keith Joseph: I had hoped that it was abundantly clear from the entire Bill, but I am glad to have that confirmation from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the Secretary of State accept that it is clear from the Bill that schools will have some administrative problems if they must take the responsibility of ensuring that a reply from a parent is kept safely? Does he accept that many schools would prefer a system in which the opposite was true, so that they had proof of the willingness of parents that their children should be liable to corporal punishment?

Sir Keith Joseph: I imagine that there are two points of view about this, and no doubt it can be argued in Committee. However, especially after the helpful results of the consultation that we have carried out in recent months, we believe this option to be the most practical.

If the school does not receive an answer from a parent, I imagine that it will be required by regulations to remind the parent that an answer is awaited. If, after a few weeks —or the period that is laid down in the regulations—no answer has been received, that parent will be assumed to have forgone the opportunity to opt out his child or children, and his or their names will be entered on the register.

As the court requires us to respect the philosophical conviction of a parent or parents, it is surely not too much to hope that a parent with such philosophical convictions will answer a question from the school and return a form.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): The Bill has given encouragement to many parents with children in schools where corporal punishment has not been available until now. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Bill will allow parents to opt in to corporal punishment in schools where there is at present no corporal punishment? If not, why not?

Sir Keith Joseph: I cannot answer my hon. Friend as he would wish. Where a school has already stopped using corporal punishment in any of its forms, it will not be required by the Bill to approach parents for their permission. Of course, it is open to a school to reconsider, but it will not automatically be open to parents to act under the Bill to persuade a school to change its view. If parents, singly or in a group, wish to ask a school to reconsider its position, they will be as free in the future as they are now, and have been, to try so to persuade the school.

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): Could my right hon. Friend help those Conservative Members who are genuinely concerned about how to cast their votes later tonight on what appears, at the very least, to be a muddled Bill? Has my right hon. Friend received the suggestion from teachers' organisations that if there are to be two tiers of punishment—for those children whose parents are prepared to allow corporal punishment to be administered to them there will be three of the best, whereas for the others there will be 100 lines or three hours of detention —this will create the most enormous administrative problems?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes, such views have reached my ears. It has been widely said, both in the House and among the teachers, that such difficulties might arise. In a few moments I propose to deal with them.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Is it not becoming apparent that if a child wants to carry out a misdemeanour he should do it with a child who is on the register because then he will not be beaten, whereas if he misbehaves with a child who is on the register he will be beaten? Is it not obvious that the legislation is absurd? Is this not the penalty that we are paying for allowing foreign institutions to decide what laws we in this country should have?

Sir Keith Joseph: My hon. Friend will find much support for that point of view. However, the fact is that the Government of this country subscribe to the treaty. Therefore, we have an obligation. The method that we have adopted in the Bill has more regard for the wishes of parents than would a Government ban on corporal punishment. If a school wishes to use corporal punishment on any pupil, it has to go to that pupil's parents to seek their views. The school is obliged to accede to the parent's wishes if the parent says no. In the most direct way possible, therefore, an exemption scheme meets the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. Without children moving from one school, normally the one the parent has chosen, to another, parents are able to secure respect for their philosophical convictions against corporal punishment.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does this apply to public schools, or are public schools exempt from human rights? Is the parent of a child who is at a public school—this is, in fact, a private school, but it is a curious British habit to call private schools public schools—able to prevent his offspring receiving corporal punishment? May I therefore pose to the Minister the problem of the assisted places scheme?

Sir Keith Joseph: I wonder whether the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) will permit me to deal with that precise point in a few moments.

Mr. Flannery: I do not want to create difficulties for the Minister, but can he explain what will happen to such a child?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Member will have his chance, if he will allow me to reach that part of my speech.

The exemptions approach has been criticised — I come now to the anxiety expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle)——

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): My right hon. Friend said that the Bill provides for the rights laid down by the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg. Will he make it perfectly clear to me and to the House whether, if left to his own good judgment, he would have introduced a Bill of this kind? Does he find that, as presented to the House, the Bill is in the best interests of the education of the children of this country?

Sir Keith Joseph: I shall go only so far as to say that if my right hon. Friends in the Government had offered me the chance to present a Bill on education, this is not the subject upon which we should be legislating.

An exemptions approach has been criticised as unfair. It would allow corporal punishment to be used on one child and not on another, even if both had committed the same offence. This is a very plausible argument, and I can see that it contains a good deal of force, but even within the same school individual circumstances already sometimes cause one child, perhaps because of problems at home, or because of an emotional crisis, or for some other reason, not to be subject to corporal punishment.

In the case of two schools virtually adjacent to one another and serving the same catchment area, one may have abolished corporal punishment, while the other has not. Moreover, in the same school, in particular where there is a mixed age range, although infants are not subject to corporal punishment they are occasionally slapped on the leg or the hand. In many schools, girls are exempt from many forms of corporal punishment, while boys are not. To argue that an exemptions scheme makes for unfairness between children who have misbehaved in the same way is to assume that corporal punishment is the only sort of punishment.

I hope that all hon. Members will accept that corporal punishment is used only for the most severe offences. Nor is it the only punishment. There are all sorts of punishments, including the withdrawal of rewards and privileges. This is probably one of the most widely used forms of punishment. Therefore, I do not accept that unfairness is necessarily a compelling argument.

If two children in a school have committed the same offence and one is subject to corporal punishment and the other is not, and corporal punishment is applied to the child who is not exempt, I do not accept that the child who is exempt will not be jealous of the child who is subject to corporal punishment. In certain circumstances, it could be that a child would rather have a short, sharp punishment rather than the longer drawn out punishment that might replace it. Nevertheless, I freely grant to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) that there may well be a risk of unfairness between children, one of whom is exempt and one of whom is not.

Exempted pupils would not go unpunished. There is a range of other sanctions that teachers could use. Where pupils are caught in the same act of misbehaviour and some are exempted and some are not, teachers can decide to offer to those who are liable to corporal punishment the choice of an alternative. This choice of punishment is sometimes given now. What matters is that pupils should know that they will not go unpunished. The withdrawal of rewards and privileges can be, and perhaps is, the best alternative. Pupils are made to realise that they cannot misbehave with impunity. An exemptions scheme can therefore be made to work.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): If the philosophical argument in favour of the Bill, as opposed to the pragmatic argument, is that parents have the right of ultimate control to remove their children from activities which they dislike, whether it be religious education under the Education Act 1944 or caning under this Bill, why should we stop at that? Why should parents not have the right to withdraw their children from biased political education, such as peace studies? Are we not in danger of imposing double standards?

Sir Keith Joseph: It is open to any parent or child to complain if education is being distorted into indoctrination.

An exemptions scheme can be made to work. Practical questions arise, however, about obtaining and recording the views of parents. That is why a consultative document was issued in 1983. The Bill has benefited from that exercise, in particular because the response has shown the advantage of seeking the views of all parents whose children are liable to corporal punishment. Under the scheme outlined in the Bill, the initiative lies with the school rather than with the parents. This, together with the fact that the school will keep a list of those who are liable to corporal punishment, from which exempted children will have been excluded by their parents, reduces to a minimum the risk of errors and misunderstandings.

I come now to the main features of the Bill. The first three clauses relate to England and Wales. Clause 1 concerns the defence available to a teacher or other member of staff in civil or criminal proceedings for battery. Where a teacher has administered moderate and reasonable corporal punishment, he can at present advance the defence that he was acting in loco parentis.

The Bill provides that that defence cannot be advanced in civil proceedings in the case of pupils who have been exempted from corporal punishment. The definition of corporal punishment is necessarily wide. It extends beyond the use of the cane or tawse, to other forms of bodily chastisement. Most acts which constitute battery would be disallowed in the case of an exempted pupil.

However, there must be safeguards for staff who are obliged to intervene physically for the purpose of restraining pupils. Provided that averting immediate danger to a person or property is one of the reasons for the action, the in loco parentis defence will still be available. There is no question of destroying the in loco parentis concept. For most practical purposes, apart from that issue of corporal punishment, it stays.

Pupils would be exempt from corporal punishment unless their names appeared on a register. The requirement to keep a register will apply to all maintained schools and to non-maintained special schools in which corporal punishment is used. I repeat that where a school has given up the use of corporal punishment in all its forms, the Bill does not affect it.

The requirement to comply with the Bill will also extend to pupils whose fees are paid wholly or in part directly out of public funds. That will affect local authority placements and pupils benefiting under the assisted places scheme or the music and ballet schemes. The legislation will not apply to other pupils in independent schools.

Finally, I should stress that the clause applies to corporal punishment used by or on the authority of a member of staff, and therefore extends to others besides teachers.

Mr. Marlow: I am sorry to intervene a second time, but would a public school, or a private school as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) called it, be able to say that, as a condition of allowing a child to come under the assisted places scheme, it would require the parents to put their child on the register? If not, does my right hon. Friend expect to lose several assisted places?

Sir Keith Joseph: I should like to consider that question. My impression is that that would not be consistent with the assisted places scheme. Either my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will answer that question whether he replies to the debate if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or I shall ensure that a letter goes to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): My right hon. Friend said that schools in receipt of public money would be liable to the scheme. Does that include children of military and diplomatic officers?

Sir Keith Joseph: I must give my hon. Friend the same answer. I should like to make sure of the answer to that and then write to him. The Bill applies to those children placed by local authorities in independent schools.

Clause 2 provides for the registers maintained by schools using corporal punishment to record the names of those pupils who are liable to the sanction on the basis of consent by their parents. The clause is the framework around which regulations will be prepared. We envisage regulations which will allow a school to assume consent if the parent did not reply to the school within a specified period of, say, six weeks. We also envisage that parents could change their minds. "Parent" would be interpreted broadly. A school's initial responsibility to seek the views of parents would be discharged by sending a form to the pupil's home address.

A school or local education authority may change its policy on corporal punishment, introducing it in schools where it was not previously used, or abandoning it in others. In that case, schools would have to set up registers or abandon them as the case may be.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Would there be some sort of gestation period, or would it be possible for a parent to phone up when he finds that his or her child will be caned and countermand that instruction?

Sir Keith Joseph: No, the thought is that regulations will provide for a few days between the decision and the effectiveness of that decision so that the teacher concerned can have no doubt about the position. Time is provided for a name to be put on or taken off the register without any misunderstanding.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Does my right hon. Friend, with his long parliamentary experience, remember any piece of legislation more bizarre than this? Has he ever spoken to anything with less conviction? Would he not be rather relieved if Parliament discharged him of his responsibilities this evening?

Sir Keith Joseph: I think that the answers to my hon. Friend's questions are yes, no, no, but I should like to make sure.

The main purpose of clause 3 is to define responsibility for the maintenance of registers. In a maintained school, the responsible body would be the governors; in a non-maintained special school and for pupils affected in an independent school, the proprietor; for nursery schools maintained by an LEA, and for pupils educated otherwise than at school, the LEA would be the responsible body.

Clause 4 applies to Scotland. While its provisions are basically similar to those contained in clauses 1, 2 and 3, it also takes into account certain aspects particular to the Scottish position. Such aspects include, in the case of young persons—those aged 16 or 17 years—that it will be the young person himself whose views are sought, not those of his parents. That mirrors the position accorded young persons in other aspects of Scottish education legislation; for example, rights relating to choice of school.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not cross-examine me on Scotland.

Mr. Bennett: I want to ask about a much more general philosophical point. Why should pupils over 16 be consulted in Scotland, but not in England and Wales? The European Court was concerned with the philosophical views of parents. If we take into account the philosophical views of 16-year-olds in Scotland, surely we should do the same in England and Wales?

Sir Keith Joseph: That is not what the court requires us to comply with.

Clause 4 reflects the long-standing policy of Scotland to which I have already referred. Those authorities which have already eliminated corporal punishment from their schools need not give fresh consideration to the issue, but can rest on their past decisions.

Clause 5 anticipates arrangements for the extension of provisions corresponding to those in clauses 1, 2 and 3 to Northern Ireland. Clauses 6 and 7 are of a general nature and, inter alia, provide for different clauses to be brought into force at different times. The schedule describes aspects of the Bill which are to be covered by regulations.

The administrative cost of an exemptions scheme would be slight, confined largely to postal and other costs incidental to keeping registers. As to extra expenditure arising from alternatives to corporal punishment, I reject the notion that there must be expensive alternatives. Some period of adjustment for schools which decide not to use corporal punishment will be necessary, but in the past others have made that adjustment, either from their own choice or as a result of local education authority policy. There is no need to expand teaching forces.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): I notice that there is nothing in the Bill about savings in the cost of buying canes.

Sir Keith Joseph: I must bear that argument in mind if anyone claims that more expense would be involved.

I repeat that action was necessary to secure compliance with a ruling which has the status of a treaty obligation. I accept that any method of compliance is bound to be untidy. I do not accept that the Bill is a muddle. The Bill is consistent with upholding good discipline in schools, for which many parents and teachers regard the availability of corporal punishment as an important requirement, because, as the House will understand, there are alternatives to corporal punishment.

The Government have sought to produce a measure which keeps the additional administrative burden to a minimum. In England and Wales the reaction of many schools may be to choose abolition. If so, it will be their choice. The essential concern of the Government is to maintain the rights of the school and to consult the parents to comply with the court ruling in the important matter of discipline. I ask the House to give the Bill a Second Reading.

5 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Bill because it does not abolish corporal punishment, leads to unfairness between pupils, creates a bureaucratic nightmare, and fails to establish the atmosphere of co-operation in which good discipline can be maintained and educational standards raised."

This is a totally unworkable Bill. As everyone knows, it is an uneasy compromise between the view held by many Conservative hon. Members that corporal punishment is good, and the binding decision of the European Court of Human Rights which, in the Campbell and Cosans case, upheld, under article 2, the rights of parents who oppose corporal punishment.

Conservative Members of Parliament, among them the Secretary of State, believe that it is right, even in the 1980s when corporal punishment is banned in all other European countries, that schools should be able to use the sanction of what outside the classroom is defined as battery—in other words, a criminal offence. The Secretary of State has tried desperately but unavailingly to square the circle between his party's prejudices and the decision of the European Court of Human Rights.

Right hon. and hon. Members will recollect that the Secretary of State produced a four-page consultative document 17 months after the court's decision. That proposed a system of opt-out, which was exactly the same as that contained in the Bill, for the children of parents who opposed corporal punishment. However, in the consultative exercise which followed, the opt-out compromise was roundly condemned by all authoritative organisations, and I think that the Secretary of State should have told the House that when he was extolling the virtues of his Bill.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman of what the organisations said to him. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities called the proposals "unworkable". The Association of County Councils said:

"a system which allowed different sanctions for the same misdemeanour . . . would be difficult to justify."

The Campaign for State Education said that the European Court had made the use of corporal punishment

"inequitable, illogical and above all impracticable."

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): These criticisms of the Bill may be justified, but why should not school governors make the ultimate decision, as the Bill provides?

Mr. Radice: I shall come to that. I want to make my speech in my own way.

The National Union of Teachers said that the Government's policy was "ill-conceived".

The Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association had the gravest reservations about the wisdom of creating two disciplinary systems.

Perhaps the most significant comment came from the National Association of Head Teachers. Right hon. and hon. Members will be aware that the consultative document stressed the central role played by heads in maintaining discipline. The head teachers warned the Government of the conflict between the decision not to abolish and the decision to retain a sanction which would be implemented on an unsatisfactory basis. Only last week the same association went so far as to urge the Government to fix a date for phasing out beating instead of introducing a measure that would bring about abolition by the back door.

On 26 October the Secretary of State told the House:

"Over 100 organisations and individuals responded, and it is clear that there is concern about an exemptions system."—[*Official Report*, 26 October 1984; Vol. 65 *c*. 735.]

If the Secretary of State is honest—and I know that he tries to be — I think that he will admit that the organisations which support him can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

The right hon. Gentleman has himself publicly accepted, as he told the House on 8 November, that an opt-out system would have "untidy consequences." Today he went even further in airing his misgivings about the Bill. Yet, despite the almost universal condemnation, despite all the warnings about unworkability and despite his own awareness of the inadequacy of the Bill, the Secretary of State has chosen to proceed with this absurd piece of legislation.

Any objective observer must conclude that the Bill's main effect is to create two patterns of discipline in the classroom—one for those pupils whose parents do not consent to corporal punishment, and the other for those pupils whose parents either support corporal punishment or have failed to reply to the school governors in writing that they are against corporal punishment.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman may wish to make some play with the term "philosophical convictions," because that is the basis of the court's judgment. However, if a parent has philosophical convictions, it is unlikely that he will fail to respond to an approach to him by the school about a subject which is as important as this one. Is not that so?

Mr. Radice: It may be that the hon. Gentleman is a better correspondent than I am, but I do not always reply to every letter sent to me. I do my best, but occasionally matters go wrong. The problem is that if a parent does not reply, the assumption is that he or she is in favour of corporal punishment. That is the difficulty. *[Interruption.]* In any event, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) points out, he may not receive the letter.

Mr. J. F. Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Did not my right hon. Friend say that not only would parents receive a letter asking whether they were prepared to have their children punished corporally but, if they did not reply, that they would also receive a reminder? They would have to neglect two specific letters. On such an important matter as this, that would be extremely unlikely.

Mr. Radice: I hope that most parents would reply, but some might not. But that is not my main argument against the Bill.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is not a very good one, either.

Mr. Radice: It is not a bad one. But I am coming to the "alpha" part.

Mr. Hogg: Could do better.

Mr. Cormack: Not very good for a Wykehamist.

Mr. Radice: Let me paint a scenario for right hon. and hon. Members. Let us say that there are two pupils who misbehave. For the sake of argument, I shall call them Keith and Giles. Keith's parents do not mind him being

beaten, but Giles's parents happen to mind. They have a conviction against it. *[Laughter.]* Right hon. and hon. Members may laugh, but this is what will happen, and it will be chaotic. The teacher may remember the wishes of the parents of the two unruly pupils, or he may have to consult the register of those parents who are in favour of corporal punishment. It has even been suggested that Keith and Giles will be wearing different coloured badges—blue for Keith and red for Giles. Whatever is the case, the two pupils are bound to resent the different punishments for the same misdemeanour—let us say, smoking in class—while the teacher will be put in the impossible position of applying different sanctions for the same offence. That is the reality of what the Secretary of State is offering the House, and right hon. and hon. Members should realise it.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Should I assume from what the hon. Gentleman has said that if a Labour Government were in power, he would say to the parents of Keith, "Caning will be abolished; you will have no say"? The hon. Gentleman must admit that at least the Bill gives parents a choice. How will he explain his attitude to parents who believe that caning is an appropriate punishment?

Mr. Radice: If parents believe in caning, they can administer it at home. The House knows that the Labour party is in favour of abolishing corporal punishment.

Once the European Court of Human Rights had made its decision, in practical terms there was no real alternative to abolition. Otherwise two classes of discipline would be created. That is the point that I have been trying to make. It is the overwhelming argument against the Bill, and the reason why hon. Members should vote against it.

The difficulties for schools do not end there. In primary and secondary schools, governors will have to write to parents and then compile a register of those who do not object in writing to corporal punishment. The procedure will be slightly different for nursery schools. I did not realise that teachers still hit three and four-year-old children. However, I am reminded by the Bill that that is a possibility. For nursery schools, local education authorities will have the responsibility of drawing up the register or, perhaps, getting rid of it—I am not sure what the Secretary of State has in mind. He appears to be offering Conservative Members in favour of corporal punishment the carrot that it might be possible to introduce more corporal punishment than currently exists. I think that that is basically dishonest because I do not believe that that will happen.

The Bill will create additional problems for schools and local education authorities. It is a farcical nonsense, and the Secretary of State, the Minister and Conservative Back Benchers are well aware of that. We are considering an absolute nonsense. It is arguable that the Bill does not even carry out the minimum requirements of the decision by the European Court of Human Rights in the Campbell and Cosans case—which is to ensure that parents who are opposed to corporal punishment have their wishes respected. If parents fail to dissent in writing, they will be assumed to be in favour of corporal punishment, whether or not that is the case.

Hon. Members should bear in mind a further point, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). He said that there are 30 cases currently before the court at Strasbourg of children having been beaten. It is possible that the court will rule that corporal punishment is not only against article 2 but against article 3 of the European Convention on Human rights, which states that no one shall be subject to "degrading treatment or punishment."

Mr. Cormack: I am somewhat comforted to know that the hon. Gentleman supports the convention so strongly. Can I therefore infer that he supports that part of it which gives parents the right to pay for their children's education?

Mr. Radice: I should like to look rather more carefully at that point. As far as I am aware, no case has arisen on that point in this country——

Mr. Cormack: Give a straight answer.

Mr. Radice: I am not prepared to give the hon. Gentleman a yes or no answer. My father paid for a privileged education for me. The important issue is what one does for one's children. I should like to know how many Conservative Members sent their children to comprehensive schools?

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: I did, for one.

Mr. Radice: Well, bully for the hon. Lady. I respect her more now.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: We chose the school because it was a jolly good school.

Mr. Radice: If the court rules that corporal punishment is against article 3, the Government will be forced—whether or not they like it—to ban corporal punishment. The tragedy is that the Secretary of State has not had the courage to take the only feasible and practical course, which is to abolish corporal punishment.

It is significant that there is a difference between the response of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and that of the Secretary of State for Scotland. I am not surprised that the Secretary of State for Scotland is not here today — *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Gentleman's underlings would listen, I shall tell them why I am not surprised. On 10 July 1984, he told the House:

> "Compliance with the court's judgment . . . would be best secured by completion of the voluntary process of elimination of corporal punishment in education authority schools." — [*Official Report*, 10 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. *448*.]

Some hon. Members may conclude that the Secretary of State for Scotland is relying too much on voluntary persuasion, but he has not done too badly so far. As the House knows, the vast majority of Scottish education authorities have abolished corporal punishment. Hon. Members may wonder why the right hon. Gentleman has allowed Scottish schools to be included in the Bill and why there is not a separate Bill for Scotland, given the different circumstances about which the Secretary of State for Education and Science has been telling us. At least the Secretary of State for Scotland has understood quite clearly that the game is up. Accordingly, he has written to all Scottish education authorities urging them to abolish corporal punishment as soon as possible. That was the sensible thing to do. It would be a credible posture for the Secretary of State for Education and Science to take also; it is not credible to do what he is doing this afternoon.

Not for the first time, the Scots are taking a more progressive view than the English about education. Perhaps the Secretary of State should take a trip north of

[Mr. Radice]

the border for a seminar on the subject. The truth is that he has ducked the issue and, instead, has brought this pathetic little Bill before us. It is an evasion of responsibility that exposes him to ridicule and derision — as we have seen already this afternoon. It has exposed our schools to an unworkable system of punishment.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have already asked the hon. Gentleman a question, which he said he would answer. He has not done so. He has constantly said that important decisions should be left to local authorities and school governing bodies. That is precisely what the Bill does. It may be that criticisms of the Bill are well founded, but why are the Opposition not allowing the school governing bodies—or, in some cases, local authorities—to decide this matter?

Mr. Radice: I have explained the reason quite carefully. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman was not listening. The decision of the Court of Human Rights has made it almost impossible—indeed, I would say wholly impossible—to continue with corporal punishment in our schools. By creating two classes of discipline, the Bill creates two classes of pupils. That will make discipline very difficult.

It would have been a legitimate position for the Government to have come to the House and said, as the Secretary of State for Scotland said, that the Court of Human Rights had reached a decision and that, therefore, local authorities should support the abolition of corporal punishment. The decision would still have been left to local authorities and school governing bodies, but at least the Government would have had a defensible position on discipline. Now, they do not have a defensible position at all.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Labour party's policy is to deprive school governors and education authorities of the power to manage schools for which they are responsible.

Mr. Radice: The hon. Gentleman had better talk to the Secretary of State for Scotland. He should try to present a logical argument. Of course, I know that he wants to defend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. We all like the right hon. Gentleman but he has introduced a "total nonsense Bill" ; I quote the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). It is not surprising that the right hon. Gentleman has been exposed to ridicule and derision.

The Labour party is against corporal punishment in principle. It is barbaric, inhumane and degrading both to the chastiser and the chastised.

Mr. Cormack: Except on the picket line.

Mr. Radice: I know that the hon. Gentleman will be voting in the same Lobby as the Opposition tonight. I suppose that that might cause him to make cheap remarks. The Labour party is against corporal punishment in principle and also because it does not work. It is not a deterrent. It does not improve discipline. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that it can be counter-productive. The Secretary of State often quotes the Rutter study when dealing with other matters and he often quotes it at me. It suggests that there is a tendency for high levels of corporal punishment to be associated with rather worse behaviour.

I wish to reassure those who are worried and concerned that abolition had been implemented successfully in every European country apart from Britain. About 90 per cent. of Scottish schools do not practise corporal punishment. It is significant that of the 16 local education authorities which have abolished corporal punishment in England, none has reversed its position. When the Conservatives came to power in Waltham Forest they intelligently dropped their pledge to restore corporal punishment. That was a sensible thing to do.

During the debate on the Queen's Speech the hon. Member for Ealing, North asked me to provide feasible and workable alternatives to corporal punishment. As the evidence suggests that corporal punishment is counter-productive, it would be wrong to provide the options for which the hon. Gentleman asks. However he has been courageous enough to call the Bill a nonsense, and bully for him. The hon. Gentleman receives my accolade, as did the hon. Member for Lancaster (Mrs. Kellett-Bowman), who is now leaving the Chamber. I wish to reassure the hon. Gentleman, if he needs reassuring, that a high standard of behaviour is linked to a considerable extent with a firm, constructive and purposeful teaching which leads, as the Opposition's amendment suggests, to an atmosphere of co-operation in which good discipline can be maintained and education quality raised.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Radice: No, I shall not give way.

Mrs. Kellet-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman said that I was leaving the Chamber.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Lady must not persist if the hon. Gentleman who has the Floor is not giving way.

Mr. Radice *rose*——

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) referred to me and said that I was leaving the Chamber. I left the Chamber to get some extra paper but he is implying that I had lost interest in the debate. I asked him to allow me to intervene so that I could explain to him my reason for leaving the Chamber.

Mr. Radice: I fully accept the hon. Lady's explanation and now she has it on the record.

Mr. Cormack: Does the hon. Gentleman believe in corporal punishment now?

Mr. Radice: I was saying that good schools and good teachers have no trouble in maintaining discipline and providing an atmosphere and ethos that is conducive to learning. Of course problems and difficulties arise in the classroom but there are, as the Secretary of State said, a variety of options ranging from reprimands, reports, parental involvement, withdrawal, suspension to exclusion. These options are available to local education authorities and schools. It is incorrect to say that corporal punishment is essential in the maintenance of good discipline or that there are not other, more effective, sanctions available.

There are at least three major hurdles facing the Bill. First, there is Second Reading. I hope very much that Conservative Members will support the Opposition's amendment when the Division takes place.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Certainly not.

Mr. Radice: Secondly, there is the deliberation that the Bill will receive in Committee.

Mr. Cormack: Really.

Mr. Radice: Sometimes instruction has to be basic in this place, especially when Conservative Members are listening to me. I warn the Secretary of State that we shall try to amend the Bill to make it an abolition rather than an exemption Bill — *[Interruption.]* Would the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) like to intervene?

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I can never resist an opportunity to intervene. Surely the hon. Gentleman is telling us what we already know.

Mr. Flannery: What a clever boy.

Mr. Radice: Perhaps it would be a good thing for the hon. Member for Grantham to be a member of the Committee that considers the Bill. If he does become a member of it, we can try to build an alliance. I can assure him that it is quite fun being in Committee. If he does not know much about that, I hope that he will take the opportunity to increase his knowledge of such matters.

The final hurdle is the other place. I think that there is a good chance that the Bill will be defeated there or amended. I suspect that that is what Ministers are playing for. If the Bill is enacted in its existing form, I must advise all local authorities, especially Labour-controlled ones, to proceed as quickly as possible to abolition because, if chaos in our schools is to be avoided, abolition will be the only sensible response.

Of course, hon. Members will be well aware that there is a Machiavellian theory that the Secretary of State has produced an unworkable Bill because secretly he wants to abolish corporal punishment but does not dare say so. I am not sure whether he really knows his own mind on this issue. It is my view that in this instance, as with student grants, the right hon. Gentleman is out of touch with the real world.

Whatever are the motives of the Secretary of State, I am convinced that over the next five years, and whether we have a Labour or a Conservative Government, we shall abolish coporal punishment. Ironically, the main architect of abolition will be the Secretary of State, who is asking the House to give a Second Reading to an unfair and unworkable Bill. I urge all hon. Members who have regard for the good reputation of this place to vote for the Opposition's amendment.

5.28 pm

Sir Ian Percival (Southport): Like many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I deplore the Bill. However, I shall vote for its Second Reading this evening. I want therefore to take a moment or two of the time of the House to explain those two apparently irreconcilable statements. It is right that we should face the consequences of what we are doing. We are interfering with a power that has been vested in teachers for a long time by the common law of England to use reasonable force in the maintenance of discipline. It has been vested in them by common law because they were regarded as acting in loco parentis. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) was right about that. At present parents do not have power to override that right, and we shall give them that power if the Bill is enacted. I shall vote for giving parents that power, but it is only right that we should face what we are doing.

The power of teachers to inflict corporal punishment is a right to use reasonable force in the maintaining of discipline. All this nonsense about barbarity and inhumane and degrading punishment is typical of the sort of argument that so overstates the case that it defeats its own ends. If a teacher did anything that came remotely within any of those descriptions, he would be as open to prosecution in the courts as if the power had never existed. All of us would support a parent who took a teacher to court in those circumstances. What we cannot stomach is the parent who takes to court a teacher who has used the mildest of force in the pursuit of discipline in circumstances that would try the patience of a saint. Let us forget all about barbarity, inhumane and degrading treatment and all that nonsense.

I hope that we shall not hear anyone say that we should not try to maintain discipline. Heaven knows, that mistake has been made often enough in our great country and has gone a long way towards undermining some of the virtues and values that we love so much.

The arguments of those who oppose the retention of the power to use reasonable force for the maintenance of discipline underestimate the position of the teacher. Have they ever tried to keep discipline in a class? If someone can keep discipline without using force, so be it; every parent tries to do that. However, it is arrogant to overlook the possibility that the teacher who has used reasonable force knew what was the best in the circumstances and what was best for the child involved and for the other children in the class. We must not forget the other children. Some unruly little brats stop a lot of other children getting the education that they deserve.

Another reason why I do not like the Bill is that it will cause administrative difficulties. However, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on meeting that problem head on and accepting it. The alternative was the abolition of corporal punishment. I caution my hon. Friends against making too much of the administrative difficulties argument.

It is not coincidental that those who oppose corporal punishment are seizing on the Bill and arguing that it cannot work and must lead to the abolition of corporal punishment. Those of us who wish parents to retain a choice should not fall into the trap of mulitplying the arguments of those who want to use the difficulties created by the Bill as an argument for getting rid of corporal punishment. I beg my hon. Friends to see that danger.

I do not believe that the administrative difficulties will be as great as some fear. I believe—and all the statistics show—that a substantial majority of parents favour the use of corporal punishment. If I am right, the number of parents who opt out may be comparatively small — probably a minority.

Secondly, I beg hon. Members not to be influenced by the argument that corporal punishment will necessarily cause terrible psychological problems for children. Children are a lot tougher than many of us give them credit for being. If I were a child, I should hate my parents to opt me out. The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) laughs, but he is not a very good example for the propositions that he has been putting forward.

If I were a child, I should not want to be opted out. First, I would not want to be thought a cissy. Secondly — I went to a school where corporal punishment was used within the limits of which I have spoken, and without causing any resentment — more often than not, one

[Sir Ian Percival]

favoured the quick punishment rather than being shut up for an hour or two. There were far too many other things that one would rather be doing than being kept in detention. I much preferred to take the punishment and get it over with. As I said, I never felt any resentment and I never noticed resentment in any other boy. Let us not be too bothered about the effects in this area on children. It is far from certain that those who are still liable to corporal punishment will think that they are hard done by. I hope that parents will remember that it may be the other way round.

Yes, there will be administrative difficulties. I know a little about them because I was a Law Officer when the decision was made by the European Court and I had a part in the consideration of what should be done. However, I do not believe that the administrative difficulties will be nearly as great as some people fear. A bigger worry to me is that those difficulties may be built upon by those who wish to do away with corporal punishment.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: As my right hon. and learned Friend was involved after the decision of the European Court, can he advise us whether, if this does not work, we can go back to the court and ask permission to revert to normal?

Sir Ian Percival: Even as an old friend and colleague of my hon. Friend, I cannot advise him on that matter. It is a difficult question, and one for the present Law Officers rather than for me.

All my instincts are against what is proposed. I have tried to summarise the positive arguments, but so many of the arguments against it are so wet. There is talk about "hitting" a child of three. Has the hon. Member for Durham, North never heard of the word "smack"? Why try to make the issue emotive by talking about "hitting a child"? What is so awful about a little smack? A great swipe that knocks somebody flying is to be deplored, but emotive language unbalances the argument.

It may be felt to be unbelievable that the judgment of the European Court should have decided that corporal punishment can come within the scope of the provisions about "philosophical conviction". I thought that we all accepted that that phrase was a safeguard to prevent the indoctrination of our children with philosophical ideas with which we disagree. I applaud the British judge on the court for the clarity with which he saw the law and the independence and clarity with which he stated it in is dissenting judgment.

However, now that the court has concluded that if someone has a philosophical conviction that his child should not be subjected to corporal punishment, and there is no right of appeal, I should be interested to see whether it works the other way as well. Perhaps a parent who has a philosophical conviction that teachers ought to be able to use corporal punishment might care to take a case to the court one day. Those who say that we must give effect to the European judgment because it would allow the philosophical convictions of some parents to be met ought to realise that we ought not to go against the philosophical convictions of parents taking the other view who are just as entitled to their views.

Lastly, a Bill like this may in fact pose some danger to the cause of human rights. I suspect that every hon. Member in the Chamber, most of whom will be saying nasty things about the Bill, counts himself as a strong supporter of the cause of human rights. But I tremble sometimes for the way in which we are going. Many distinguished people in this country would make the whole European Convention on Human Rights part of our domestic law. What of that, when we see what has happened in this case about corporal punishment and philosophical convictions? There is a good deal in what my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) said a moment ago. When we have such judgments and have to act on them, many people ask why we have to go against our own philosophical convictions because foreigners tell us to do so. I do not agree with that attitude.

The Times once carried the headline:

"Fog in the Channel. Continent isolated."

We have come a long way since then. We must work with our European colleagues in this sphere, as in other spheres, if we are to further the objective, which we all share, of increasing human rights. However, there is a danger that if things go the way in which these things have gone, far from furthering the cause of human rights, we may actually put people against that cause.

Having said all that, why then shall I vote for this Bill? Because, as often happens in life, where one has few options one must take the least unattractive of them. It is not a mere matter of words for us to say that when we enter into international agreements, we must stand by them. Indeed, the decisions which it is most important we do implement are frequently those we do not like. We have no difficulty in implementing those we like. I recall the present Lord Chancellor saying that the only laws that matter are those we do not like. It is easy for us to obey those we like. We must also obey the ones we do not like.

So long as we remain a member of a convention of this type, we must implement the decisions of its court. I am glad that the Secretary of State is implementing them with the minimum of interference with the rights that we want to preserve. Parents who share my convictions and those of many of my hon. Friends will still be able to see that corporal punishment—where it is not prevented by the governors or local authority—reasonable force for the maintenance of discipline is available to those into whose care they have entrusted their children.

5.42 pm

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): This is a poor little Bill. My fear is that its opponents will be so disparate that there will be little happy conversation in our Lobby at the end of the debate. What we have had so far is akin to armed men attacking a jelly.

It might be right at the outset for me to make clear the position of my party. Liberal policy on education is to abolish corporal punishment, while recognising the need to support teachers more effectively in promoting good discipline. I share substantially the philosophy of the right hon. and learned Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival) on this subject, except that I do not believe that people take pleasure in seeing other people's children beaten when they themselves do not believe that that is right.

Sir Ian Percival: Nothing in the world that I said could suggest that anybody took pleasure in seeing anybody beaten, and I trust that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw that remark.

Mr. Freud: The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that there was a sort of justice in the imposition of corporal punishment.

Sir Ian Percival: I said nothing about anybody enjoying it.

Mr. Freud: If there is a sort of justice in it, and if one has a conviction that one does not want it for one's own child, I take the inference—and I am happy to withdraw it if the right hon. and learned Gentleman does not enjoy watching other people's children being beaten——

Sir Ian Percival: Really!

Mr. Freud: For hundreds of years it has been recognised that corporal punishment is not a satisfactory way of chastising children. In the 17th century a children's petition was presented to Parliament as a

"modest remonstrance of that intolerable grievance."

In 1883 the Committee of the Privy Council on Education reported:

"the more thoroughly a teacher is qualified for his position by skill, character and personal influence, the less necessary it is for him to resort to corporal punishment."

Dr. Arnold said of corporal punishment:

"it is a defeat for the teacher and a counsel of despair."

I do not understand why we who are trying to distance ourselves from those arcane malpractices should now, when we have advanced in every other respect and when we no longer send children up chimneys or down pits, should pride ourselves on continuing corporal punishment.

A recent initiative to abolish corporal punishment came from the Plowden committee in 1967. It reported:

"The excessive use of punishment of any kind should be regarded as an acknowledgment of someone's failure."

Any punishment of a corporal nature is bad, because beating a child does not produce a better child but tends to produce a more bitter and truculent one. If I believed anything else, I would not be arguing as I am.

As the only country in Europe which retains a teacher's right to spank, hit or beat children, we are not badly advised to look again. I regret the type of Bill that this is, because I am an abolitionist. Athough the measure is designed with some intent and principle in mind, rarely can a Bill have come from the Secretary of State's Department so lacking in either of those respects, so limited in its purpose and so devoid of spine. Nor have we had many Bills which will be so incomprehensible to those whom it will affect and which will please so few people because, as hon. Members have shown, it goes too far or does not go far enough.

The Bill has no guiding principle behind it. There is no indication that the concept of discipline, self-discipline or punishment has been understood by the Department, that the right hon. Gentleman has an appreciation of the problems facing our schools and teachers or of the fact that many teachers will not punish, even if their local education authorities recommend them to do so, and that many unions are opposed to it.

Worse still, there is no analysis of the moral or educational basis of corporal punishment. On what grounds, for example, are we to be the only country in Europe to retain the sanction? Why is this measure being presented when there are over 30 outstanding cases awaiting judgment in the Commission, judgments which may render this piece of legislation outwith the convention? As the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) said, as we debate the Bill through its different stages we may be overtaken by events as the result of new judgments from the European Court of Human Rights.

To encourage the gradual introduction of other, more imaginative, forms of punishment in our schools is a sensible idea. I attended a school at which other boys were punished but, because the views of my family were known, I was not corporally punished. Instead, I was made to learn Le Morte D'Arthur and Chaucer's prologue, which I still know by heart.

Mr. Cormack: He must have been very bad.

Mr. Freud: There is nothing so bad about Chaucer's prologue.

Mr. Cormack: I meant that, as a boy, the hon. Gentleman must have been rather bad if he had time to learn it by heart.

Mr. Freud: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has an opportunity to make his own speech, when he can develop that, if he so wishes.

Why do the Government persist in seeing corporal punishment as a solution? What great virtue do they see in our spending our time discussing such a pathetic and potentially damaging little Bill? Although the Minister did not say so, one suspects that it is a crumb to help assuage the voracious appetites of his hon. Friends who gave him such a hard time when he had to explain his proposals on student grants, and who gave me a hard time because I was in the next Committee Room hoping for a well-attended meeting of the Friends of the British Council. Few turned up for my meeting, because they wanted to hear the Secretary of State. *[Interruption.]* A few came.

What will the Bill do for our schools? It will not do a lot. It will do even less for our school secretaries and administrators, because it will impose even more work on those overworked people. This will happen particularly in the small comprehensive schools, which are already facing increasing amounts of paper work. What is worse, the new work load will be such that teachers will never be sure whether the list is up to date or whether a mistake has been made. Teachers will feel considerable guilt if things go wrong.

What does the Bill do for parents whose rights, we are told, the legislation respects and who are trying to bring up their children with a sense of fairness and equity and to face the immense problem—to a child—of being "different"? Will parents need to explain that punishment and right and wrong have different meanings for different children? How will parents react to the ritualisation and bureaucratisation of punishment which the Bill will usher in?

How can the Secretary of State think that the Bill does anything to encourage greater responsibility by parents for their children's behaviour and more involvement in what happens in schools? If behavioural problems have as much origin in the home as in the school, relying on the simplistic answer of the cane seems naive.

Most importantly, what does the Bill do for the teacher? The teacher will now have to stop in the middle of administering a punishment and say to the child, "Hold on a minute while I check the punishment register. Stay there and do not do anything." The harassed teacher will then go to the school office and say, "Can I punish this child?

[Mr. Freud]

Are you sure it is this child, and not the child's brother? Are the parents separated? Do we have consent from both the father and the mother?"

To the teacher who asks, "What can I do when I am confronted by a violent 16-year-old?" I say that the Bill is no answer and that the child does not suddenly become violent. The cane is not the answer and, with respect, has never been the answer. The child will not be reformed by the imposition of institutionalised violence, nor will he be deterred, as all the evidence shows. We should be looking beyond the expression of his fears and frustrations. Those who support the Bill seem to think that there is a simple solution to these problems. I believe that it is time we thought again.

How will a teacher teach his children self-discipline or to understand what discipline means when he faces the scenario that I have mentioned? Surely the admittedly nebulous concepts of justice and equity are part of what we should include when we speak of educating our children.

In an intervention the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) asked the hon. Member for Durham, North whether, if he had such faith in the European Court of Human Rights, he would preserve the private sector. If I were asked that question, I would say that I believe in the retention of his private sector of education, but I believe that it should become truly independent. I do not believe that giving charitable status to a concept as uncharitable as Eton, Harrow or Winchester makes much sense.

Liberal Members reject the belief that caning is a solution to any problem in our schools. We reject the Bill, whose only point seems to be to meet a ruling of the European convention: this is laudable but misguided, in that there is nothing more—no reasoned defence and no attempt to make our schools better or to tackle the real problem of motivation and discipline. I hope the Minister will promise us that he will examine those education authorities which no longer impose corporal punishment and ascertain whether they have found an answer. I advise the House to follow the example of the Liberal party and to reject the Bill. As the hon. Member for Durham, North said, there are many hurdles to come—but none need come up. Kill off the Bill tonight.

5.54 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I shall not follow the abolitionist path taken by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud). I would like to send the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) to a comprehensive school for a couple of years so that they will really be at the "chalk face" and will know every aspect of this problem. They speak as though they have known comprehensive schools from the inside, but they have not.

I hope that I have not been too damaged by the accolade of the hon. Member for Durham, North, which went straight to my heart. The hon. Gentleman's points could be damaging to teachers, especially when he makes trite remarks about the need for teaching to be firm, constructive and purposeful. Tell that to the east end teachers struggling to control many children who are deprived and damaged in certain ways. The hon. Gentleman needs to go beyond such broad, sweeping statements and think of the extra problems faced by teachers.

Mr. Radice: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Greenway: With respect, I did not interrupt the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Radice: The hon. Gentleman did not dare.

Mr. Greenway: I have demolished the hon. Gentleman's arguments so many times in the House that I believe I should let him off today.

There are two separate discussions about punishment in schools. The Labour party and the National Union of Teachers hold one view. I notice that the hon. Member for Durham, North did not refer to the views of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, which believes that corporal punishment is a sensible form of punishment.

Mr. Radice: The hon. Gentleman should give way on that point.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Member for Durham, North tried to give the impression that all the unions oppose corporal punishment.

Mr. Radice: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Greenway: I will not give way at the moment.

The hon. Member for Durham, North takes an idealistic line on corporal punishment and behaviour in general, as does the Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment and others who agree with him, including the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East. They say that all children are basically good and that punishment is therefore irrelevant and unnecessary. They say that it is wrong to use force to bend children to one's will. They believe that Rousseau was right when he said that children are basically self-motivated and self-motivated for good and that, if children are left to their own devices, all will be well.

The hon. Member for Durham, North should consider what the great Thomas Arnold of Rugby said:

"My object will be, if possible, to produce Christian men, for Christian boys I can scarcely hope to make."

That point should be borne in mind.

The other view on punishment in schools is held by the practical person—the schoolmaster. The hon. Member for Durham, North has conceded that I have been in comprehensive schools. I have been involved at the top of them for 23 years, so I have dealt with every disciplinary problem, and many more, in areas such as King's Cross and Lewisham.

Schoolmasters and all teachers need a practical approach. One cannot always be intellectual about the discipline one administers, but one must be intelligent about it. I would not say that no schoolmaster has never said that corporal punishment is a cure, but it is a deterrent. If sparingly, effectively and thoughtfully used, it can be a deterrent. I am not defending massive beatings by grown men of schoolchildren, but, carefully administered, the use of corporal punishment is sensible and right as a punishment for gross bullying, vandalism, and other misdemeanours.

Corporal punishment is sparingly used today. It is slowly going out of the punishment book, but it is still there. It is wrong to argue that it should suddenly be withdrawn by a sweep of the legislative pen. Corporal

punishment has parental and teacher support. What is done in schools must have, if possible, parental and teacher support. That fundamental value must be considered in determining the use of corporal punishment. Children must always be given equal punishment. That punishment should be given when needed and should never be malicious.

What are the alternatives? What are we talking about? I will mention some alternatives that the hon. Member for Durham, North gave and some that he did not. There are sin bins, lines and extra maths. As I have said before in the House, what does it do for the teaching and learning of maths if a teacher says, "You will stay behind to do some maths tonight for your misbehaviour."? Punishment runs might be good. There is sarcasm. We have had a little of that in the House, and we all accept it. However, sarcasm destroys and damages a child's mind. That is much worse than a tap on the bottom or somewhere else. Do they advocate shouting or suspension? Expulsion has been advocated.

If the Labour and Liberal parties advocate suspension and expulsion as an alternative to corporal punishment, they should know that almost always those children who need to be in school for educational, social and other reasons are put outside by these, to their lifelong damage. Moderate corporal punishment is much better for those children.

What else do the hon. Gentleman and his Labour colleagues advocate? The juvenile court? The abolition of corporal punishment can bring the juvenile court much closer. Perhaps they advocate psychiatrists, but the psychology service is already overworked.

We must take account of the fact that most teachers are in favour of corporal punishment. My experience, which is long and well known to the House, is that some of the keenest abolitionists are the first to run to the head or deputy head's office and say, "That boy is out of hand. Will you give him the cane?" However, they do not advocate corporal punishment; they are against it, they always say.

I can give an example of a teacher who ran to me. No woman was keener on abolishing corporal punishment than that lady. She burst into my office one day at the end of school and said, "Two horrible boys have just let down the tyres of my car. Will you catch them and give them a good hiding?". I said, "Miss Jones, you have always been opposed to corporal punishment. What are we talking about?" She said, "I cannot have that. What is to be done about it?" That is what happens in some schools. The abolitionists do not accept what they advocate when they are challenged or upset. That is a telling indictment of them.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Greenway: I shall not give way, because I think the hon. Gentleman will be replying to the debate.

The Bill is damaging because it permits unequal treatment in schools. I was pleased when my right hon. Friend said that in some areas there are schools side by side, one of which has corporal punishment and one of which is against it, which the parents know when they enter their child. It is in the school prospectus. That is the way that we should go. I hope that the Bill can be turned in that direction. I shall support the Bill because I shall seek to amend it.

I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Durham, North and the Liberal party because they are seeking to make the Bill an abolition Bill for the slight and flimsy reasons that they have given. The Bill must be amended. People inside and outside the House have pointed out instances that cause serious anxiety. It is wrong to damage the position of a teacher acting in loco parentis. I know that the Labour party wishes to take that away altogether.

To make teachers subject to civil actions because they have behaved as a parent might in certain circumstances, as the Bill does, is to damage the finest set of working people — the teaching profession — and to make life unnecessarily difficult for them.

The objections of the much-respected National Association of Head Teachers should be considered. It objects to the Bill and says that it creates an obligation upon schools to maintain a list of all pupils who can be subject to corporal punishment. The association feels that that is an unwarranted imposition. It argues that it would have been far better if the list merely recorded those people who were subject to parental exemption. I ask my hon. Friend to take up that point and respond to it when he replies. The association says:

> "We remain concerned that the heads and teachers will be at risk of civil action when a genuine mistake is made in the application of corporal punishment to an individual pupil who has been exempted."

Everyone can make mistakes. The Bill contains no let-out for the head or teacher who makes a mistake.

The association also says:

> "We strongly believe that only those heads and teachers who act in deliberate breach of parental wishes or who are guilty of recklessness or gross negligence, should be liable to civil action."

That would be much more reasonable than the Bill's position on that matter. I argue strongly in support of heads and teachers with whom I formerly worked and with whom I am in close contact in advancing their objections.

I am sorry to see that the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East is not in his place. He was on exceedingly thin ground when he said that we should emulate Sweden and abolish corporal punishment and not be the only country to retain it. Only a week or two ago on the radio he was arguing that we should not emulate Sweden on loans. I happen to agree with him about that, but he is trying to have the argument both ways. He should see the error of his argument.

I ask for the guidance of my hon. Friend when he replies on the subject of the hysterical pupil. The Bill does not mention, and nor did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the teacher who has to deal with a pupil who has become completely hysterical. In schools or anywhere else, traditionally one has had to give a good hard slap across the face or elsewhere. Sometimes that is the only possible thing to do to bring back reason. That point should be covered. It should be made clear that teachers and heads who do that are covered.

May we know how many weeks will have to elapse before parents who have not replied to an invitation to opt in and accept corporal punishment will be said to have done so? There are many parents who cannot read. They could not read a letter sent to them on that point. They may have to get someone else to read it for them. There are others who cannot write and who never respond to any

[Mr. Greenway]

letter. They are almost always the parents of children for whom punishment should be thought about carefully. I should like my hon. Friend to consider the position of such children and parents when he replies.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the hon. Member accept that any school that has the interests of such a child at heart will ask the parent to come to the school, when a decision will be taken as a result of discussions between the teacher and the parent? One of the objections to the Bill is that it does not do more to foster co-operation between the parent and the school, and to make it clear that parents have a responsibility for discipline.

Mr. Greenway: There are some parents who would never come to the school, even if one promised them £1,000 or a pint of beer. What the hon. Member for Denton and Redditch (Mr. Bennett) says sounds grand, but it is not entirely realistic.

My right hon. Friend made a valuable point when he said that we have to reaffirm our acceptance of the European Court of Human Rights, and its charter every five years. Presumably that gives us the right to renegotiate at that time on any point on which we have reservations and indeed to opt out altogether on such points. I hope that, as the European Court is making such nonsense of discipline in our schools, the Government will assure us that they will bear that point in mind when the next five-yearly negotiating time arrives.

How long will the established policy of the school have to last before it can be reversed? Once a school has established its policy under the legislation, will that policy have to last for a year, two years or five years, or could it be overturned at a week's or a day's notice?

How much notice will parents have to give of a change in their wishes for their child? That is another important point. Presumably they could not, within minutes of hearing that the child was to be given a smack, announce that, although they had formerly agreed to corporal punishment, they were now opposed to it.

I have no hesitation in voting for the Bill. Bad though it is — nonsensical though it is — I believe that it is amendable, and that the Opposition's policy is destructive or worse. In Sweden, children of five can take their parents to court for giving them a smack. That is the situation that the Labour party appears to advocate. We must avoid it at all costs.

6.13 pm

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I find it almost unbelievable that a group of reputedly intelligent human beings should be discussing such nonsense. The Bill is so backward as to be almost unbelievable. Those who are in favour of corporal punishment would be just as defeated by the passage of the Bill as those who, like me, are opposed to it. We are searching for convoluted methods of helping people off a hook on which they have impaled themselves. The situation is so silly that I defy anyone who has passed the infant school stage to believe what we are talking about.

If we examine what has been said repeatedly in the debate, we must assume the existence of some kind of British exceptionalism that we are arrogating to ourselves. Perhaps, like the prevention of terrorism legislation, the Bill should be renewed every six months. From what some people say, one might think that children were creating terror on a grand scale in our schools.

We all want discipline in school. Those of us who have taught know how necessary it is. I have been opposed to corporal punishment throughout a long teaching life. I can never understand how — witout saying it in so many words — we dare to accuse all the nations that have abolished corporal punishment of enduring utter chaos in their schools as a result, while, because we retain corporal punishment, we have wonderful discipline. That is nonsense.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), with whom I have worked as closely as two hon. Members on opposite sides can work, has fallen for that line. How can we possibly believe that, because of corporal punishment, we, out of the whole of Europe, have discipline in our schools, while all those poor, benighted souls in the Common Market — in which I do not believe — have schools that are in a state of chaos because of the lack of corporal punishment? It is an abuse of teachers in other countries——

Mr. Forth *rose*——

Mr. Flannery: I may give way later.

British exceptionalism in schools is arrant nonsense. It is akin to gunboat diplomacy.

Mr. Radice: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Flannery: I would not want the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) to feel abused. Perhaps my hon. Friend would wait a little.

As any experienced teacher knows, corporal punishment is born of sheer frustration. It eases the situation of a teacher who cannot teach any longer without caning a certain child. It is the last refuge of many good teachers; but it is the first refuge of the poor teacher.

Many years ago, when I was teaching a junior class——

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flannery: With respect, I should like to tell my anecdote, which is absolutely true.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Flannery: I hope that the hon. Lady will not interrupt me.

In those days, primary and secondary schools were not so neatly divided. There were junior boys and secondary boys in the school in which I was teaching, as happened in the state system. As hon. Members may remember, many teachers were needed after the war, so an emergency scheme was set up. People had only a year's training. Many of them were ex-service men. We needed them, even though they were inadequately trained. Many of them were far better teachers than they would otherwise have been, because they entered the profession after the war, after long experience of life, rather than being pushed into it by mummy.

One teacher at that school had been a lieutenant in the Navy. He was a very good person, but, as soon as there was any indiscipline, he felt that he must use the cane. Like me, he had taught primary and secondary school children. He took over a class of mine in which there were 46 nine-year-olds. I had found the class easy and friendly.

When the head asked me to move around the school and teach history and English to some of the bigger and smaller boys, the teacher to whom I have referred took over my class.

I still took the class for one or two lessons a week. On one such occasion, a little boy came and stood beside my desk and boasted, "Sir, I have been caned." I asked, "Have you, John? What had you done?" He told me about some peccadillo for which he had been caned. Another child came up with his book and said the same thing. I told him to go and sit down. I then said, "Hands up those boys who have been caned," and 46 boys put up their hands.

Caning goes on in more than 80 per cent. of our secondary schools. There is a caning every 19 seconds. It closes the channels of learning, makes it more difficult for the teacher to teach, and it has all sorts of bad effects.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flannery: In a moment. Do not be impatient.

Most canings are contrary to law and take place in front of a full class. Often small and sensitive children are caned, and the caning makes it difficult to go on teaching them. The caning is not put into a punishment book, as it should be, and is not conducted before witnesses, except children. I fail to see how it helps teaching.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flannery: I shall have to eventually. Very well.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he gave his case away when he said that caning is the last refuge of a good teacher? That is precisely the argument that my right hon. and hon. Friends are using. It is a deterrent, and even good teachers need a deterrent.

Mr. Flannery: As usual, the hon. Lady is wong. Before I said that, I said that caning was born of frustration.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Look at *Hansard*.

Mr. Flannery: Perhaps the hon. Lady would stop interrupting me. She knows that I would never interrupt her.

Caning is born of frustration and has no impact, except a negative one. We are discussing a bizarre Bill which, like caning, is born of frustration. There is an air of panic about the Bill. Ministers have said, "The European Court of Human Rights has made a decision and we must react to it." The only real reaction is the abolition of corporal punishment, but the Tory party could not face that. It could not face abolishing one of its most cherished notions about children. The result is a half-way house which is unfair and utterly unworkable. Conservative Members will not have to implement the Bill. I wish that they would talk to the teachers who are expected to implement it. It is simply not true that teachers agree with the Bill. Even teachers who believe in corporal punishment disagree profoundly with it because they know that it is unworkable and unfair and will help nobody.

The Bill has been dreamt up by people who do not understand and have never faced the problem. They have merely a memory of what happened to them in their childhood. In many cases that was a long time ago. Teachers oppose the Bill because they know that they will not be able to implement it and that, therefore, matters will be worse.

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): The hon. Gentleman has been a teacher. Does he agree that some teachers believe that physical assaults on teaching staff by pupils are the very form of misdemeanour from which corporal punishment can safeguard them? Does he also agree that that is an important reason for keeping corporal punishment?

Mr. Flannery: The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong. Statistics prove that when corporal punishment is abolished, the incidence of assaults on teachers is reduced. There is gross indignity in one human being chastised by another, when it would be an assault outside the education system. Physically punishing people up to the age of 18 is bound to arouse passions. Schools which have relied to some extent on corporal punishment will be in most difficulty if the Bill becomes law. There will have to be discussions about how to deal with recalcitrant children.

The smaller the class, the less difficulty there is in teaching. The abolition of corporal punishment will be expensive. It means having better schools, more teachers and smaller classes. Anyone who has taught knows that there is a point at which a teacher becomes a child minder. We want classes that are small enough to enable teachers to have a one-to-one relationship with pupils and to let the pupils know that the teacher is deeply interested in their problems. Opposition Members are struggling towards that goal, as are many Conservative Members. We all know that the Bill is nonsense.

We are providing that people under the age of 18 in England and Wales can be beaten, although pupils over the age of 15 in Scotland can choose whether to be beaten. Are we really suggesting that a 17½-year-old boy or girl will walk up to a teacher and say, "I want to be beaten for what I do wrong."? That is claptrap. It is insulting for the House to be expected to vote on such rubbish. We have far better things to do. The Bill is the child of a bureaucratic mind and panic.

I am sorry that corporal punishment is so deeply ingrained in the Tory party as the best method of bringing up children. I have met ex-pupils, who were never caned in my schools, boasting about how they were caned. It made them feel manly. I have seen people standing at bars saying that caning never hurt or did them any harm. Others look at them quizzically and say to themselves, "Good God! Did it not? We all have our own opinions about that." It is all so manly being 21, starting to shave, boasting about being caned and slapping on the after-shave lotion. Caning has no part in teaching, but, unfortunately, some Conservative Members will go on with it until what is bound to occur occurs.

There is only one progressive element in the Bill. It opens the way to complete abolition, when it is proved that the Bill is unworkable and backward.

Most parents do not want their children to be caned. They do not want someone else doing what they do not do. We should not equate a little get-along slap on the leg of a child with standing over him with cane in hand. The older the child, the more terrible it is to stand over him with a cane. He may even take the cane from the teacher and snap it over his knees. That causes a great deal of trouble in secondary schools.

Sir Keith Joseph: I am sure that the words of the hon. Gentleman are widely read, so I should warn him that even a little "get-along" slap on the leg would count as corporal punishment.

Mr. Flannery: Conservative members have already used euphemisms that equate caning with the sort of little get-along that I have just mentioned. That is not the way to deal with the problem. No one is complaining about the tiny losses of temper, even though the right hon. Gentleman says that they are wrong and that one should beware of them. My point is that we cannot equate caning with a little slap of that nature.

Sir Keith Joseph: I should have completed my remarks. A slap that is given as part or as the whole of a punishment constitutes an offence under the Bill.

Mr. Flannery: I accept that. I reiterate that I am totally against slapping a child. My point is that Conservative Members are equating a slap with caning as though they were the same thing. I am against both. I want good teaching. That means not beating children, but opening the channels of learning by gaining their interest and respect without beatings.

The fact that private schools are not included in the measure shows that it is fatuous. I understand that in public schools they try to conceal the fact that children are there on public money. If a parent opts out and says that he does not want his child John caned, it will become clear that John comes from the state sector and has an assisted place on taxpayers' money. There will be a stigma attached, as there is with free meals. That is one of the tiny peccadillos of the Bill.

In its attempt to preserve the backward methods of discipline of the past, the Bill falls between two stools. By doing so, it could lessen and even cause the collapse of discipline in schools. If we had a free vote, the Bill would be rejected, because both sides of the House would oppose the middle way. Conservative Members should have sufficient courage to join us in throwing out a measure in which no one believes and which could deepen rather than solve the problems in our schools.

6.33 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I always enjoy listening to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), and this evening I agreed with some of his points. Unfortunately, many of my right hon. and hon. Friends cannot support the Opposition amendment because of its wording, although our sympathies may be with some of the points that it raises.

I compliment my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues on all the good work that they have done since the Government took office. They have attempted to get to grips with the real problems of education in contemporary Britain. When I listened to the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) talking about the education policy of the Labour party, I thought back to the last Labour Secretary of State for Education, who now belongs to a different party. She ruined many good schools, allowed standards to decline drastically and ignored the literacy and curriculum problems of schools. Although I agree with Opposition Members who say that the Department should improve the curricula and discipline in schools, when the Labour party was in office quite the opposite occurred.

I am thankful that since 1979 the Government have been heavily involved in dealing with those real problems. Their record on teacher quality, raising pupils' levels of attainment, reviewing examination methods and encouraging greater parental involvement in schools lead us to look forward to future reforms which are in the pipeline. With such a good record, it is regrettable that the Government are obliged to introduce this Bill. It is a hindrance to the progress that they have made in many areas.

It is regrettable that Government time is being taken up by this so-called reform. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, it is not the Bill that he would have liked to introduce if he had had the choice. It cannot be denied that some measure to reform corporal punishment had to be introduced. Because of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, the Government must make provision for respecting the philosophical convictions about corporal punishment of parents whose children are educated at public expense.

Conservative Members believe in abiding by the rule of law. The United Kingdom is a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights and must, therefore, be bound by the rulings of the court, regrettable though they may be. To ignore its decisions would be to breach an undertaking in international law. Conservative Members could never suggest nor condone such a thing.

Having accepted that some measure of reform is necessary, and having acknowledged that the wishes of parents must be respected, one wonders what effect the Bill will have on discipline in schools, if it is left in its present form. I agree with the hon. Member for Hillsborough that that must be the criterion on which we judge the measure.

I am a former teacher, and I am only too aware of the difficulties which many teachers face in maintaining discipline. Education can be successful only in an atmosphere conducive to study. Such an atmosphere cannot exist where unruly children disrupt classes. Where corporal punishment is available as an ultimate punishment, discipline is generally maintained. Without it, unruly pupils may face a less painful punishment but a more damaging one.

Some of my Conservative colleagues have mentioned in interjections that an alternative may be to expel disruptive pupils, who then end up in a so-called sin bin. I regret that, because it means that a child's education may be further prejudiced. I accept that there are other acceptable methods of punishment and that corporal punishment is not widely used. It is rarely used, but it is a deterrent and an ultimate punishment.

Many people say that disruptive children deserve their fate if they go to a sin bin, but should a child's education be irreversibly harmed because of thoughtless childish behaviour which could be remedied by a few strokes of the cane or a smack, depending on the age of the child? I am not in favour of 17-year-olds being caned. It is not practical. However, it may be a deterrent and a punishment for younger children.

The decision of the European Court of Human Rights requires the Government only to make allowances for the philosophical convictions of parents about corporal punishment. The court did not say that the punishment was wrong. It did not decide that it was cruel or degrading, contrary to what Opposition Members have said.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: No Opposition Member suggested that the court said that in its judgment. We

simply referred to the 20 cases that are pending, some of them under a different article, and the possibility that the Government might have to legislate again.

Mr. Evennett: I accept that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman did not say that, but the hon. Member for Hillsborough suggested that it was cruel and degrading. However, I agree that the court did not say that——

Mr. Flannery: I did not say that the Court of Human Rights said that it was degrading. I said that I believed it was degrading.

Mr. Evennett: I accept that the court did not say that and that the hon. Gentleman did. It would appear that the Opposition are suggesting that the punishment is degrading.

The Bill seems to be leading us along the path of abolition, not by the will of the House, but because its provisions, if implemented, will cause serious problems to schools, and especially to teachers. They will have to abandon corporal punishment, and the result will be abolition by default. We cannot have it both ways. If we want greater professionalism from teachers, we must give them as much support as possible to carry out their duties. The Bill will not only fail to support them, but will undermine discipline, which is the essential foundation upon which teachers must rely.

Despite my right hon. Friend's interesting and informative speech, I am still a little confused about opting in and opting out. He suggested that letters will be sent to parents telling them that they have the option of putting their child on the register. It will be difficult, in schools where the majority of parents decide to opt their children out, to maintain a couple or half a dozen children on the corporal punishment list. That would be unfair to the parents and to the children. There is a large question mark against whether parents will write to the schools and say, "Yes, I want my child to be punished if necessary." The result may be that a minority of pupils at the school will be liable to corporal punishment. Many parents who saw that would then opt their children out, and corporal punishment in that institution would end.

The teachers unions, the press and nearly everyone has been against some aspects of the Bill. During the years in which I have been interested in education, no other education legislation has attracted so much criticism.

Parental choice has become a keynote of the Government's education policy. I hope that, having suggested to my right hon. Friend that parental choice could be restricted by the Bill, he will consider it slightly differently. We must conform with the court's ruling, but of the three options that my right hon. Friend mentioned in his speech, I wonder whether he would reconsider the option to designate schools and allow school governors and local authorities to determine whether a school should be subject to corporal punishment.

Recent legislation has forced schools to draw up lists of information about the subjects and facilities that they offer. When parents look for secondary schools to which to send their children, they have a choice—encouraged by the Government — depending on curriculum and opportunities available. The Bill might be better received if the Government allowed school governors and local education authorities to designate some schools as corporal punishment schools and to give parents the choice of sending their children to those schools.

Mr. David Lightbown (Staffordshire, South-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that if his proposal were enacted it would create problems for school transport? Immediately the two-mile limit for primary schools and the three-mile limit for secondary schools were breached, parents would demand, as a statutory right, that the local education authorities provided transport. That would be an expensive alternative.

Mr. Evennett: There are two sides to that argument. In urban areas, such as my constituency, it would not be a problem, because there are many schools in the area. However, in rural or outlying districts it could be a great problem. If we are dealing with a philosophical conviction — that the parent does not want his child to attend a school that has corporal punishment—the risk of a child having to travel a little further may be a consequence of his opting his child out of corporal punishment. It may involve additional expenditure, but if the Government believe in more choice for parents they should consider providing choice in this area.

Opposition Members mentioned the children who attend public schools, not because their parents pay the full fees, but because they receive a grant from the Government. As we believe in excellence in education, the opportunity for children of a certain background or from a certain area to attend schools, often of academic excellence, at public expense is greatly welcome. However, if those children come within the provisions of the Bill, schools may be less keen to take them. It will cause public schools more problems, because they will be able to maintain corporal punishment, unhindered by the Bill, for those who are not on the assisted places scheme.

I realise that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in a difficult position, and we sympathise with him. He is obliged to introduce legislation to comply with the court's decision, and he believes the Bill to be the most practical way out of the difficulty. I understand his reservations about the alternatives, but the Bill in its present form will result in the abolition of corporal punishment by the back door. I agree completely with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) that the Bill should be amended at a later stage.

6.48 pm

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): If I, as a teacher, had received the Bill as a submission for A-level work, I should have been tempted to write on the report, "Your son has received an excellent education from us, but it is evident that he has been educated beyond his intelligence." It worries me that we have not talked much about the children. Children will accept many forms of discipline, provided that they believe it to be fair and just, and provided that pupils in the same class do not receive different punishment for the same offence. That is the basis not only of class discrimination but of legal discrimination.

What we should try to do in schools — I am not referring to social engineering, because I do not believe that it works — is to make each child feel when he leaves school that he will receive equal justice before the law. For children to be brought up in a society in which

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the rules and regulations discriminate against them creates no basis for turning them into responsible citizens of the future. When I was a teacher I did not use corporal punishment, not because the lads tended to be bigger than I was — although that would have been a reasonable enough excuse — but because in many of our city schools lads are brought up in violent areas. One very often faced lads with whom even the police could not deal.

My reason for not using corporal punishment was that its use meant that I should descend to the level that I condemned. If I had used the cane as a deterrent, I should have sown in the minds of those children the belief that might was right, that the guardian of the law was not the courts but the guy with the biggest fists and the most effective punch. That is the key argument for the abolition of corporal punishment. We are referring not to the occasional misdemeanour but to serious disruption. My experience was that if lads accepted corporal punishment they did not need it in the first place.

Already a distinction is made between the punishment that is right for girls and the punishment that is right for boys. A distinction is now to be made between the parents of those boys who write to the school and those who do not. The parents who write tend to be the more articulate parents, whereas the boys who very often need help but who get the bashing have parents who do not care. They are discriminated against at home and they are then discriminated against by the first kind of authority with which they come into contact. That is no way in which to build a one-nation society.

My condemnation of this Government's legislation is that it will create a two-nation society: the privileged and the under-privileged, the articulate and the inarticulate, those who have the resources to stand up for themselves and those who do not. That is no way in which to create a one-nation society. It will not be easy to create the kind of society that we want to create in schools. It will involve all kinds of additional resources. If the Minister wishes to create discipline in schools, by which I mean the creation of a working relationship, there must be smaller classes and more teachers and more books. However, the Minister is a wrecker. There are 1·4 million children in classes with over 30 pupils and 130,000 children in classes with over 35 pupils; 30,000 teachers have disappeared in the last four years and 20,000 teachers are due to disappear in the next two years. Again the Government are skimping on a pay claim by the teachers. The Government are creating dissatisfaction among both the pupils and the teachers whom they are there to serve and to defend.

Mr. Lightbown: Is it not a fact that every year since the early 1970s the pupil-teacher ratios in both primary and secondary schools have improved?

Mr. Young: No, not according to what needs to be done.

Who else will deal with glue sniffing? The parents, the police, the courts and this House cannot deal with it. This is another among the many jobs that have to be done by teachers and social workers. Ours is the only society that seems not to recognise that the real potential of this country rests upon the education of our young people, both at school, in industry, and in our universities. Every cut slashes at the very seedcorn upon which this country depends if it is to compete with our competitors abroad. Unless we create in our schools, because the classroom is the doorway to society, the belief that children will receive fair treatment—everybody cannot be equal but equality of treatment can be expected—and that they will not be divided from the age of five into two societies, we shall have failed in our duty to those upon whom the future of this nation rests.

I am very sad that in legislation such as this we are pandering to the maintenance of prejudice. If children do not behave in grammar schools, they can be told to go elsewhere. Where, however, does the kid from the comprehensive go? Nobody can solve that problem. There has been a great deal of discussion about handing this question over to governors. I suppose that when we next debate capital punishment we shall ask somebody else to deal with it. One of the jobs of this House is to create a better educational environment for our kids. I hope that hon. Members will support the Opposition amendment and ensure that corporal punishment is abolished. At the end of tonight's debate I, as a constituency Member of Parliament, shall be writing to my local authority asking it to make a decision that will not divide one child in a class from his neighbour in Bolton at least.

6.58 pm

Mr. Warren Hawksley (The Wrekin): I do not intend to follow the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young) down the abolitionist road.

I am glad that the debate is taking place this week. If it had taken place last week it would have been much shorter, had the powers that be had their way. It is crucial that we should have a long and full discussion on Second Reading of what I believe to be a very important Bill.

In March 1982 I tried to raise the question of corporal punishment for young offenders by putting down a new clause to the Criminal Justice Bill. I initiated a debate that continued in Committee for 6½ hours. The was no filibustering. It demonstrated the importance of the subject to the Committee, although one appreciates that the context was different. However, it is interesting to note that many of the arguments that are being put forward today, particularly those relating to the European Court of Human Rights, were raised then as reasons why it was not possible to consider the reintroduction of corporal punishment for young offenders.

This Bill is not concerned with whether we should allow corporal punishment. Most people think, as do I, that it may be the beginning of the end. I regret that, although I appreciate that some Labour Members hope that that will be so.

When I advocated corporal punishment for young offenders in 1982, I said that those of us who had had corporal punishment at school were none the worse for it. When the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) was being questioned about his education, I was tempted to ask whether he had ever experienced corporal punishment. If he had answered that in the affirmative, I would have gone on to ask whether he thought it did him any harm. I do not believe that it does anybody any harm to be caned to a reasonable degree. I admit that we are talking of a sparing use of the cane, not of brutal attacks by teachers which would be open to action in the criminal courts.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman feel that it does any good at all when, on occasions, pupils

tell teachers who have administered corporal punishment that it did not hurt and go off to glory, first, in that fact in front of other pupils and, secondly, in the fact that they could make such a remark to a teacher?

Mr. Hawksley: I am sure that I always said that corporal punishment did not hurt when I was at school, but I have a funny feeling that it acted as a deterrent. I was slightly more careful next time about committing that offence. It is a deterrent. I appreciate that people may claim that corporal punishment does not hurt and may try to glory in it, but in their heart of hearts they must feel that it is a deterrent. It is a sanction which teachers should use sparingly, but which I believe strongly should be available to them to use as they think fit.

Is the Bill before us today because the Government disagree with corporal punishment? The answer must be no. It comes about only because the European Court of Human Rights said so in the February 1982 judgment in the case of Campbell and Cosans. We should look at the judgments of the European court. Let us spread the net a little wider. Let us consider not just that case, but the case involving corporal punishment in the Isle of Man—the Tyrer case. In both those cases the British judge dissented from the judgment which went against the British interest.

It is also interesting to note that Lord Scarman, in a judgment in another place in 1980, stressed the importance of the rule of Parliament here at Westminster. He said:

"This House's decision, even though the European Court has held the rule it declares to be an infringement of the Convention, is the law. Our courts must continue to look, not to the European Court's decision but to the House of Lords' decision."

Is it in our interest that we should blindly follow a court whose judgments have nothing to do with Britain's legal system and are not even arrived at by our judges? I should say no.

Rather than push the Bill to a vote tonight, the Government should have decided to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights. When that convention was ratified in 1951, we retained the right to decide that it was not for Britain. In view of the judgments that are coming forward, we should reconsider the situation. That, I hasten to add, has nothing to do with our membership of and responsibilities to the EEC. It concerns, purely and simply, the ratification by the Government in 1951.

I hope that we shall consider whether we want our law to be made in this Chamber and to be enforced by British judges.

Sir Keith Joseph: I ask my hon. Friend to bear in mind that many hon. Members had reason to welcome at least one, if not more, of the judgments of that court from which he wants us to withdraw.

Mr. Hawksley: I think that I know what judgment my right hon. Friend is thinking about, but, on balance, the argument that we should be ruled in such matters by a court in which the British judge dissented from the judgment does not appeal to me.

The right for teachers on the continent to be regarded as acting in loco parentis is not common. Although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says that we are dealing here with a small and fine point, that whole relationship will be endangered by the fact that we are prepared to go on accepting the edicts of the European Court. If that is continental practice, I fear that that will be inflicted on us. That is wrong.

Decisions on the system that we want in our schools and the relationship between teachers and the children that they are looking after should and must be made by the House and the other place.

I shall have no option but to vote against the Labour party's amendment, which would abolish corporal punishment and therefore cannot possibly have my support; but I shall also be unable to support the Government when we vote on this important issue tonight.

My support for corporal punishment as a sanction, and my dislike of the Europeans telling us what to do in our own country, is joined in my mind by a belief—some Opposition Members may agree with me here—that the Government's proposal to create the sheep and the goats — those children who can be caned and those who cannot—is probably the worst of both worlds.

The teachers are right to say that the abolition of the cane will lead to problems and that increased expenditure will be necessary. That point was mentioned by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East. To a certain extent, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State skirted round that point in his opening speech, but he accepted that some slight expenditure would be necessary. At this time, when education is having to play its part in helping the economy to get back on its feet, can we possibly accept any extra expenditure on an item such as this?

There are some practical problems. I can imagine a situation where, a crime having been committed that deserves to be punished by the cane, the headmaster finds that of the two children involved one can be caned and the other cannot. If it is the ringleader who cannot be caned, is it fair that the minor party should be caned? It is not.

What safeguards are there against a 15-year-old with a single parent intimidating his mother when she has to decide whether he should be exempt from punishment? When detention slips have to be returned, one sometimes hears of children forging them. What safeguards have we to prevent these forms being returned with forged signatures? Those are practical problems which must be dealt with in Committee.

I hope that the views of the National Association of Head Teachers on retaining a list of pupils who are subject to parental exemption will be considered in Committee. What punishment will be offered as an alternative? We have heard suggestions from both sides of the House. I am slightly nervous that, at a later date, some of those may be ruled out of order by the European Court if we remain a signatory to the convention.

Some people may have read in *The Times* today of the 16-year-old boy from Wirral who was suspended from school because he would not be caned and whose lawyers are claiming £17,000 in compensation for him. Will that be the first of many cases? If so, it causes me great concern. I hope that, when he replies, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will deal with the future of the European Court and how those further decisions will be arrived at. According to *The Times*, it is unlikely that that case will be heard by the judges. It is expected that it will end in a friendly settlement. If that is the case, will taxpayers' money be used to support the parents of that child who is making the complaint?

Even at this late stage I hope that Ministers will think again and withdraw the Bill, go back to the Cabinet and ask it to agree to our withdrawal from the European

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convention. It is important that we retain for Britain the right to make our own decisions about how we maintain law and order.

7.10 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I find it odd that I am the sole hon. Member representing a Scottish constituency to seek to contribute to a debate that intends to amend the law of Scotland. It is odd that a proposition of this kind should not arouse the interest of either Front Bench. However, when I contemplate the reason for it a little more closely, it becomes clear that there is a certain underlying and unspoken justification for there being less interest in this debate among my Scottish colleagues than among right hon. and hon. Members representing constituencies south of the border.

When the judgment in the Scottish case of Campbell and Cosans was handed down by the European Court of Human Rights, it was recognised in Scotland that it was giving the red light to corporal punishment. Although I am not one of the greatest admirers of the Secretary of State for Scotland and have little admiration for his political courage, on this issue at least he showed the kind of leadership that ought to have been demonstrated by the Secretary of State for Education and Science. He showed a willingness to recognise that, notwithstanding the existence of a strong body of opinion in Scotland that favoured the continuance of corporal punishment—an opinion privately shared by many teachers even though many representative bodies in education were not prepared to say so publicly—he should advise local authorities to proceed with the abolition of corporal punishment. They are in the process of doing that.

The Bill seeks to change the law in Scotland and to introduce a number of bizarre anomalies. For example, a young person over the age of 16 in Scotland who is to be subjected to corporal punishment must himself say whether he wishes to receive it. In Scotland, the Bill in a sense will be a dead letter. I do not think that local education authorities will continue to accept that corporal punishment should have any place in the Scottish education system. That is a recognition of the practical difficulty of any other conclusion, in the light of the Campbell and Cosans case.

It is odd that the Secretary of State for Education and Science has not been able to resolve this difficulty south of the border in the same way that his Cabinet colleague did north of the border, and I do not find what the right hon. Gentleman said about our differences of position particularly compelling. He did not specify those differences—differences of degree or of popular opinion—on the subject north and south of the border. He did not demonstrate that there was any greater use of corporal punishment south of the border than north before the Campbell and Cosans case.

I think that the explanation lies in the natures of the two Secretaries of State. The Secretary of State for Education and Science seeks to defer to the atavistic instincts of those of his colleagues and those members of the Conservative party who wish to resist the abolition of corporal punishment at any cost. But he is signalling to his colleagues behind him that he regards this Bill as a tiresome necessity and not as a measure which he has any great pleasure in presenting to the House. He is seeking to have it both ways.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman try to be more consistent? Not too long ago, people applauded the reaction of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to what his Back Benchers were saying about student grants. Is it not consistent for my right hon. Friend to be rightly concerned about and sympathetic to what his Back Benchers may be saying in today's debate?

Mr. Maclennan: If the right hon. Gentleman tried to follow the opinions of his Back Benchers on this issue he would be in dire difficulty. A range of opinions has been expressed which is so confusing that it cannot have given him any guidance. In those circumstances, he would have been wiser to rely upon his own judgment and not to twist like a weather vane, blown by the winds of the opinions behind him.

Mr. David Young: That is what we are here for.

Mr. Maclennan: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the views of his colleague, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Hawksley), bear the slightest resemblance to those of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) or those of the former Solicitor-General and of any other Government supporter who has spoken, he has been only half listening to the debate.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science would be wise to consider what has happened in Scotland since the Secretary of State for Scotland issued his advice to local education authorities, because he should recognise that there is now no significant body of opinion in favour of the reintroduction or retention of corporal punishment and that the debate in Scotland is no longer about corporal punishment in schools so much as what is to be done to maintain discipline in difficult schools in the absence of corporal punishment. That is a pressing and much-needed debate.

It is important to consider whether teachers in areas of stress and deprivation whose pupils are unruly, unmotivated and capable of disrupting classes have adequate means of instilling discipline and the circumstances which enable the education of those who wish to have it and those who would be better for it if it were to proceed.

Not enough thought has been given to the other available options. I had hoped to hear about them from the Secretary of State. It is clear that the majority of local authorities in England, as in Scotland, will recognise that the Bill is wholly unworkable and wholly inequitable. Their political complexion will not matter. They will proceed step by step inexorably down the road to abolition.

Today's debate would have been altogether more constructive if the Secretary of State had addressed himself to the circumstances that are to follow abolition. Instead, he buried his head in the sand and tried to split the difference between himself and those other hon. Members who have a more realistic appraisal of what goes on in the classroom.

I want to comment on what the hon. Member for The Wrekin said about the European Convention on Human Rights and the authority of the European Court. I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point of view that it is not wholly satisfactory for Parliament to legislate

to bring the United Kingdom into conformity with judgments reached in Strasbourg, especially when there is so much reluctance on the part of the Government even to commend the terms of the Bill.

The route around that difficulty would be the hon. Gentleman's acceptance—as many of his hon. Friends have accepted—of the overwhelming case to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into our domestic law. I introduced a Bill for that purpose during the last Session of Parliament, and enjoyed the support of a considerable number of Conservative Members. I think that 137 hon. Members, many of them Conservative, supported that principle in an early-day motion.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong to think that the principles of the convention are in any sense exotic or unsuited to this country. The convention was drafted by Englishmen in 1950 and was the product of the work of the late Lord Kilmuir, a distinguished Conservative Lord Chancellor who, at that time, was the chairman and rapporteur of the legal affairs committee of the Council of Europe on the subject of the protection of human rights. The convention was essentially a conservative measure, drawn up by lawyers well versed in the common law system and its practice. They knew what needed to be done to strengthen the protection of human rights — not abstractly in Europe as a whole, but in all the member countries of the Council of Europe.

Mr. Forth: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the United Kingdom entered a reservation against the protocol on which this whole case is based, and that that must cast some doubt on the suggestion that, even in the 1950s, the United Kingdom gave any credence to the sort of thing that has been brought before us today?

Mr. Maclennan: The protocols have been brought forward at different times, and different Governments have given assent on behalf of the British people. No doubt further protocols will be considered by the Government. Some protocols remain unratified by the Government.

There is a further respect in which the Bill is defective, which is that the issue should have been faced once and for all. It is highly unsatisfactory that this country should be dragged before the European Court of Human Rights time and again on the issue of corporal punishment—or, indeed, on any of the issues that have arisen from our alleged infractions of the convention to which we are a signatory.

In reply to my intervention earlier, the Secretary of State acknowledged that a number of cases are pending under article 3 of the convention—not under article 2 of the protocol—which may lead, in certain cases, to it being held that the corporal punishment was inhuman or degrading——

Mr. Forth: Nonsense.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Gentleman may say that, but he is not following the argument. Under the convention, it is possible that the infliction of corporal punishment in a school may be held to be inhuman and degrading. That fact was brought out not only in the Tyrer case but in the judgment on the Campbell and Cosans case. The court said:

"it follows from that judgment"—

the Tyrer case—

"that 'treatment' itself will not be 'degrading' unless the person concerned has undergone—either in the eyes of others or in his own eyes . . . humiliation or debasement attaining a minimum level of severity. That level has to be assessed with regard to the circumstance of the case."

It is quite clear that defining, in one case, that the infliction of corporal punishment is not inhuman or degrading does not end the right of another individual to take his case to the court. It is absolutely insufferable that case after case of corporal punishment should be brought before the court with the issue being decided judicially and over a protracted period. The Government must face the issue — it is time to bring an end to that form of punishment.

It is surely reasonable to study the experience not only of Scotland but of other European countries—on other occasions, the Government are quite ready to say, "We are culturally and socially close to them" — that have abolished corporal punishment in schools.

If, by some mischance, the Bill is given a Second Reading—and the SDP will vote against it—it will need to be amended if it is not to lead to the most gross of inequities and the most shocking administrative difficulties for those who have to give effect to it. I cannot envisage how the Bill can be amended to make sense. Nothing that has been said tonight by any hon. Member who has supported the principle of the Bill and has wanted to follow the Secretary of State's road has altered my view on that. They have raised questions to which there are already answers. We look forward with great interest to seeing how the difficulties mentioned by Conservative Members will be taken into account. We are highly sceptical about the Bill and oppose it in principle.

7.26 pm

Sir. Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): To cane or not to cane, that is the question—or is it? The Prime Minister is constantly saying that she does not want anything to be fudged. This issue is something which she will have to accept is being fudged—even though she is a previous Secretary of State for Education and Science. If ever there was a Bill that fudged anything, this is it.

When I was at school, if I had been told that in 50 years I would be in the House of Commons with an opportunity to do away with caning, I would have been delighted. I would have told my chums that it could not be true, but that if it did happen it would be worth waiting for.

This is about the daftest Bill that the House has been asked to pass. It has been imposed upon us by the European Court of Human Rights. I hope that the court realises the ridiculous position in which it is putting the Secretary of State. During the 25 years that I have been in the House I have voted on a number of daft issues produced by Governments, so I am realistic enough to say that I shall vote in favour of the Bill, in the hope that when it comes out of Committee it will be improved in some way. I keep my votes and abstentions against the Treasury Bench for those occasions, which will certainly occur during this Session, and perhaps in Sessions yet to come, when the Government are being daft in what they themselves are proposing. At the moment the Government are stuck with the Bill, so we are stuck with it and have to live with it: thanks to the European Court judgement.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State introduced the Bill, he said that if he had had a choice of Bill to introduce he would not have picked this one. However, his name is at the top of the Bill, I regret to say, so he must put it through the House.

[Sir. Kenneth Lewis]

A number of ex-teachers have contributed to the debate. There are many more ex-teachers in the House than when I first entered it and some will say that that is splendid. At times the place seems full of ex-researchers, ex-teachers, ex-university lecturers and others of that ilk. That can be said of Members on both sides of the House. I would merely urge that teachers should not be allowed to sway us too far when they express their views on education, let alone on corporal punishment.

I happen to believe that there is much merit in allowing a headmaster to use the cane on occasions when he thinks that it is proper to do so and when he has been advised by his teachers that it should be done to keep order. The procedure was quite different when I was at school. In those days, the teachers in the classrooms used the cane. They used it pretty rapidly, pretty heavily and pretty often. That has long since changed. As I understand it, there has to be a register in a school if caning is to take place, and the headmaster is usually the person who is responsible for administering corporal punishment. I believe that that is right and that some parents would prefer that system to continue. I accept that practice varies from area to area and from school to school.

When I read the Bill for the first time, my immediate reaction was to ask myself why the matter should not be decided by parent-teacher organisations and governors. Why should there not be a democratic vote? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in favour of involving parents on all education issues, and I see no reason why parents should not also be involved here.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am sure my hon. Friend recognises that governors of any school have the power to prevent corporal punishment being administered, by not providing a register. That is the way in which governors can exercise their jurisdiction and come to a final decision.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: As I have said, my immediate reaction was to ask why parents should not be allowed to vote on whether a school be one where corporal punishment is allowed. However, I am told that that would not be in keeping with the terms of the European Court judgment. That being so, I presume that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State does not have the option to consult parents as a group. I hope that this matter will be thrashed out in Committee—not necessarily by me—so that we may become aware of the realities.

Many difficulties are bound to be seen as likely to arise. The House will understand that this is an opting-out Bill. Let us suppose that a parent decides on behalf of little Johnny to opt out of the use of the cane for the boy at school and that little Johnny is doubtful about being opted out and cannot convince his mum that she should opt him in. The result will be that he is opted out. Let us suppose also that then his great friend at school, Jimmy, has been opted in by his mum. That means that he will be subject to receiving the cane. It is thus probable that little Jimmy will become the hero of the class. Little Johnny may well then tell his mother that he also wants the right to be caned if he does something naughty. He will have his eye on his friend who has become a hero, and he will want the same status. That is quite likely to happen among boys at school. So it is a difficulty that will arise because of the Bill.

If a parent decides to allow his child or children to be caned during one term, will he be able to take the opposite view during the following term?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes, there will be scope for parental changes of mind. A certain number of days would have to be allowed for the change of mind to be duly established on the register or removed from the register.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: That makes the position even more difficult and confusing. There may well be a class meeting at which it is decided that all the children want to change their minds except for one or two. The pupils will then return to their parents and say, "Next year, mum, you must opt us all in for caning." The Opposition are assuming that this measure will become a non-caning Bill. I feel that it might lead eventually to the abolition of caning, but, equally, it might have the reverse effect. We do not know. Parents will be able to change their minds, and so will children, and children may press upon their parents that they should exercise their authority by agreeing with what they, the children, want.

There has been talk of public schools. An important parent suggested recently that it was a sad state of affairs that if a parent wanted his child to be subject to corporal punishment and reasonable correction he had to put his hand in his pocket and pay for his child's education. That is no longer true. More than half of our public schools have opted out of caning. Many of the top public schools no longer use the cane. They have almost totally done away with the system of canings by prefects, and a great many have also taken away the right of masters to cane. Almost all the modern headmasters who are appointed to lead public schools are non-caners.

I still believe that there is some merit in a headmaster having the right to administer corporal punishment in certain situations, but it might be thought that with so many opting out of caning it is no longer possible to have a division between schools which are in favour of corporal punishment and those which are not. There is also a division between parents. It would seem that the majority of parents are against the idea of corporal punishment, so it is clear that the Bill is the thin end of the wedge and that we may be moving to a general system of education that accepts that caning is out.

In my school days there used to be a sick-note system. If Johnny was given a sick note by his parent, he would be absolved from punishment while that note was in force, and sometimes a note had effect for a long time. Now, in this Bill we have to have a letter. I shall tell a story about a famous headmaster who is now a well-known Member of this place. He is well known to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, because he was Minister of State, Department of Education and Science until a few months ago. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson) was a famous and effective headmaster before becoming an hon. Member. I have his permission to tell the story of what happened when there was trouble at one of the schools at which he was headmaster. Trouble was one of the things up with which he would not put.

Headmaster Boyson found out that the trouble was being caused by one of three boys. He kept on at them, investigated the matter, plagued the life out of them and would not let up. Although he thought that one particular boy was responsible for the trouble, he was still not sure. Eventually one young chap walked into his office and

voluntarily admitted responsibility. Headmaster Boyson said, "You know that means that you have got to take your punishment—six of the best."

It seemed to headmaster Boyson that that was the end of the matter. However, a week later he discovered that he had punished the wrong fellow. Being a fair headmaster, he asked the boy to come to his study and said, "I am sorry about that, but why did you admit responsibility?" The boy said, "You were plaguing the life out of us. We could not get rid of you, so I thought that I would admit responsibility and then it would all be over."

Fair-minded headmaster Boyson then said, "We cannot leave it at that. We must do something about it." The boy replied that he did not know what could now be done about it. But headmaster Boyson did. He wrote out a note on a piece of paper on his desk and said to the boy, "There you are—a credit note for six of the best." The boy carried that credit note through the next two years he spent at the school.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is giving a wide range of caning credit notes in this Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North is the first hon. Member ever to have an incident at his school enshrined in legislation.

The Bill became inevitable after the decision of the European Court. I wish those who examine it in Committee the best of luck. I do not know how it will come out of Committee, and still less how it will come out of another place. It will be fascinating to read the report of the debate there. Indeed, I hope that they are still on the television at the time of that debate so that we can watch another place debating whether to cane or not to cane.

We could do without the Bill, but the Government had to introduce it and, because that is not their fault, I shall vote for the Bill.

7.43 pm

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): I have never heard a Secretary of State present such an unconvincing case for a Bill. The right hon. Gentleman made it clear that the Bill was being introduced only because the Government had to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights.

The House ought to tell the Secretary of State to take the Bill back, have a fresh look at it and change the Government's thinking. Conservatives have traditionally been hangers and floggers, and they are dissatisfied with the Bill because they have always supported the physical violence attached to education. There are one or two exceptions who do not support physical violence in schools, but that is not the traditional attitude of Conservatives, and the titters of some Tory Members have been noticeable throughout the debate. One Conservative Member made the crazy suggestion that schools should be designated as beating or non-beating schools. I do not see how any sensible education authority could adopt such a policy.

The Opposition say that the Bill is unworkable. Even a Conservative Member said that it was a muddled Bill which resulted from muddled thinking. I go further and say that it is a loony Bill. I predict that soon after it becomes an act it will have to come back to the House for amendment, because it will be seen to be so nonsensical that something will have to be done.

Conservatives have always supported physical punishment in education. A leading Conservative politician said that that attitude was the result of the public school and Royal Navy tradition in his party. He said that rum, sodomy and the lash were part of that tradition.

Mr. Freud: Not at the same time.

Mr. Eastham: No, not at the same time. The House knows what I mean.

The boarding schools are noted for brutality, and homosexuality is common in those establishments because of the abnormal non-family life that the unfortunate children experience during their education.

Manchester city council advises me that there is no physical punishment given in its primary or special schools and that it is rapidly dying out in secondary schools. One of the largest authorities in the country is attempting to revolutionise thinking and to concentrate more on education, which is what it is all about.

I have always contended that teachers are not policemen. Their job is to teach, and the other side of the business should come from the parents. The parents' example is usually reflected in the children. Those from good homes usually do not need the physical violence that some parents demand that their children should receive. A councillor on Manchester's education committee once told me that West Indian parents used to say to him, "You should beat my child." I do not know what that attitude has to do with education, but it seems to be the mentality of some people.

A friend of mine used to be the headmaster of one of the largest comprehensive schools in Manchester. He was a little Welshman, about 5 ft 3 ins tall, and he did not permit physical punishment in his school. Any new teacher was made clearly to understand that corporal punishment would not be tolerated. The discipline in that school was a good as, if not better than, discipline in most other schools in the city.

When I was a member of the local education committee, we received reports from various high schools, and we always noted that one of the most difficult schools in the city was one where corporal punishment was known to be meted out regularly. We resolved that once the headmaster of that school retired, we would make some changes and remove some of the violence that was taking place there.

I wrote to my Welsh friend, the little headmaster, for a considerable time, and I remember that in one letter he stated a profound truism. In effect he said, "On the day when children in any secondary school walk into the playground and tell the staff, 'We have had enough of this violence,' that is the end of physical punishment in that school." In other words, once a group of children decide that they will take corporal punishment no longer, no headmaster is able to permit physical punishment to be inflicted.

A few teachers get some sadistic satisfaction out of the corporal punishment of children. I recall a primary school where an elderly spinster teacher was known to be a most sadistic person. Even today I think of her with fear and trepidation. She instilled in her pupils not good education: only fear. Unfortunately it is not uncommon in schools for there to be the odd teacher with a violent reputation. The sooner we can put and end to such violence, the better.

I was worried some years ago by reports of what was occurring in some special boarding schools. I chaired meetings at which I had to discipline male teachers over

[Mr. Eastham]

some of the thuggery—I must call it that—that they were inflicting on children in special boarding schools. Let us not forget that for those children, being in special schools, the situation was worse because the school was their home. They were at the mercy of their teachers. They were not able to go home and complain to their parents. I agree that it is rare to come across such violent teachers, but it went on in those days, when I was concerned with education committees. For that reason, I welcome the day when it will be illegal for corporal punishment to be inflicted on children.

Parents must accept that they, too, have a responsibility for their children in school. That particularly applies to parents who object to corporal punishment. It is not good enough for them to say that discipline is the job of the teacher. Many of our problems are caused by failure not in school but at home.

Flogging does not do anything to improve children's education. Youngsters do not learn by being afraid. Better discipline can come in a variety of ways, including better staffing, the provision of equipment, and so on. Smaller classes are vital. Imagine the problems facing a teacher trying to educate 35 or 40 children in a class. What must it be like to try to maintain mutual respect and discipline in such an environment?

We must devote more resources to education and provide children with a challenge to learn. They will then know that the local authority and all concerned are interested in their education, and they will not become rebellious and frustrated.

The abolition of corporal punishment does not mean a lawless school. There are other sanctions for non-compliance by children — and there is the ultimate sanction of expulsion. That final sanction was not unknown in the authority the education committee of which occupied my attention. Parents amd children can be presented with alternative sanctions so as to gain their co-operation.

I support the call from Europe, but what makes our schools so different from those in the rest of Europe? Why should we be less able to organise our education system than, say, France, Italy and Germany? No case has been made to set us aside from the rest.

In my experience, the teacher who is a thug is usually the most unsuccessful as a teacher. In my school days, the teacher who was a thug was always despised by the youngsters. Never to his credit could he say that he educated his pupils successfully. For those reasons, I shall oppose Second Reading of the Bill.

7.58 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): It is clear from the speeches of Opposition Members that the Bill has had the one effect so far of rekindling the cause of the abolitionists. The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) has made his position clear on that issue. While I do not agree with him, I respect his opinion.

The education spokesman for the Liberal party, the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) told us how, because of arrangements made by his family, he was exempted from corporal punishment. That being so, I could not understand his later comments about the Bill. I should have thought that he would wish to support a measure which would allow people to opt in and out of the system.

Last year I found myself at odds with the Government over what was then the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Bill, a piece of legislation which I considered to be most un-Conservative in its nature. I regard this Bill in much the same light — as a surprising piece of legislation for my party to be introducing. Those two measures seem to be at odds with Conservative belief in the family and discipline. I am probably leaving myself open to being called unkind—I am prepared to take the risk—by some of my comments today.

My right hon. Friend is doing a great deal to improve standards and widen the opportunities available for our children, and I greatly admire his efforts, but I regard this measure as nonsense and I fear that it will prove to be a great mistake. The legislation has been introduced to fulfil an obligation arising under article 2 of the first protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights. As that is clearly the case, perhaps we should be discussing that matter rather than the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will not argue in defence of the Bill that this convention has never been broken before.

Teachers are an important section of society, particularly in their role in influencing young people and future generations. An essential part of their job is to be responsible for teaching young people the difference between right and wrong and for maintaining discipline in our schools. We can all think of teachers who are fine academics but who are not successful in their jobs because of their inability to maintain discipline. For many teachers an essential part of their armoury is their option to use corporal punishment, and I would certainly defend that option.

No doubt many hon. Members were on the receiving end of corporal punishment during their days at school. I went to a fairly tough school in the east end of London, where corporal punishment was administered on many occasions. I believe that in the school that I attended, and because of the circumstances under which it operated, corporal punishment was an effective deterrent, and I am not aware of any damaging psychological problems suffered by those to whom it was administered.

Mr. Freud: Would the hon. Gentleman talk about the deterrent if some of his friends had not been punished and he had been punished? Is that not the most divisive action that could occur in a class?

Mr. Amess: I certainly never found that to be the case when I was at school, and I am sure that it will not be the case in the future.

When I taught I never had to administer corporal punishment, but the option was always available. My fundamental objection to the Bill is that it is unnecessary and unjust. It perpetrates and encourages injustice. One of the best definitions that I have heard states that justice is the treatment of equals equally and of unequals unequally. Our whole system of education is founded on that principle. How often have hon. Members received a reply from one of my right hon. Friends saying that an individual case must be treated on its merits? The Bill could serve as a definition of injustice — the treatment of equals unequally. What sort of justice allows two children at a school who commit the same punishable offence to be

treated differently, one receiving corporal punishment and the other, after the teacher has referred to the register, receiving detention? What sort of example does this set our young people, other than a bad example amounting to dual standards?

There are further consequences of this court judgment about punishment. The child in detention will be held by the rest of the children to have got away with his action, while the child who is caned will suffer from the thought that she or he has been singled out for special punishment for an offence that others committed as well. Grievance and dissent will spread throughout the school, with rival parents blaming the teacher, the head and the local authority. The net effect will be the lowering of standards of discipline at a time when the teaching profession is seeking to restore those standards.

I draw the attention of the House to the evidence given by the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association to the Education, Science and Arts Committee, which was investigating achievement in primary schools. That evidence demonstrated the marked deterioration in children's behaviour. At the AMMA's assembly in April 1984 Mrs. Heather Ryan stated:

"Disobedience, aggression and destructiveness are no longer the exception in classrooms or playground. Aggression includes physical and verbal abuse of peers and adults."

I can back up that statement with hard evidence. Although primary school teachers are doing a heroic job in inducing social training, some of these children will enter secondary school in the same state and with the same attitudes. The Bill will do nothing to assist secondary school teachers in enforcing discipline; in fact, it will militate against any such discipline. The bureaucracy involved in the register will mean some delay in the traditional administration of justice in schools, and that is wrong.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): At the moment, many schools have a number of nominated persons who administer corporal punishment to children who have committed a misdemeanour. Often the child is sent from the classroom to the headmaster's study, where he awaits receipt of that punishment.

Mr. Amess: I stand corrected. My hon. Friend appears to have found a defect in my argument.

The bureaucracy involved in compiling the register will be excessive. I am afraid that, after a time, people will become lax about registering their children on the corporal punishment list. A parent may take a particular dislike to a teacher and may be up in arms when his child is wrongly punished. We may then have a court case on our hands and bad publicity for the school.

We have the extraordinary case of a small group of people in the schools—teachers—seizing the opportunity the Bill presents to impose their will on the majority and thus destroy any access within a school to corporal punishment. Is that right? Is it democratic? Upholding the right of one person over the right of another when both rights are equally good is the negation of justice.

Before voting on the Bill, I must consider three views —the view of my constituents, of my party and of my conscience. In supporting this measure, I satisfy all three.

8.7 pm

Mr. Stan Thorne (Preston): A number of points have emerged from the decision of the European Court of Human Rights. Are the Government concerned with conformity—with carrying out what the court believes to be right? Are the Government concerned with force —with being forced by the court to take this action? Are the Government concerned with persuasion? Each of those questions is relevant to the subject of corporal punishment.

A long time ago, I read a book by Émile Durkheim, a sociologist. He said something of value about corporal punishment—that the punishment of children by parents is personal, but by teachers is impersonal. He came down very much on the side of those opposing the use of such punishment in schools.

Like many hon. Members, I have direct connections with this subject. For many years I was the deputy chairman of the Liverpool education committee and chairman of the schools sub-committee. Inevitably, we had to consider whether as an authority we favoured or opposed corporal punishment. We considered that point about the time we were discussing reorganising education in the city. The National Union of Teachers made it abundantly clear that it wished to retain corporal punishment. It considered that if corporal punishment were taken away, it would be deprived of a means of maintaining discipline within the classroom.

We decided as a committee—I accepted responsibility for a large share of this — to visit schools and examine the punishment book. An interesting point emerged from that study. In almost all the schools, when the punishment book was brought forward by the headmaster and examined day-by-day over a couple of years, it was fairly clear that there was a pattern— Johnny Smith had been punished on one day and Johnny Smith was punished a few weeks later. There were invariably no more than three or four names repeated again and again in the punishment book.

What did the committee deduce from that? It was apparent that pupils repeated their offences and teachers repeated their punishments. The result was that there was no change in the child's behaviour. The argument that the punishment of children is an effective way to improve discipline is not proven by the evidence that I have seen within the city of Liverpool. Hon. Members may say that that is not the same in Norwich, Portsmouth, or elsewhere. I am speaking from experience. I do not believe that Liverpool is unique. A handful of repetitive punishments tends to establish that corporal punishment is not a cure for the indiscipline that exists in many of our schools.

The debate within Liverpool took place when the committee was considering secondary school reorganisation. Two grammar schools, which were in a fairly well-placed area in terms of their intake, were being amalgamated to form one comprehensive school. The headmaster of the boys' grammar school had abolished corporal punishment several years earlier. The girls and boys grammar schools became a comprehensive school. We wondered whether the headmaster of the boys school would change his decision about punishment for indiscipline when the school had a different catchment area.

I visited the school about seven years after it was established as a comprehensive because there was a change of headmaster. Being a governor, I took the opportunity to visit the school. When I raised this subject with the teachers, they said that they had not found it

[Mr. Stan Thorne]

necessary to return to any form of corporal punishment. They had disciplinary problems—no school is free of them—but they dealt with them differently.

To pass a Bill which will result in some children in some schools being subject to punishment and other children in other schools, or in the same school, being free of it is unfortunate. It will make life extremely difficult for teachers. It may be suggested that we are interested not in teachers but in the discipline of children. That is the teachers' problem. We should be talking to teachers and to organisations such as the NUT and the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association. If the Department of Education and Science or the Select Committee on Education and Science were to set up a thorough investigation of the problem of corporal punishment and indiscipline in schools with the right to make recommendations — as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) when he referred to the size of classes—about the resources available for schools, the whole range of problems and how best to provide education, I suggest that we might have meaningful discussions with teachers about the problem.

According to recent information—I shall no doubt be corrected if I am wrong — the NUT has shifted its position on this matter. Originally it was in favour of corporal punishment. I do not know why it has changed its views, but its experience over recent years probably tends to establish what I have said: that the same pupils are being punished repeatedly and it does not deter them or improve relations within the schools.

I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for having been given the opportunity to take part in the debate.

8.16 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): We are debating this issue not because we want to but because we have to. We should perhaps debate discipline in schools regularly. It is a great shame that the Benches are so empty, when this is an issue which must affect all of us. That the debate is taking place at all is the result of a disciplinary admonition by the European Court, which has been much referred to today. The Government have responded by producing the Bill—something which many people find unpleasant to debate.

I had expected that hon. and learned Members would come scurrying from their courts this afternoon to tell us why we, as laymen, should throw out the Bill on some legal or constitutional ground. We might have expected some arguments from the anti-European lobby. I have other arguments in mind. We will not leave the European Community for the sake of letting some of our teachers beat other people's children. That old chestnut would be an excuse, not a reason. We could do worse than ask ourselves why discipline is better in other European schools, where no cane is employed. It might be because there is a stronger form of family discipline and responsibility, which is perhaps lost in this country. It might be something to which we should be looking in the future, rather than lamenting the passing of the cane, which I suspect will be the result of the Bill.

As a child in the 1950s, the backs of my bare legs—short trousers of course—were hit regularly with a ruler as an aid to learning mathematics. It was entirely counter-productive. Later, school prefects administered an automatic cumulative points system for enforcing discipline, punctuality and tidiness at school. I must admit that I failed the bed-making test. The boy who beat me is now an acclaimed film producer, and the school is all the better for having changed the system. At about the same time, my eldest brother was doing his national service. The Queen visited his barracks by train, and the day before was spent by those national servicemen sandpapering the railway lines. On the day itself, they were usefully employed painting the grass green.

I mention these examples to illustrate two important principles. First, a sensible teacher never sees physical violence as an aid to learning, and rarely as an aid to discipline. Children whose work falls short of acceptability can usually be separated into the idle, slovenly and disobedient, and those whose academic progress needs encouragement and incentive. Secondly, though teachers of every kind and generation recognise discipline and indiscipline when they see it, the consequences and punishments, mercifully, have changed, along with the demands and perceptions of those in authority. Calls for a return to national service often come from those who remember the daily routine bounded by the automatic discipline of Queen's regulations. The services are different today, and so are the schools.

In the 17th century Samuel Butler said:

"Love is a boy, by poets styled;
Then spare the rod, and spoil the child."

We have heard about the distinction between a smack and a caning. There have been occasions when my own children have felt the physical representation of my wrath. That does not mean that I caned them, or sought corporally to punish them. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival) is a most gentle and distinguished Member of the House. He presented us with many arguments, but I have to say that my experience leads me to different conclusions.

In 16 years as a schoolmaster, I only once caned a boy. It happened in my first year in the profession. That was the system. It was loathsome. It was humiliating for both of us. For the rest of my teaching career, I neither needed nor used the cane. Indeed, after I moved south of the border, I was not allowed to use it. A distinguished headmaster said to me this weekend that people who cannot control children without recourse to physical assault should be in some other business.

Mr. Forth: I have listened to my hon. Friend's speech with rapt fascination. Does he agree that we do not in fact need any legislation? He has just given the perfect example of a system that works. Either the teacher makes his own decision whether or not corporal punishment is efficacious, or the school or the local authority does so. Why do we need legislation?

Mr. Key: We have no option in the matter. We must produce a Bill of some sort. In my view, the Government have got it as nearly right as is possible.

In all our best schools, whether in the maintained or the private sector, the cane is not used. Conversely, in the more difficult schools and the more deprived local communities, the cane is used more. The use of corporal punishment is an excuse for failure to attack the root causes of indiscipline. That is not a reason for continuing to support it.

I regret to say that many head teachers who say that they have not used the cane for years and would not do so will not come clean with their parents and children, on the ground that they still need to have a deterrent in the cane cupboard. That is a strange moral argument and a negative approach to discipline. A number of headmasters and teachers have begged me not to identify their schools because this is a sensitive issue. What are they afraid of?

The Bill is so dotty that it could safely be supported by abolitionists as well as by retentionists. It is a clever Bill. It is not what it seems. However, we should not underestimate the opposition to the Bill. Of parents with children at primary school, 54 per cent. are in favour of retention. Of parents with children at secondary school, 67 per cent. favour retention. Only 36 per cent. of teachers favour abolition, against 52 per cent. who are retentionists —the majority of them women.

Great strides are being made by the teaching profession in all areas of discipline in schools. Teachers are not helped by the silly, ideological and political excesses of local education authorities, nor by strident and negative lobbying by pressure groups. Some hon. Members still believe—basing that belief on their own school days—that there can be no discipline without corporal punishment. They should remember that they were at their secondary schools—whether in the public or the state sector—for only four or five years, some years ago, when the demands on schoolchildren were very much less and the problems facing parents and teachers were fewer. It would be encouraging to think that my hon. Friends would take note of the views of the small number of us who spent much longer in the world of schools. Parents had sufficient confidence in us then to entrust their children to us. I have tried to teach the sons of several right hon. and hon. Members, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, whose admirable son was a model pupil.

It is always dangerous to judge schools today by one's own experience as a child. Indeed, I have some reservations about the Government's proposal for more parental involvement in schools. I have seen teachers' morale lowered and progress delayed, both on school governing bodies and on local education authorities, by well-intentioned but reactionary governors trying to recreate what they believe to have been the happiest days of their lives, some 30 years before. I predict that the Bill will meet opposition of that kind in the other place.

What are the alternatives? With what could we replace corporal punishment? In the schools where, as we are told, it is used two or three times a week, it is said that the system is good for certain children, often those whose parents do not support the teachers or the schools. Where does one draw the line? Should one cane girls? Is 10 years old too young? Is 16 too old? One must draw a line somewhere. The issue cannot be fudged. Teachers who use the cane often say that it works best on pubescent 11 to 13-year-olds. However, the Secretary of State identified that group this afternoon as perhaps unsuitable for caning.

Who still uses the cane? Is it the older teachers who have always done so? Do women teachers have more discipline problems and refer children on to senior management for a semi-automatic beating? In my experience, the best disciplined schools usually rely on a series of steps. The more steps that the teacher can apply, the better. Schools which have tried withdrawal classes for disruptive pupils have found that that is a rather doubtful solution. Children often like being sent to a withdrawal class with other children who have offended the social code of a school. Similarly, suspension from school can be popular among the children whom it is designed to improve. More successful in my view is withdrawal of freedom and privileges in school. That can often disrupt family life and force parental attention on to the problem, and that is one of the keys to discipline.

Another point that is often overlooked is the folly of moving teacher to pupils, rather than the other way around. I know of one teacher who, in a school of 1,700 children, taught in 11 different rooms during the week. That school had problems. The teacher is now working in another school where he has his own classroom, which he can personalise and which strengthens the bond between children and teacher. The system works. That school has fewer problems.

We should not forget the importance of resources in schools. Staff numbers matter, not only from the point of view of supervision, but from that of the positive role of pastoral care. Many pastoral heads of year in our schools have only four periods a week for pastoral care. That is not time enough in which to deal with 180 children. Often academic teachers are rewarded with pastoral work. Both aspects of their career suffer, and so do the children.

Those are management problems, but nothing is as important as the tripod on which successful teacher recruitment depends. An experienced teacher from a comprehensive, which is not in my constituency, told me only yesterday:

"Two of our worst teachers are the best qualified men in the school".

Teaching depends on three things—academic ability, aptitude to teach and attitude to education. It was never true that those who can, do and those who can't, teach. Much more should be done to encourage positive attitudes to discipline and responsibility in schools. I have mentioned a few alternatives which work, but there are many more. Much more needs to be done in teacher training and retraining. I shall never accept that there is no alternative to corporal punishment. There most certainly is, and it works.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) said that there was no underlying principle to the Bill. He is wrong, because if the Bill has a principle it is a democratic one. This is the most democratic option that was open to the Government within the narrow range available. There has been a voluntary elimination of corporal punishment in Scotland. That should be a lesson to us all. The Bill is important because it means that there will be no heavy hand from Whitehall telling local education authorities what to do. Education authorities can phase out the cane, as can governors. Parents will effectively have to opt in, as far as I can understand it, if their school or authority operates a register. If parents cannot be bothered to write in, they will be opted out by default. That is a matter for debate, which we might have to consider closely in Committee. I should say that it is a matter which those who are on the Committee will have to consider carefully.

Among the implications of maintaining a register is the time and money involved in maintaining it and the good will of teaching and non-teaching staff, which will be under additional strain. That is a valid point for the

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teaching unions to argue. They are mostly abolitionists, so I am surprised that they do not support the Bill on that ground alone.

I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State means what he says about strengthening the role of parents, as is explained in his Green Paper on parental influence in schools. The Bill gives parents a choice and requires them to get appointed or elected to governing bodies if they wish their views to prevail. It also requires them to get elected as councillors and on to the local education authority to be sure of getting their views over. If there is one thing wrong with local democracy at the moment, it is that people do not take it seriously and therefore do not vote, and that the people who make the most noise do not wish to stand and take on the onerous tasks involved in being on a local authority.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows very well—more of us should realise it—that the Bill is not really about caning. It is about who runs the schools and the future of discipline in them. The hard-line opponents of abolition are not addressing themselves to the issues that face parents and teachers in 1985—nor are the hard-line egalitarians who insist on throwing out the baby with the bathwater by abolishing speech days, prizes and every other simple incentive to which children respond so naturally. We all respond to a mixture of sticks and carrots, and if we abolish sticks we shall need more carrots, not fewer.

The Bill is not about beating children, but about the whole structure of discipline and responsibility in schools. It has always been clear that the Government are concerned with standards and with an extension of responsibility towards schools, teachers and parents. That is why schools now issue prospectuses, why my right hon. friend wants more parent-governors with some direct financial control and why teacher appraisal is not just about removing bad teachers but about making good teachers better.

The Bill, expedient and dotty as it might seem, will concentrate all our minds wonderfully. I believe that we should give it a Second Reading.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I should say that five hon. Members still hope to speak before the winding-up speeches start at about 9.15 pm. I appeal for brevity so that all five hon. Members can get in.

8.33 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): It is a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). He made an excellent speech in favour of abolition and then baffled the House with a bizarre, perverse and tortuous argument in support of the Bill. If it was an attempt to get on the Front Bench, we should welcome him there, as he has sane and liberal views on discipline. He would be an embellishment to the Front Bench but I fear that it will take more than such perverse logic.

Undoubtedly the hon. Member for Salisbury would have agreed with Roger Ascham. As a former school teacher he is probably one of the few hon. Members who knows who Roger Ascham was. He was the tutor to Queen Elizabeth I. As a former teacher, the hon. Gentleman will probably remember Roger Ascham's work entitled "The Scholemaster", which was one of the first on educational theory. He referred to corporal punishment with an enlightened attitude for his day. He wrote:

"Even the wisest of your great beaters do as oft punish nature as they do correct faults."

I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees with that. Unfortunately, we have heard a great deal of noise from Conservative Members who profess to be great beaters, but they are not among the wisest of their kind. They seem to have learnt nothing in the past 400 years. In supporting the Bill, which is an utterly ill-considered compromise and which satisfied neither them nor Opposition Members, they do no credit to their case or to the seriousness of the subject.

When I read the Bill, I thought that there were considerable drafting problems. I am sorry to have missed the Secretary of State's speech but I gather that he gave way a good deal on the drafting implications. I also understand that he has sorted out many of them. I look forward to reading his speech tomorrow, and perhaps examining the drafting in greater detail in Committee.

The implementation of the Bill has taxed the House. That is right, as it will create many problems, not least for children who, as many hon. Members have said, will now find that they are punished differently for the same offence. That is the worst possible example of justice and effective discipline for children. I am also worried about implementation in regard to teachers. If a head teacher is faced with two children, one of whom he is allowed to beat and the other of whom he is not, what is he to do? Should he beat one and not the other, knowing that he is behaving unfairly, unreasonably and unjustly, or should he amend the punishment for both children although his professional judgment—in my view mistaken—is that he would be correct to beat both? It is nonsense that he should change his professional judgment because the parents of one child do not want that child to be caned.

There is also a problem with what is to go on the register. How are parents to be communicated with? I understand that the Secretary of State said that a letter would be sent home. Is it to be sent by post? That would be expensive. Moreover, what would happen if, by chance, the Royal Mail did not get through and the parents did not receive the letter?

Mr. Freud: Nobody gets beaten.

Mr. Fisher: On the contrary, I understand that parents have to opt out and therefore they must receive the letter and return it. The vagaries of the mail might determine whether a child is on the list. There are also difficulties associated with recording the views of parents. What happens when parents are separated or divorced or indecisive? What happens when the father takes one view and the mother takes another? What will happen with children in care?

Mr. Dunn: When there is a divorce and parents live apart, the view of the parent who wishes the child to be exempted will prevail.

Mr. Fisher: I am grateful to the Minister, but it would be helpful if that were made clear in the Bill. Perhaps it can be amended. The views of parents in regard to step-parents and foster parents is also a contentious isue. If the Minister wants to amend the Bill to clarify the matter, I hope that the Government will table such an amendment.

Legal responsibilities if things go wrong with the implementation of the Bill are also a vexed issue. I understand from clauses 2 and 3 that governors have the responsibility to maintain the register. Presumably, if a child is beaten in error, even if it is not the error of the governors in maintaining the register — it could be a clerical error by the school secretary — the governors will be responsible. Will a parent whose child has been beaten against his wishes and his record on the register be able to take a suit for battery against the governors? That would be a thoroughly unsatisfactory position. That is a thoroughly onerous responsibility for governing bodies, which may meet only once a term.

The shambles comes about because of the Secretary of State's dilemma. He consulted, and more than 100 professional bodies and people responded and said that his three options were all rotten, but that this option was the most rotten and unworkable of the lot. Despite that response, he introduced this measure. That is perverse in the extreme. Conservative Members ask what else the Secretary of State can do, and argue that he is circumscribed by the European Court. That is not true. Other European countries have abolished corporal punishment. He could have taken a straightforward abolitionist line and solved his problem. Instead, he is frightened of his Back Benchers. He is wrong to be frightened of them, because he has taken the wrong decision.

Labour Members are almost unanimously in favour of abolition, both on the principle and because it is the only effective and efficient option. Because Conservative Members, the beaters, have spent a lot of our time discussing this matter, it is important to state the principal case for abolition. Corporal punishment is beating. It is the infliction of bodily pain and the punishment of the body. It does not address the mind, which has occasioned the offence. Would Conservative Members inflict corporal punishment? As the hon. Member for Salisbury said, it is an extremely unpleasant task. I doubt whether many of them, being gentle souls despite their misguided views, would wish to do it. I doubt whether they believe in beating pets.

Mr. Dunn: The hon. Gentleman served on a local education authority, and he speaks with vigour. Does he not think that those arguments should take place in the council chamber of a local education authority, so that others may be persuaded of the rightness of his case? The local education authority should not rely on the strong hand of central Government dictating that it should abolish corporal punishment by law.

Mr. Fisher: That is a feeble argument. The Secretary of State is introducing a measure to change discipline in schools, and because he cannot bring himself to abolish, which he knows in heart of hearts to be right, he seeks to devolve the responsibility to local government. As the Government have a responsibility to respond to the European Court, they should abolish corporal punishment. They know that the principal argument for abolition is correct.

I am sure that Conservative Members do not believe in beating dogs. Why then do they believe that beating children is such a good idea and so suitable? Judicial beating was abolished in 1948. The Army, showing an amazing degree of prescience and sanity, abolished corporal punishment in 1868. Why should it still exist in schools? What is it about children that makes them susceptible to violence? Is it that Conservative Members believe that children can understand only violence, and that they cannot understand reason? That is nonsense. It is not justifiable in principle and it is not effective in practice. No schools or authorities which have abolished corporal punishment have regretted it. There is no sign that discipline in those schools is any the worse for it. Indeed, the evidence that exists, suggests that discipline improves.

The only argument that has force — it is surprising that it has not been used — is the in loco parentis argument. One form of logic is that if parents have the right to beat children and schools are in loco parentis, schools have the right to beat children on behalf of parents. That is the logic behind the non-exemption that allows schools to continue beating pupils. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary nods as though he agrees, but it is a poor piece of logic.

If parents hit their children, they do so in the heat of the moment, in the context of a close and, I hope, loving and complex relationship, in the confidence of knowing each other, and with an opportunity to forgive and recreate that relationship. If a child is beaten in school it is right that it should be beaten in this way — in a cool, objective judicial atmosphere, possibly by the head, whom the pupil may not even know, a long time after the event, and with no opportunity to restore the relationship. There is no similarity between the position of parents and schools.

For schools to suggest to parents that it is intelligent to give their consent to beating, and to approve the idea of generalised consent is extremely unintelligent and unsatisfactory. Parents cannot know the context of the offence, what the alternatives were, what was passing through the mind of their child or what the position in the classroom or school was. Yet they are being asked to give generalised consent by opting on to the register for beating, or off it for being exempted. The Government should have addressed themselves to a proper structure of discipline.

The Government should have provided an entirely new contract for teachers and children. They should have said to the education world, "We shall give you a decent context for education. We shall give you books, buildings and resources so that you as teachers can do a good job. We shall give you a good pastoral context to create good discipline in schools." The Government should have said to the children, "We shall give you a society in which it is worth being educated, worth having the prospect of a job and therefore worth behaving and getting the most from education. In return we shall expect discipline and self-discipline from all members of the school community."

Instead, the Government have given teachers poor buildings, too few materials, too little in-service training, large classes, no supply teachers and insufficient staffing levels to maintain a good pastoral organisation. Teachers are overstretched and undervalued. Recently, the Secretary of State told them that their standards were too low and that they were failures as teachers. No wonder teachers' morale is low.

How do pupils react in such a position? If the Government manifestly do not rate and value the teachers, why should pupils respect them? Throughout the country, pupils are looking at the estates on which they live, the

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schools where they are educated, and the prospects for them when they leave school and saying, "If the Government do not rate us or teachers, why should we care or behave?" The Government have removed the carrot of the prospect of worthwhile education. Now they are removing part of the stick. The Government are inadvertently fostering any discipline problems that exist by their educational neglect. By their faulty Bill they are compounding those problems and making a bad position worse.

The only way to achieve better discipline, better relationships and a better atmosphere in schools, is through smaller classes, a full and proper pastoral structure, and teachers with time to spare to form relationships with pupils and to know what their problems are.

Mr. Pawsey: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the pupil-teacher ratio in our schools is at the highest level ever, and that the per capita spending is also at its best level? How does he reconcile those two points with the picture of real privation that he paints? That is not the case. Unfortunately, and I am sure unintentionally, the hon. Gentleman is misleading the House with his 18th-century description of education.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman referred to the highest pupil-teacher ratio, when he meant the lowest pupil-teacher ratio. It has undoubtedly come down, but like all those who read much and understand little about education, he does not understand the difference between pupil-teacher ratios and class sizes. Classes are extremely large. As pastoral roles have improved and developed in schools from a rudimentary start 10 years ago, class sizes have not improved to reflect the undoubted improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio. If the hon. Gentleman doubts my description of low morale in schools, he should visit the schools in his constituency and ask teachers whether they believe that the Government value them, and whether their morale is high or low. He will obtain only one answer: that morale is low because teachers feel neglected. If they feel neglected, so do pupils.

The only way to achieve discipline is to have a better atmosphere, smaller classes and pupils who believe that education is worth while. That will come, but certainly not from this Government. It will come only from a Government who have a vision of education and who care about the future of children. Only in that context can good discipline be fostered.

8.50 pm

Mr. J. F. Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I do not follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) too far down the road that he signposted. Since he talked about my constituency, I should tell him that, perhaps unlike him, I take the trouble to visit the schools in my constituency regularly. I visit most schools at least once every two years, so I have a good idea of what happens in schools. Teacher morale is not as low as the hon. Gentleman would have us believe. Generally, teachers appreciate what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is doing—for example, with teacher assessment.

The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) said that the Bill was unworkable, but, in the immortal words of Mandy Rice-Davies, "He would, wouldn't he?" He is an outspoken abolitionist, so clearly nothing in the Bill commends itself to him. Therefore, most of his speech should be dismissed for what it was.

Mr. Radice: Do not consider the argument.

Mr. Pawsey: The argument was persuasive, but unfortunately the hon. Gentleman had not bent his mind to it. He usually contributes much to our debates, but on this occasion his intellect was not focused on the problem before the House.

When considering the Bill, my worst prejudices about Europe come to the surface. The judgment by the European Court of Human Rights has helped neither Britain nor the House. We have been making our own laws for hundreds of years without the benefit of European advice and interference, and our laws reflect our customs and our traditions. The latter are not always those of France, Italy or Belgium. However, the United Kingdom has signed the European convention on human rights, and it must abide by the consequences of that signing.

The Bill sets out to meet the requirements of the European Court and to make the best of a bad decision. The decision was made not by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, nor by the Government, but by European judges. The only alternative to this Bill is the complete abolition of corporal punishment, which is clearly unacceptable to the majority of hon. Members. No doubt we shall see after the Division this evening who is right on that point, as on all the other points that we have discussed.

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would have been better to have not a whipped vote but a plain statement of the opinions of hon. Members?

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend knows as well as I do that, sadly, it is sometimes thought necessary to impose disciplines on hon. Members, in the same way as we seek to impose them on others outside.

The alternative to the Bill is the total abolition of corporal punishment, which I believe would be a retrograde step. It would not endear us to parents or teachers, and it would leave schools without one of their principal deterrents—a deterrent that helps to counter defiance. Opposition Members have not said what they would put in place of corporal punishment. They have tried, but they have not proved their case. Until they do so, and provide a viable alternative to corporal punishment, the status quo should remain.

It is not necessary for the cane to be often used and, as I know, it is hardly ever used in the best schools. The knowledge that it exists is usually sufficient. We have heard the argument this evening that what is good enough for European countries should be good enough for us. Hon. Members have said that if European states can manage without corporal punishment, why should not Britain? That is a short-sighted argument that does not take into account the fact that, in the United Kingdom, the teacher is in loco parentis. That is not understood in Europe, and that is one reason why the European Court's judgment was in error. The court did not appreciate the basic point that, in Britain, the teacher stands in for the parent.

In the United Kingdom, the cane is the traditional punishment for misdemeanours. In many European

countries, the punishment is suspension or detention. In France, if a child is suspended for poor attendance at school, the social security benefits that they would normally attract are also suspended for that period. The punishment affects not only the child, but the rest of his family. Do hon. Members put that forward as a viable alternative? Of course not, because it would be impossible to introduce. In eastern Europe, the child's misdemeanours are posted on the notice board of the factory in which his father works. One can imagine the outcry, especially from Opposition Members, if we suggested using that method in the United Kingdom.

Sovereign nations have evolved methods of maintaining discipline in schools, and the United Kingdom has evolved its method——

Mr. Fisher: Beatings.

Mr. Pawsey: No, not beatings. That is an emotive word. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that the usual terminology is "caning". I noted that during his speech he did not use the word "caning". It was either a mistake or a deliberate attempt to mislead the House into believing that most schools administer the sort of treatment that he may have experienced at his school.

Opposition Members have not suggested a punishment that would provide an effective deterrent in place of corporal punishment.

Parents need to understand that if corporal punishment is abolished and their child misbehaves, he will probably receive more detentions and a greater loss of privileges. In severe cases, that may result in positive suspension from school. When parents know that those are the alternatives, I believe that they will decide that corporal punishment is the lesser evil.

If, for example, in country areas a child is put into detention, it may mean that he misses the school bus home. In many country areas the only bus to get the child home is the school bus. Such punishment would undoubtedly exceed that of corporal punishment were it to be used in country schools.

We should not seek to minimise the difficulties created for head teachers by the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. I appreciate the difficulties surrounding the need to record the names of those who can be caned, but I do not believe that they should be overstated. When one considers the alternatives, I believe that, problems or no problems, we should support the Bill. I believe that parents will decide not to opt out of the system. Because they will recognise the clear need to maintain school discipline, I believe that parents will co-operate with head teachers and teachers. In view of the increase in parental choice that the Bill provides, I believe that parents will opt in. I further believe that my right hon. and hon. Friends have tried and, in general, succeeded in salvaging a working measure from the wreck of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights.

9.1 pm

Mr. Sean Hughes (Knowsley, South): If the debate has served one purpose, it has emphasised the fact that the sooner the House of Commons is televised the better. The country will then have an opportunity to watch and listen to some of the antediluvian arguments which are put forward by Conservative Members.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Hawksley) said that this is a very important Bill. I believe that it is trivial in the extreme, compared with the real needs of education. Some Conservative Members are obsessed by such punitive issues as this. I believe that they are totally irrelevant to educational problems and that it is one of the most negative ways of looking at education, its development and its problems. Having listened to Conservative Members, with the honourable exception of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), one would think that the use of the cane and the strap is crucial to the maintenance of standards and discipline. What utter nonsense. Of course the Bill has been forced upon us by the decision of the European Court of Human Rights. However, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said, it should have been used as an opportunity to get rid of an uncivilised, punitive irrelevance.

To put my comments in perspective, I could never be considered to be a trendy, middle-class ex-teacher. I believe very much in educational standards and quality. I am consious of how a deprived environment distorts educational aims. The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) asked us to consider the plight of the harassed teacher in a deprived area. I suggest the cane is not the way in which to overcome deprivation. I taught for 13 years in one of our most deprived areas. I noted that the hon. Member for Ealing, North suggested that the hon. Member for Cambridge, North-East (Mr. Freud) should spend a few years in the classroom of a large comprehensive school. That is what I did. It was an area of massive youth unemployment, whose educational ethos was non-existent, but the school in which I taught did not practise corporal punishment. That experience over 13 years taught me that one cannot whack excellence into children, or beat them into examination success or cane them into discipline.

I do not want to exaggerate the incidence or extent of corporal punishment. Indeed, I am not very convinced by some of the sociological arguments against corporal punishment, although I accept that corporal punishment might cause psychological damage to children. I simply do not know whether the occasional whack promotes in a child the belief that might is right. In my case it did precisely the opposite. However, I accept that the worst schools overuse corporal punishment and that it adds to an atmosphere of violence. I accept equally, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) mentioned, that when he is at the end of his tether even the most civilised, rational, decent-minded teacher can be goaded into contemplating meting out a good hiding to somebody.

Although I accept that the environment distorts educational achievement and behaviour, I accept, too, the concept of original sin.

Why then do I oppose corporal punishment? It is simply because the sight of a 40-year-old man hitting with a stick the outstretched hand of a 12-year-old boy is distinctly distasteful and wholly unnecessary. Conservative Members have said that it is a deterrent. All the evidence points to the fact that it is the same child who is repeatedly beaten, caned or strapped, as my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne) said. Either that means that, apparently like some Conservative Members, they like it, or that it is not a deterrent.

I am opposed to corporal punishment because I hold it to be uncivilised. My experience tells me that it is unnecessary. It distracts us, as it has done today, from

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debating the real reasons for educational deprivation and inequality. That is why I hope that the House will support the Opposition amendment.

9.5 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Unfortunately, I must restrict my comments severely because of the hour, but I want to put forward an argument that we have not yet heard. I want to return to the genesis of this measure and to see why it is that what we are told is inevitable is not so at all.

Let us go back to the original debate in the Council of Europe in 1951 when the origin of this measure was considered. We have been told repeatedly that the people who wrote the European convention on human rights and the protocol on which it is based had in mind corporal punishment and its effect on children. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I wish to quote the words of Mr. Teitgen, the rapporteur in the Council of Europe at the time. He said:

"it is essential for our Protocol to protect the rights of parents in the field of education and teaching against the danger of nationalisation, absorption, monopolisation, requisitioning of young people by the State".

In other words, the intention of the original protocol to the convention had nothing whatever to do with corporal punishment in schools; it concerned the post-war context and the fear of the then generation of undue political influence in the educational process.

That is bad enough. It is also relevant that even then, and in the light of that, the United Kingdom entered a reservation to the protocol on which the judgment is based, distancing itself from the protocol as then expressed and using such vague and rather difficult words as "philosophical conviction".

On the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights we have the excellent dissenting opinion of Sir Vincent Evans, the British judge in that court. He said that the original aim, as I have set it out, and as the words of the rapporteur suggest, give no basis for the judgment which was passed down by the court against his dissenting opinion.

The way in which our continental friends conduct their legal proceedings takes no account of the original intention of those who pass the law. They feel free to graft on to that law a meaning which may suit them at the time. Therefore, 30 years after the original passing of the convention and the protocol we find a judgment by the court which bears no relationship to the circumstances of the 1980s.

It is for that reason that I believe the oft-quoted convention and protocol, as laid before us, do not have the strength, relevance or directness which have been suggested to us over and over again during the debate. Therefore, we are entitled to decline to accept the solution that has been offered to us and that has been so rightly criticised on both sides of the House. We are right in asking the Government to think again, probably at great length, and possibly to return with another half-baked solution. In other words, we should have time to reconsider whether we should have anything to do with the European convention on human rights, which was created 30 years ago in such different circumstances; to reconsider whether we should still be signatories to and supporters of the protocol which was based on a different time and in different circumstances; and to reconsider whether Britain should allow itself to be subject constantly to interpretations and reinterpretations of conventions and protocols—116 of them—which have been cumulatively created by the Council of Europe over the years.

It is for that reason, and that reason principally, that I shall be unable to support the Government in what they have brought before us today. I look forward to the day when we seriously reconsider our membership of the Council of Europe and our adherence to the European convention on human rights in order that we may obviate and eliminate the repetition of an unfortunate case such as we have before us this evening.

9.10 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): This has been a long debate, but I am reminded of the words of an old schoolmaster friend of mine, Mr. Tom Peacocke, who said:

"For the boy, the stick. For the politician, the red hot poker."

I think that he had it right on one count at least.

Unfortunately, the Bill falls between two stools. It introduces for the first time a two-tier system and, in trying to please everyone, I suspect that the Government are likely to end up pleasing no one.

The argument is not about the merits or otherwise of corporal punishment. I support corporal punishment, provided that it is used appropriately, and I believe that my view is widely shared. As a punishment it has the merits of being immediate, quickly over with and easily associated with the offence, and in many cases it is far less damaging to the pupil than its logical alternatives of expulsion or suspension. Those latter punishments often cause long-term resentment in children and long-term damage to a child's education, since they may interfere with examinations. Apart from all else, when a school suspends or expels a pupil, it is an admission of failure by the school. In the borough of Croydon, we tend to suspend some 300 pupils per year, often for long periods, with resultant disruption to their education and family life.

There are a number of problems with the Bill. First, it appears that either parent has a right to object to corporal punishment. One parent may be strongly in favour, the other may be against. The "against" view will prevail, which may cause rifts and divisions in the family.

The situation could arise where a parent objected to corporal punishment for one of his two children but not for the other. That could only result in divisions between children in the same home.

At the school, for an identical offence two children might be punished in different ways. Is that not bound to cause divisions between children and between staff at the school?

Given that public and parental opinion can change, the possibility is there of a child being subject to corporal punishment or not, as the case may be, at different stages in his education.

The message is clear. A two-tier system of punishment is divisive both within the school and within the family. Children respect principles of certainty, consistency and, above all, equality of treatment. Passing the Bill opens the way to enormous divisions and resentments when those well-established principles are breached.

The extraordinary picture emerges of two children, perhaps the best of friends, starting together on the same day at the same school. From the moment that they enter

the school gates together, they are subject to wholly different regimes. In punishment, the word "choice" does not seem to be wholly relevant. There is much more merit in the word "consistency".

I put a few short points to the Minister. There is reference in the Bill to "a parent". Who is a parent? Does a divorced parent qualify? Even though he has no rights of access to or custody of the child, can he exempt a child of his from corporal punishment? If a child is in care, does the local authority make the decision, or does the parent or either parent make the decision? If a child is subject to a supervision order, is the position different from that of a child under a care order? Who carries the can? Who makes the decision? We have not heard about these matters, and I hope that we shall do so before the debate ends.

I am sure that no hon. Member has ever had any difficulty in distinguishing between the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, established by the convention, and the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, established by the Treaty of Rome. However, for understandable reasons, the two courts are inevitably confused.

Many people will think that the Bill is being foisted on us by the EEC, which it is not. Even the *Daily Telegraph* political staff slipped into that error last Wednesday when it said that the deferment of the Bill had averted a second rebellion over the EEC. We must distinguish between the two courts. It is not an EEC matter that is being foisted upon us.

We must recognise that a large number of people in Britain are beginning to resent some of the interference from the Court of Human Rights. We are beginning to feel that these are matters that we can best deal with ourselves. We do not have a great deal to learn about human rights from a number of the signatories to the convention. A bill of rights for us and a withdrawal from the convention are matters for another day.

9.15 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The Government have been on a hiding to nothing in this debate, and there has been very little support for them. Even the Secretary of State did not really recommend the Bill to the House with great enthusiasm; he was obviously only too well aware of the many internal inconsistencies in it. He found little support on the Conservative Benches. At best, Conservative Members said that they would support it because it is making the best of a bad job.

I used to be a teacher and I now regret that I sometimes inflicted corporal punishment at one or two schools, where the ethos expected it of teachers. I always felt ashamed when I caned a pupil. I also felt that somehow I had failed to carry out my duties as an effective teacher. Equally, as a school governor, I was responsible on one occasion for pressing very hard and successfully for a teacher to be appointed particularly and specifically to reduce the amount of corporal punishment in that school. The level of violence in that school was unacceptably high. Unfortunately, the teacher turned out to be disastrous, which was unfortunate for him and the school.

I have no illusions that getting rid of corporal punishment in any school is an easy task. It must be done over a period, especially where a school has consistently relied upon it. I also believe that we cannot effectively teach in an atmosphere of fear. Conservative Members who have spoken about deterrence are really saying that schools should work through an atmosphere of fear. It is essential that we get rid of that element from our educational system.

We must remember that one of the key features of education is teaching young people self-discipline. The approach of many head teachers, teachers and local authorities who have set deadlines of six or 12 months for the ending of corporal punishment is the correct way to tackle the problem. The Secretary of State for Scotland gave a good and effective lead when he suggested that all local authorities should aim to phase out corporal punishment within 12 months. It is commendable that all but two regions in Scotland are moving in that direction. The reality is that in the two regions which, apparently, will try to retain corporal punishment, the number of children who are caned or strapped is extremely small.

We must measure the Bill against that background. It is a tragic missed opportunity because it fails to abolish corporal punishment and to make positive proposals for improving school discipline. Shortly before Christmas the Opposition suggested that the Bill should be subject to the Special Standing Committee procedure so that Parliament could have an opportunity to discuss school discipline, find ways to deal with the problems created by the court's judgment and come forward with positive proposals to incorporate in our legislation. It is sad that the Government refused. No doubt they anticipated trouble with Conservative Back Benchers.

The Secretary of State talks almost continually about wanting to raise standards in schools, and one of the keys to high standards in good behaviour. The right hon. Gentleman should have sought by means of the Bill to give schools positive help in achieving good behaviour. Instead, he has offered them muddle and compromise. The Bill does nothing to help schools improve the discipline of pupils.

At the very beginning of the debate I pressed the Secretary of State to tell the House which parent would have overriding responsibility. The Bill does not tell us which parent will have the right to decide if two parents have different views. The Minister has said in an intervention that that issue will be dealt with in the regulations. That may be, but unfortunately the Bill does not give the right to one parent or the other. If, as the Secretary of State said earlier, the one parent who wants to opt out of corporal punishment for the child will have the right to do so, how will this be done? The right is not set out in the Bill and it seems that this issue will have to be dealt with in the regulations. That is unsatisfactory.

The Secretary of State said that he had a relaxed view about who should count as a parent. I think that the Bill should have referred to parents or guardians. That is the term that is used in much of our family legislation. It is not especially appropriate to lay down who will have responsibility for carrying out this parental right only in the regulations. It would be far better to set it out clearly in the Bill in order to make it clear that responsibility lies with the parent or guardian. As the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) said, we need to know the position of the child who is in care, for example.

We have heard during the debate about the opt-out procedure. It has been put to me by several people in education offices that the procedure that is set out in the Bill is the most difficult one to administer. It relies on a letter being sent from the school to the parent. It relies also

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on an assumption that the parent receives and understands the letter. The Secretary of State has told us that if necessary the school will send a second letter, but we all know that in practice some children move from one household to another. Sometimes they are looked after by a granny, sometimes by an aunt, sometimes by one parent and sometimes by the other. In these circumstances it will not be particularly easy to establish in a court of law that a letter was sent by the local authority to the parent.

Another issue will be whether the letter has been returned by the parent. The pupil concerned may insist that the letter was handed in at the school office. How will the school office record that the letter is with it? It has been put to me by those who are involved in education administration that it would be much better to have the alternative system which would require the school to have in its possession a letter that states, "I am the parent of X and I agree to corporal punishment being administered to my child if it is necessary." The Minister must address himself to these practical issues. I understand the political reasons that led him to go for the opt-out system but in administrative terms the opt-in system is much more positive and easier to deal with by the authorities.

Mr. Freud: I have been following closely the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Surely an opt-in system would mean opting in by both parents, step-parents, guardians and aunts and grandparents where necessary.

Mr. Bennett: I accept that argument. I do not want to spend too long trying to improve the Bill. However, I have some sympathy for the local authorities which will have to administer a measure that will cause them problems. I is a measure that the Minister should not have introduced.

I wish that the Secretary of State had dealt more fully with suspensions. It is disturbing that many local authorities and school governing bodies have gone increasingly for suspensions. This seems to be a development within the education world and is not the result of the phasing out of corporal punishment. Several Conservative Members expressed the fear that considerable harm could be caused to children who are kept out of school for long periods as a result of suspensions.

The Government argue that the Opposition should not oppose the Bill because we favour giving powers to local authorities. The Government claim honour for the fact that they are returning power to local authorities, schools and parents. We would have more sympathy with that argument if the Government were prepared to allow local authorities to have control over their own finances. But the Government say to local authorities that they are taking away control over expenditure and other important matters and giving back only the small right to make decisions on such matters as corporal punishment. I welcome the support of the Liberal party and the SDP for our reasoned amendment.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) misrepresented the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers when he said that it did not object to the Bill. The union favours corporal punishment, but it objects to the Bill. It is one of the many groups involved in teaching that feel that the legislation is unworkable.

Mr. Greenway: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bennett: No. The hon. Gentleman would not give way. He said that he favoured corporal punishment because it was quick. In most secondary schools and in many junior schools it is no longer quick. There is almost always a member of staff designated as the person to administer corporal punishment. In mixed schools, punishments for boys and for girls are administered by different people. The member of staff has to be found and usually wants an explanation of why corporal punishment is to be administered before even considering it. In many instances, it is a long-drawn-out process. The hon. Gentleman should reconsider his view.

Mr. Greenway: In my experience, corporal punishment is very quick. However, that was not the defence that I advanced. I said that it was a suitable deterrent and punishment for grossly serious crimes, such as bullying and some forms of vandalism. I said that the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers supported corporal punishment. I did not mention its position on the Bill.

Mr. Bennett: I am sure that in practice corporal punishment is not quick. If it were such a good deterrent, we would not have the problems of bullying and bad behaviour.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) made the valid point, echoed by other hon. Members, that we should look at the experience of other countries. No one has suggested that discipline in European schools is a major problem because they do not have corporal punishment. Discipline in almost all the other countries of Europe is as good as, if not better than, the discipline in our schools, even though there is no corporal punishment in those countries.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) mentioned the sanctions that were available in France and some other countries. I am told that the withdrawal of social security benefit because of a child's non-attendance at school is a rarely used sanction in France.

Mr. Pawsey: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, even if it is used rarely, the threat exists, so the deterrent effect is the same as that of the cane being available in schools? The cane may not be used frequently, but the fact that it is available puts children off. They will behave.

Mr. Bennett: That is a doubtful argument. On the whole, deterrents which are not used fall into disrepute.

The hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) suggested a system under which one school would practise corporal punishment and another would not. Probably all hon. Members accept that that would not be a practical solution. There are already too many problems when parents want to choose between schools and we find that what they want does not fit in with what is available.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Hawksley) expressed great enthusiasm for the deterrent—he spoke of his school days — and suggested that corporal punishment had not done him any harm. Presumably it did not deter him, either. I suggest that he defeated his own argument.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South-East (Mr. Young) was rightly concerned about the way in which pupils would perceive the situation, and he

questioned whether they would think the arrangement fair —a point echoed by almost all hon. Members. Two pupils involved in the same offence would not feel it fair if one was punished in one way and the other was punished in another. Several hon. Members pointed out that, even worse, two pupils involved in the same type of offence might find that the one who had committed the least serious aspect of the offence was subject to corporal punishment and the other not. That would be seen by pupils as unfair.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir K. Lewis) pointed out that more than half the public schools, the better ones, had already abolished corporal punishment.

The hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) referred to injustice resulting from different treatment. He should reflect on the situation that would be created if, for an offence, one pupil got one type of punishment and a second received the cane. Both would feel that injustice had occurred. But mistakes are made in schools, and it might be discovered later that neither pupil should have been punished. One of the two may have been given detention or some other punishment which had not yet been inflicted, but little could be done about the pupil who had already been caned. Thus, great resentment could arise.

The speech of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) came as a breath of fresh air and enlightenment from the Government Benches. He probably summed the Bill up best when he said that it was so dotty that it could enjoy support from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Conservative Members who take the trouble to read his speech will note with interest his account of the well-run school in which corporal punishment is unnecessary. That is the type of school for which we should be striving. It is regrettable that the Bill will do little positive in that direction. Rather, it will help to produce a bureaucratic nightmare.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) spoke of the problems and cost involved in writing to parents. He also spoke of the errors that can occur. Mistakes also arise because several pupils on the register can have the same or similar names. It is not too difficult to avoid confusing, say, two John Smiths. One is aware of Smith being a common name; hence, the teacher is wary of making mistakes. But it is surprising how often quite uncommon names crop up and there are two children with the same name.

Are we to have "John Smith the cane" and "John Smith the detention" as the names by which teachers remember which boy is which? I suggest that the possibility of error will be horrendous and that, in practice, the majority of schools will decide to abolish corporal punishment rather then get involved with that type of bureaucracy.

The Government should take this measure away and go to the local authorities and say, "We want you to get a debate going in your area so that we can establish a framework for discipline by which parents and schools are clear about their roles when trying to ensure good discipline." Teachers should examine the alternatives to corporal punishment. There should be debate on how the schools administer those alternatives, the role of suspension in schools and, if a pupil is suspended by the school, the duty of local authorities to ensure that, after a short period, the child is found another school to attend. In some authorities pupils remain suspended for a term or more, and that is most unsatisfactory.

We need much more discussion between local authorities about the implication of withdrawal groups in schools and what happens if a local authority creates what one might call "sin bin" schools. What are the implications for Warnock-type integration if we try to integrate children from maladjusted schools into other schools? What are the implications of excluding pupils for punishment reasons?

I suggest to the Government that they advise local authorities to address themselves to the question of how to create an atmosphere in all their schools where self-discipline prevails, where good behaviour is the order of the day and where all teachers and senior staff need to spend little time in enforcing discipline. That has already been achieved in a few schools, but it needs to be achieved in all our schools. The Bill does nothing to achieve that end. The Government should take the legislation away and bring forward proposals to abolish corporal punishment and to create a positive framework within which good discipline can evolve in our schools.

9.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): We have had a long debate on a difficult subject. We have heard speeches from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival), my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), for The Wrekin (Mr. Hawksley), for Stamford and Spalding (Sir K. Lewis), for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) and for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins), and by the hon. Members for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud), for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young), for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham), for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), for Preston (Mr. Thorne), for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), and for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes). In the time available to me I shall attempt to deal with the points of substance and political dogma, and I undertake to write to those hon. Members whose points I cannot answer now.

The House will know that I have looked forward to this debate since the Queen's Speech last November. In recent weeks, the words of George Canning have gone through my mind. He said:

> "Give me the avowed, the erect, the manly foe;
> Bold I can meet—perhaps may turn his blow;
> But of all plagues, good Heaven, thy wrath can send,
> Save, save, oh! save me from the Candid Friend!"

But I had no need to quote those words tonight because this debate has been amiable, good natured, cheerful and enthralling. It has been a debate on a serious and difficult subject, and the Government have faced a dilemma.

The debate has been good natured, except for the contribution by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central who overstated his case by the language he used and the intemperance he brought to it. One had the idea that Wackford Squeers had not died 100 years ago, but was alive and well and replicated throughout our education system. The draconian and irresolute picture painted by the hon. Gentleman is not one of fact today.

Some Opposition Members have accused us of bringing forward a Bill which is not based on any principle. That

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was referred to in a most elegant speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). The Bill is based upon a principle which should unite every Member of the House — the principle that local education authorities should decide whether to permit the application of corporal punishment in their schools, and those local authorities that so decide will allow school governors and parents to decide the matter in each school.

If any parent wishes to have his or her child exempted from corporal punishment, he has the right to seek that objective. We have debated this subject in the knowledge that some of the views expressed have been at odds with the views of the people we represent. I am convinced that if I were to have an opinion poll in any part of my constituency, I should find that the vast majority of my constituents are in favour of the retention of corporal punishment in schools, as are those represented by Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Has the Minister asked the GLC?

Mr. Dunn: The hon. Gentleman brings a peculiar affectation to our debate. I always think that he has the fervour of a poodle dog attempting to seduce a wellington boot. If he is to learn from my answers, he should remain silent for a little longer.

The *Daily Telegraph*, in its column written by John Izbicki, pointed out that a Gallup poll showed that 69 per cent. of the people polled believed that discipline had become worse in our schools; 19 per cent. thought that it was about the same; and only 3 per cent. thought that it had improved. That is the background to the debate and the Second Reading that we shall undoubtedly give to the Bill.

Mr. Forth: Does not the point that my hon. Friend has made reinforce the fact that the European Court of Human Rights in its judgment is as far from the opinion of the people of this country as many of us have suggested? Is that not the problem that the Government have had to face? How does he relate the results of the opinion poll that he has given with the court's judgment?

Mr. Dunn: I do not intend to do so tonight, if my hon. Friend will forgive me. I am sure that his remarks about the European Court of Human Rights will be noted by my right hon. and hon. Friends who have responsibility for those matters.

Mr. Fisher: We are overcome by the Under-Secretary's theatrical and seductive winks to the Opposition Front Bench. When he is taking these straw polls in his constituency, does he consult teachers and head teachers? Will he confirm that the vast majority of those whom he is expecting to administer corporal punishment are against the Bill?

Mr. Dunn: If I thought that were the case, I should be the first to admit it. The hon. Member has known me long enough to accept that. I am conscious that last year a sample poll mounted by NOP for *The Times Educational Supplement* showed 52 per cent. of teachers interviewed to be in favour of retention, compared with 36 per cent. in favour of abolition. In the north, and the midlands where the hon. Member has his constituency, the comparative figures were 64 per cent. and 27 per cent.

Mr. Radice: Is any teachers' trade union in favour of the Bill?

Mr. Dunn: I dare say that if I researched for long enough, I might find one. However, the question that the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) should address is whether those trade union leaders are acting in the interests of the members they purport to represent. Probably they are not doing so.

The Bill is before the House because of a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Campbell and Cosans. We cannot accept some judgments and discard others, picking and choosing between those that we like and those that we do not like. The case was vigorously defended by the United Kingdom, but the judgment went against us. We have an obligation to abide by the judgment of the court, and that obligation will be fulfilled by the scheme that the Bill introduces. Failure to act would place us in breach of a treaty obligation and expose us to the possibility of a succession of cases under the European convention on human rights and the further possibility of compensation awards.

Mr. Silvester: I am sorry to give my hon. Friend such cause for pause, but if he feels that we are under an obligation, are not the Government also under an obligation—before we commit ourselves to a Bill which my hon. Friend has hardly defended with vigour—to provide time for the House, for the first time in history, to make a judgment on whether we wish the European Court of Human Rights to operate in that way?

Mr. Dunn: My responsibility tonight is to steer the Second Reading debate to a satisfactory conclusion. The matters to which my hon. Friend refers are for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, whose attention to such matters is known to all.

We cannot pick and choose between judgments, and we must act to give effect to the ruling. Our obligations on the matter date back to 1951, when the Government of the day accepted the court's jurisdiction in cases brought by another state in which the prior agreement of this country had been obtained. In 1966, the Labour Government accepted the right of individuals to make complaints under the convention. That acceptance has been renewed by successive Governments. The latest renewal was in January 1981 and was to last for five years. Consequently, we must give effect to the ruling.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dunn: I do not have much time. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

The Opposition parties would have preferred our action to take the form of abolishing corporal punishment. Opposition Members who have spoken tonight appear to be united in their determination to abolish corporal punishment, whether they belong to the Labour party, the Liberal party or the Social Democratic party.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why no Scottish Minister has participated in the debate, even though the Bill applies to Scotland? Am I right in saying that Scottish Ministers are in total disagreement with the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend, believing that corporal punishment should be abolished — advice that they have already given to local authorities?

Mr. Dunn: The hon. Gentleman is churlish. We have been supported throughout the debate by a representative of the Scottish Office.

Mr. David Young: Can the Minister name any education authority which supports the educational apartheid proposed in the Bill?

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Dunn: I had some difficulty in hearing the hon. Gentleman, but I undertake to answer his question in the fullness of time. I was not able to hear the hon. Gentleman's speech, but if he asked that question during the course of it, I undertake to give him a genuine reply.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose*——

Mr. Dunn: I must press on.

Mr. David Young *rose*——

Mr. Dunn: I have many questions to answer.

The Opposition parties have made it plain that they want corporal punishment abolished. We accept that the Bill is a response to the European Court's ruling. It deals with some problems and not with others. The Labour party has made it plain that it would solve the problems facing us, if it were in government, by abolishing corporal punishment. It is consistent with the theme that we have heard often since I came to the House in 1979. Labour would abolish corporal punishment, private education, the assisted places scheme and local authorities' discretion whether to permit corporal punishment in their schools. The Labour party has the answer to everything—the abolition of circumstances in which people get together and do something of which the state does not approve.

Our theme has been consistent with the view of many parents and teachers in England and Wales who want the sanction of corporal punishment to be retained. We believe that the Government should not legislate to force abolition. That centralist line might appeal to Opposition Members, but it has no appeal to the Government.

The court's judgment was not about banning corporal punishment, but about the right of parents to exempt their children from such punishment. We have proposed such a right. We examined the alterntives carefully. On close examination, the possibility of some schools being able to use corporal punishment while others could not—the so-called dual system—proved utterly impractical. Having rejected abolition and the dual system, an exemption scheme was clearly the only practical solution. As we have said, it might not be perfect but criticism has greatly exaggerated the difficulties. An exemption scheme can work. Schools which wish to retain corporal punishment will make it work, and I am sure that the common sense of parents and schools will make an exemption scheme workable.

Some people have claimed that the system is unfair. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has exposed the weakness of that argument. Schools which wish to offer exemptions while retaining corporal punishment should be free to do so. That is the basis of the Bill. It confers rights, whereas Opposition Members, who made it clear that they are committed to abolition, would like to withdraw rights.

Several detailed questions have been asked and some of them are matters for consideration in Committee. I look forward to joining battle in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford referred to a dual system. I am sure that the House agrees that such a system would be costly and difficult to administer. It would entail virtually doubling existing provision so that parents could gain respect for their convictions without losing the range of school choice that they have now. That would be impossibly expensive. Moreover, such a system would create practical day-to-day difficulties in the allocation of pupils to schools. Indeed, the problems for local education authorities, especially those serving country districts, would be colossal. The House would need to face the fact that children in a particular school would have to be treated differently because of the change of status in that school. That would pose unique and particular problems for the parents of those children during that difficult transitional period.

Hon. Members referred to the problems of cost and asked whether the scheme would be expensive to administer. We accept that it will involve extra work for schools which attempt to administer the scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury asked about the children of military or diplomatic personnel who are being educated in the private sector. Public moneys received for that purpose will be regarded as emoluments of salary and will therefore not be covered by the Bill. We took clear legal advice on that matter. I hope that my hon. Friend, who has a great interest in that matter, will be happy with my explanation.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough asked what the Bill meant for children in receipt of assisted places. We envisage that the question whether a child should be liable to corporal punishment will be put to parents after the pupil has been accepted by the school. If the parents of such a child seek exemption, the school will be obliged to respect their wishes.

Independent schools will be free, but not obliged, to offer the choice of exemption to all parents. The hon. Member for Hillsborough mentioned the stigma that may be attached to assisted-place children. His interpretation and general thrust are wrong. There is no stigma attached to being a recipient of a right. The parents of an assisted-place pupil will have a right which will be embodied in legislation. I accept that some independent schools will extend that right to all parents. In such circumstances, the assisted-place pupil will not be distinguished from others.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North referred to the problem of parents changing their minds. There will be a requirement for some delay—a few days—before a change of mind in favour of exemption can come into force. My hon. Friend also asked what would happen if the school changed its policy. He accepts, as I do, that a school can change its policy at any time, but clearly it will not wish to continue to change its approach.

This has been an interesting and thoughtful debate. We were invited earlier to join battle in Committee. As I have already made clear, I relish the prospect of victory both in Committee and tonight. I promise hon. Members whose points I have not answered that I shall answer them. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the Opposition amendment and in favour of this important legislation.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 168, Noes 298.

Division No. 78[**[10 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter

Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. John McWilliam.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Lawrence, Ivan

Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Ian Lang.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 41 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 171.

Division No. 79] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Bulmer, Esmond
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel

Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Ian Lang.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Budgen, Nick
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ian
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Grist, Ian
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Malins, Humfrey
Marek, Dr John
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Prescott, John
Proctor, K. Harvey
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Silvester, Fred
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael

White, James
Wiggin, Jerry
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Brunei and Maldives Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. —*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

EDUCATION (CORPORAL PUNISHMENT) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education (Corporal Punishment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Brunei and Maldives Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

10.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Renton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The purpose of the Bill, which has been approved in another place, is to make minor amendments to certain United Kingdom enactments to take account of the recently acquired status of Brunei and the Maldives as members of the Commonwealth. It will have no effect on the laws of Brunei and the Maldives.

Britain's historical connections with those two countries are particularly interesting. The sultanate of Brunei first entered special treaty relations with the United Kingdom in 1846 and subsequently enjoyed the status of a protected state until 1971. Subsequently, the United Kingdom continued to exercise direct responsibility for Brunei's external relations until 31 December 1983. On that date, Brunei resumed her status as a sovereign and independent state and was admitted to the Commonwealth with effect from 1 January 1984.

Britain's connections with the Maldives date back to the 18th century when, on taking possession of Ceylon, we extended our protection to the Maldives. In 1948, the Maldives were granted self-government, but the United Kingdom continued to maintain control of their external relations. In 1965, the Maldives became a fully independent sovereign state outside the Commonwealth but were admitted to the Commonwealth, at their own request, as a special member in July 1982.

Brunei and the Maldives are thus united in their membership of the Commonwealth. They are both small in area and in population and predominately Moslem, but in many respects they are strikingly different and they have their own roles to play.

As the House knows, Brunei has been endowed with abundant resources of petroleum and natural gas. The associated revenues make her one of the wealthiest nations in Asia, with substantial foreign reserves. She is actively developing an individual foreign policy commensurate with her economic strength as a member of the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the Association of South-East Asian Nations. Brunei is already playing her part with her ASEAN partners — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand — in contributing towards promoting stability in south-east Asia.

At a time when Brunei has been taking up her international role in the United Nations and within ASEAN, we are particularly proud of the fact that she has elected to join the Commonwealth and will continue to maintain her close traditional ties with the United Kingdom. We attach importance to assisting in the continued development of Brunei. Britain has long provided teachers and other experts for Brunei, and about 2,000 Brunei students are studying in Britain. We retain major investments in the Brunei economy, particularly in the vital energy sector. We are a major trading partner.

Through those various channels we keep in the closest contact with modern day Brunei, thus preserving a tradition extending back for more than a century. Then, as now, both Brunei and we have benefited from our happy association.

[Mr. Tim Renton]

The Maldives, on the other hand, have been endowed with one of the most idyllic locations in the Commonwealth, as an ever-increasing number of British tourists are finding out for themselves. As Lord Alport was moved to say in another place:

"You will certainly find there a very hospitable, very delightful and very attractive people to meet and you will find as well charming islands and a charming environment."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 November 1984; Vol. 457, c. 513.]

We remember with much pleasure that President Gayoom made a successful visit to Britain in May 1982, as a guest of the Government, during which he called on the Prime Minister, lunched with Her Majesty the Queen and announced the Maldives' application for membership of the Commonwealth. We were pleased to welcome him back to London in June 1984 and were delighted that he was able to address the Royal Commonwealth Society conference on the important and appropriate subject of small states in the Commonwealth.

Our long association with Brunei and the Maldives has made our relationship with both particularly close. It remains so now that they are independent, as was demonstrated by the warm reception that the Bill received in another place. Many noble Lords described their connections with both Brunei and the Maldives and expressed their good wishes to both countries.

I know that those sentiments are shared by many hon. Members on both sides of the House. In particular, I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris), who is sorry that he cannot be here, has expressed personal interest in, and support for, the Bill.

Therefore, it gives us great pleasure to welcome the admission of Brunei and the Maldives to the Commonwealth—a process on which the Bill puts the seal. We are confident that we shall continue to build on our long-standing friendship with both countries.

The amendments which the Bill makes to United Kingdom enactments follow the precedents of the Papua New Guinea, Western Samoa and Nauru (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1980 and the New Hebrides Act 1980. These precedents relate to countries which, like Brunei and the Maldives, required only such legislative provision as was consequent on their accession to membership of the Commonwealth.

In the case of former British colonies, the relevant independence Act passed on the achievement of independence, and almost simultaneous accession to the Commonwealth, includes these necessary amendments to other United Kingdom legislation which place the state on the same footing as other Commonwealth countries. However, both Brunei and the Maldives have achieved full sovereignty and membership of the Commonwealth without the need for such an independence Act.

Clause 1 and the schedule provide for the necessary modification of United Kingdom enactments. Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the schedule provide for amendments to section 427(2) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1894 and to the Whaling Industry (Regulation) Act 1934. Because nationals of Brunei and the Maldives will be brought within the definition of "British subjects" in enactments passed before the coming into force of the 1981 Act, it is necessary to amend the Merchant Shipping Act 1894 and the Whaling Industry (Regulation) Act 1934 in such a way as to exclude Brunei and the Maldives from their application.

Paragraph 3 of the schedule provides for an amendment to the Imperial Institute Act, as amended by the Commonwealth Institute Act 1958. Brunei and the Maldives will thereby be included as countries which may be represented on the board of governors who are consulted when arrangements for the Commonwealth Institute are changed.

Paragraphs 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the schedule provide for amendments to Acts relating to Commonwealth forces and their discipline while on visits to the United Kingdom. These amendments make provisions for forces raised in Brunei and the Maldives similar to those which apply to forces raised in other Commonwealth countries.

Paragraph 8 provides for an amendment to the British Nationality Act 1981. The Maldives will be added to the list of Commonwealth countries under schedule 3 of that Act. Paragraph 8 applies to the Maldives only. The similar consequential change with regard to Brunei has already been effected by Order in Council.

I am sure that all hon. Members will wish to join Her Majesty's Government in welcoming the Bill. Although the amendments which it introduces have practical implications in only limited fields, they are changes which should be made if nationals of Brunei and the Maldives are to be given their proper Commonwealth status in this country.

10.38 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Minister's warm words of welcome are shared by Opposition Members. It is a pleasant surprise of our Commonwealth history that two such different territories can be brought together in one Bill. It illustrates the unique nature of the historical development of our colonial or, in this case, quasi-colonial past.

Both countries, as the Minister said in what one might describe as his fascinating history lesson, went through a period as British protectorates, and for a time we were responsible for the external relations in both countries; both are somewhat artificial in geographic terms; both have populations fewer than 200,000 people; both are mainly Islamic in religion; and both have historic links with our military forces—one thinks of the problems we had in the mid-1970s in our relationship with Gan and of the Gurkha detachment in Brunei.

The similarities between the two territories end there. The Maldives with their 20 coral atolls depend on fishing and are relatively poor. Brunei with its oil wealth is per capita one of the richest countries in Asia. Brunei has, however, a number of problems. Behind the wealth and apparent stability there is, as I am sure most friends and observers note, a need to modernise its political structures. The elective parts of the constitution have been in abeyance for some time. Sadly, Brunei has a number of political prisoners. Brunei faces the problem faced by most Islamic countries—the need to work out its relationship, in terms of its laws and so on, in line with the new radical impulse of Islam.

Recently, there were difficult negotiations over the future of the Gurkhas. It would be helpful if the Under-Secretary of State explained whether there are any circumstances in which the Gurkha battalions — still under the control of the Ministry of Defence—could be

used for internal purposes. In 1962, the Gurkhas were used to suppress the rebellion which followed the success of the Brunei People's party in the only democratic elections held in the territory in 1961. In another place, Lady Young, speaking on behalf of the Government, said that the presence of the Gurkhas contributed to the stability of Brunei and of the surrounding area. Is the Minister confident that the guidelines are sufficiently clear? Is he confident that, in an internal emergency, there would be no misunderstanding between Britain and the Sultan about the role that the Gurkhas can play at such a time?

There is much that is positive about development in the Maldives and Brunei and much that is to the credit of the Sultan's Government in terms of the development of welfare services and looking ahead to the period when the oil runs out. The Brunei people will then need to depend very much on their own resources, particularly agriculture. The fact that there is a lack of personal income tax makes other people in other countries jealous of Brunei.

The problem in Brunei is not shortage of cash but the lack of the trained human resources which are necessary for the development of that country. There is a shortage of key personnel and a need for technical assistance. I am pleased to note how much our Government and the Governments of neighbouring Commonwealth countries have done to assist Brunei in its technical development. The Under-Secretary of State referred to the fact that there are about 2,000 students from Brunei in Britain. It is especially gratifying to note that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Malaysia and Singapore have given a helping hand to Brunei in training diplomatic personnel and in introducing Brunei, step by step, to international organisations. We are confident that that co-operation within the Commonwealth can be further developed.

As the Minister has said, the Bill is relatively minor and technical. It marks the fact that both territories have achieved their independence in a mood rather different from that to which we are accustomed with the majority of our Commonwealth countries. Hence, the Bill makes minor consequential changes to United Kingdom law, making a formality of the end of the quasi-dependent relationship. For example, under paragraph 8 of the schedule, the addition of the Maldives to the countries whose citizens are defined as Commonwealth citizens under the British Nationality Act 1981 will make no practical difference to that country.

We look forward to welcoming the two territories to full Commonwealth status, and we shall do all that we can to make them full members of the Commonwealth family. It is good to know that they see advantages in joining the Commonwealth. It illustrates the diversity which is, perhaps, the strength of the Commonwealth connection.

I understand that as yet no application has been made by either territory to join the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, but I am confident of their eventual membership. They will be welcome in that organisation. We wish both countries well. We look forward to continued co-operation within the Commonwealth family to our mutual benefit.

10.45 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Our welcome is no less enthusiastic for the Bill and the accession to the Commonwealth of these two states. I shall not emulate my noble Friend Lord Taylor who, when the matter was discussed in another place, was able to point to the fact that three generations of his family, culminating in his grandfather, had been made hereditary rulers of Sarawak by the Sultan of Borneo in the 19th century, an arrangement which lasted well into this century. I make no such claim.

I emphasise our enthusiastic support for Brunei's accession to the Commonwealth and for British relations with Brunei. There is a well-established trading relationship and Brunei has an increasing stake in the British economy. Strong trading relations must be maintained between our countries.

Brunei is the 49th full member of the Commonwealth. I hope that it will not be long before similar legislation is before us to welcome the 50th, which should be Namibia. The sooner the better, because that story has been going on for too long. The Maldives have been independent since 1965 and have special membership of the Commonwealth, enjoying all the benefits of membership without being involved in Heads of Government meetings. Both countries are small states, within the normal definition of that term, and 70 per cent. of the smaller states are members of the Commonwealth. Both must be aware that small, while being beautiful, can also mean being vulnerable. The matter of vulnerability was thrown into sharp relief by the Grenada crisis.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government have set in train a study of the special needs of small states including their defence and economic needs. The presence of the Gurkhas in Brunei and Brunei's interest in the protection of its territory has been mentioned.

We must also be aware of the economic vulnerability of the Maldives. It is a poor country, and we hope that it will benefit from the tourism, to which the Minister referred, and strong links with and support from Britain. Interest has been expressed about the development of permanent trade and political representation in London. We hope that that will come about.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) mentioned the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It has published a report on the security of small states and has explored the Commonwealth dimension in that. We must all hope that those ideas can be developed.

The Commonwealth is an extraordinary community of nations to which those two have been added. It covers more than one third of the world's population and one third of the nations with membership of the United Nations. The fact that on achieving independence so many of those territories have chosen freely to become members of the Commonwealth is remarkable and a great tribute to the Commonwealth's potential and possibilities.

There are links of language, culture, history and shared institutions, but we in Britain must remember how much we have to do to sustain that connection, and the arrival of two more states within the Commonwealth in recent years, of which this Bill is the culmination, should remind us of that. In all Government policy, whether we are talking about overseas students, broadcasting services to the Commonwealth or other policies, we must remember our side of the commitment to the Commonwealth and how much that should imbue every aspect of Government policy. We also hope that involvement in the Commonwealth will be the means of widening and spreading democracy in all its members.

10.50 pm

Mr. Renton: I thank the hon. Members for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) for their interesting contributions to our short debate. The hon. Member for Swansea, East referred to the disparity between the two countries covered by the Bill. He was quite right, but what is interesting—the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed picked up this theme—is the fact that, despite that disparity, those two countries are now united not only in that both are independent and have a long association with this country but also in their membership of the Commonwealth. That is a striking feature of the Commonwealth.

Like the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, I read the speech made by Lord Tanlaw. It would be hard for any hon. Member of this House to emulate the close four-generation connection of the Brooke family with the development of Brunei, but what we can do is to show the high regard in which we hold the two countries in question. That is a tribute to the friendship between the United Kingdom and Brunei and the Maldives, and bodes well for our future relations.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East referred to the question of the Gurkhas. The Gurkha battalion is being retained in Brunei at the request of the Sultan. He believes —as do Her Majesty's Government—that its presence contributes to the stability of Brunei and the surrounding area. Other members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations have shown their understanding of the arrangement. The arrangement is also beneficial to the United Kingdom in that the battalion is found in rotation from the Hong Kong garrison and has, in Brunei, opportunities for training that are unavailable in Hong Kong. The battalion remains an integral part of the British Army, under the operational control of the Ministry of Defence. It is the intention that the battalion will normally remain in Brunei.

The Governments of the United Kingdom and of Brunei are committed to consult on matters of mutual concern under their treaty of friendship and co-operation of 1979. There should therefore be no possibility of misunderstanding such as the hon. Member for Swansea, East feared.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed rightly referred to the special needs of small states. That is a singularly appropriate point in reference to the Maldives. He will be pleased to note the encouraging progress made with the study commissioned at the 1983 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in New Delhi, which the British Government continue strongly to support. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office made an initial contribution to the study for the Commonwealth Secretariat in June 1984 and our memorandum, published by the Select Committee in July, is the fullest statement to date of British policy in that area. The committee that was set up continues to make its inquiries and undertake its research, and we await with great interest the conclusions of the study.

It is probably worth stating that our basic approach is to emphasise the objective of prevention rather than cure, through greater regional co-operation by the small states themselves, the provision of technical assistance and training assistance for the armed and police forces, an active information policy, the promotion of political and cultural links and the maintenance of an adequate diplomatic presence in as many small states as possible. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed spoke in moving terms about the development towards democracy in many countries throughout the world and how many of them have become members of the Commonwealth. I am sure that the whole House wishes to welcome these two countries as members of the Commonwealth. I should like all hon. Members present to join me in expressing our desire that our close friendship with Brunei and the Maldives should be long and fruitful. We are proud to see them as fellow members of the Commonwealth and it is in that vein that I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[Mr. Lang.]

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Bill read the Third time and passed, without amendment.

BANKRUPTCY (SCOTLAND) BILL *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with as if it had been certified by Mr. Speaker as relating exclusively to Scotland.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

BANKRUPTCY (SCOTLAND) BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second reading read.

Ordered,

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee. —*[Mr. Lang.]*

FAMILY LAW (SCOTLAND) BILL *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That the Family Law (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with as if it had been certified by Mr. Speaker as relating exclusively to Scotland.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

FAMILY LAW (SCOTLAND) BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Ordered,

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee. —*[Mr. Lang.]*

VE Day (40th Anniversary)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

10.57 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I am glad of this opportunity to discuss in more detail than has hitherto been possible the celebration of the 40th anniversary of VE day.

I welcome the fact that the Government appear to have changed their earlier attitude. I tabled a question to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in November last year, asking about the details of the anniversary celebrations. I was shocked to get a curt and peremptory reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, which ran:

"We have no present plans for any official British celebration of this anniversary."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. *453*.]

That struck me as unacceptable, so I pursued the matter by letter with the Foreign Secretary and eventually received a reply from the noble Lady, the Minister of State, which caused some consternation when it was published a couple of weeks ago. The most surprising and, to me, disappointing comment in that letter was her conclusion that the celebration of the 40th Anniversary of VE day, such as I had suggested, would be

"at best nostalgic and at worst anti-German".

It may be my advancing years, but I cannot see much wrong with nostalgia, especially nostalgia for a momentous event in the lives of many people. It has become clear that many of our colleagues in the Federal Republic of Germany are not opposed to the idea of celebrating the 40th anniversary of VE day. Many of my friends there have made it clear that they are as anxious as any one else to celebrate the end of the Nazi regime. They point out, with considerable justification, that the first victims of the regime were Germans. They are glad to celebrate the sort of things which we have in mind.

I endorse what the Prime Minister has said and share her objectives in commemorating the 40th anniversary of VE day. As I understand it, she is saying that we should first pay tribute to those who gave their lives during the war. That is absolutely right. It is also right to emphasise the reconciliation that has taken place between ourselves and the nations that were our traditional enemies in Europe. We should celebrate 40 years of peace in Europe. We should give thanks for the new Europe which emerged from the old at the end of the war and in which nations which were for generations at each other's throats are now close allies. All those matters are worth celebrating.

I also wish to refer to VJ Day. I have received many letters from people who say, "We were the forgotten army in the far east. Do not let us be the forgotten army again at any celebrations". That is a fair point. I do not know whether it would be better to combine celebrations of the end of the war in the far east with celebrations of the end of war in Europe, or to have a simple, separate and wholly appropriate celebration at the appropriate time. Whatever we do, we must not give the impression that everything finished with the war in Europe and overlook the contribution of our countrymen who fought in the far east.

I wish to urge some aims and motives on the Government and to make some sensible suggestions. First, I wish to see the broadest possible celebrations and commemorations in the United Kingdom. Secondly, I hope that whatever we organise will be genuinely international in character and involve both our former enemies and allies.

The events should involve ordinary people. Ordinary families bore the brunt of the war and made the sacrifices demanded by it. Celebrations should not, therefore, be limited to national leaders, to the great and the good, but should involve a broad cross-section of ordinary people. We should seek the participation of the veterans of the war to whom we owe so much.

I hope, however, that we shall also try to involve young people. They have benefited from the peace, and our future depends on them. They sometimes fail to understand what the war was about, and how much we owe to those who fought it on our behalf. I hope that celebrations will not be limited to a national event at Westminster abbey or the Cenotaph, important though such a function may be. It would be a tragedy if the commemoration were London dominated. There must be local events, such as church services, which make clear the contributions of all communities, towns and villages, to the war effort.

I hope that the commemoration will be seen not simply as a solemn and serious occasion. It should undoubtedly have its solemn and serious content. However, my abiding recollection of VE day in 1945 is of street parties. I still feel the great sense of relief that the war was over. Street parties are part of our folklore. The ability to organise them passes from generation to generation. We do not do that often enough. We tend to do it on great occasions, such as coronations and jubilees. The 40th anniversary of VE day is a good basis on which to organise street parties. I know from my postbag that much work is being done in many communities, and I hope that the Government and local authorities will do all they can to encourage such a popular celebration.

This was not just a national war; it was a war that involved several of our allies. I have already mentioned the need for reconciliation and the need for the involvement of the Federal Republic of Germany and, indeed, the German Democratic Republic, if it wishes to be involved. We must also involve our allies, and the Americans will be an important element in the celebrations. I say that with self-interest, because I grew up in Lincoln during the war and I remember that Lincoln was surrounded by Royal Air Force and United States Air Force bases. Many Americans gave their lives, not only in the air force but in other forces, for our future in Europe. Clearly, Commonwealth nations should also have the opportunity to take part.

Perhaps the most controversial suggestion is that we should seek to involve the Soviet Union in the celebrations. There has been a suspicion that the Soviet Union will be restricted to ambassadorial involvement. I would not support such an approach, which would be a cold and formal involvement. I was interested to see the letter of 12 December from Lord Carrington to Mr. Martin Dent of the University of Keele, in which he endorsed the idea of an international celebration. He said:

"I have much sympathy with the view that it would be right to plan the celebrations in a way which emphasises the reconciliation between those combatants who are now partners in the Atlantic Alliance and the hopes which we all have for a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union."

We should aim to achieve that in our commemoration of the 40th anniversary of VE day.

[Mr. John Cartwright]

I say that ambassadorial involvement will not be sufficient, because there was, and still is, an understanding in Britain of the extraordinary contribution of the Russian people to the winning of the second world war, and there is a case for a much more imaginative involvement of the Soviet people in the commemoration of the peace. It has been suggested that the sword of Stalingrad, which was forged in Britain as a token of the respect and admiration of the British people for the defence of Stalingrad, should return to Britain for display. That would be worth pursuing.

The most obvious example of British and American co-operation with the Soviet Union during the war were the Arctic convoys of British and United States merchant ships carrying desperately needed war materials to the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1943. Those convoys were concentrated in the winter months to take advantage of the bad weather and the darkness of the Arctic night in order to hamper Nazi attacks on the ships. The conditions must have been appalling, and many British and American lives were lost in the effort to supply the Soviet Union. By the end of 1942, 219 ships had reached Murmansk, but no fewer than 64 had been sunk. The convoy operation was a heavy burden on Britain. The responsibility of defending the ships against German aircraft and U-boats fell on Britain, and there was also the problem of providing the desperately needed equipment. By the end of 1942, Britain had provided no fewer than 1,793 tanks and 1,988 aircraft —far more than even the United States provided—and Britain's resources were clearly strained.

Sir Winston Churchill, in his history of the second world war, said:

"We gave our heart's blood resolutely to our valiant, suffering ally."

That episode in British-Soviet relations is worth recalling when we commemorate VE day. A reunion of survivors from all three nations would be a fitting part of any celebration, and perhaps one could organise a naval exchange, with ships from all three nations visiting each other's ports.

Another aspect of Anglo-Soviet co-operation that is worth recalling is the Aid to Russia Fund, launched in 1941 by the Red Cross and the Order of St. John. Mrs. Churchill, as she then was, the wife of the Prime Minister, accepted an invitation to head the organisation. Her first appeal was issued in October 1941. It was a very moving appeal. In that appeal Mrs. Churchill said:

"There is no one in this country whose heart has not been deeply stirred by the appalling drama now going on in Russia. We are amazed at the power of the Russian defence and at the skill with which it is conducted. We have been moved to profound admiration for the valour, the tenacity and the patriotic self-sacrifice of the Russian people. And above all, perhaps, we have been shaken with horrow and pity at the vast scale of human suffering."

That appeal, which was targeted to launch £1 million, was much more successful than that. Contributions came in from all sources. Lord Nuffield gave £50,000 to the appeal. The King and the Queen gave £1,000 specifically to assist the Russians. In fact, nearly £8 million was raised, the bulk of it in weekly subscriptions from ordinary people. To quote again from Sir Winston Churchill's official history:

"Thus through the powerful organisation of the Red Cross and St. John's and in spite of heavy losses in the Arctic convoys medical and surgical supplies and all kinds of comforts and special appliances found their way in unbroken flow through the icy and deadly seas to the valiant Russian armies and people."

That kind of achievement is worth recalling, perhaps by a reunion of those who helped to raise the money and organise the assistance with those in the Soviet Union who benefited from it.

Perhaps one might be more positive and suggest that we could commemorate the Aid to Russia fund by trying to found a new Anglo-Soviet fund to finance much needed medical projects in the Third world. Whatever we do, we should not lose this opportunity which the commemoration of VE day gives us to try to improve relations with the Soviet Union. That is very much of a motivating force now in British foreign policy. I suggest that there could be no better way to improve relationships than by trying to rekindle that spirit of co-operation that existed 40 years ago.

These suggestions are by no means intended to be exclusive. They represent some of the ideas that have been put to me by people in various parts of the country from all political persuasions. I perfectly understand that there may be many other ideas that are well worth pursuing, but if the 40th anniversary of VE day is to be commemorated it should certainly not be a half-hearted operation. It really should be in keeping with the momentous impact of the second world war and the personal sacrifice that that war demanded. It is in that sense that I commend these ideas to the Government and look forward with great interest to the Minister's reaction.

11.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): I welcome the opportunity presented by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) in initiating this debate to explain a little more fully the Government's thinking on this very important issue. I know of his early and genuine interest in VE day—it is perhaps fitting that the hon. Member's constituency has such an historic military connection. I visited Woolwich myself last September and I know that during the second world war the royal ordnance factory at Woolwich suffered 25 separate air raids. Despite this, the factory produced 11,000 artillery pieces, 14 million shells and no fewer than 1,350 million rounds of small arms ammunition—a truly remarkable achievement.

We have stated on a number of occasions that we have decided that the 40th anniversary of the end of the second world war should be marked by a national commemoration. We are particularly conscious of the high degree of public interest that there has been on this question and understand and sympathise with the feelings that have been expressed.

We are still considering the form that the commemoration should take and a number of options are being closely studied: I am sorry, therefore, that I cannot be specific tonight. A service of thanksgiving is one option that has been widely canvassed and we are sympathetic to the opportunity this would give for those who gave their lives to be honoured and for the spirit of peace and reconciliation to be stressed.

In planning the commemorations we are also carefully considering the nature and extent of representation from other countries. We shall, of course, take into account the

views that have been expressed to us from various quarters, including those of the hon. Gentleman, before taking any decisions.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already announced that there will be many representatives of foreign and Commonwealth Governments to whom we shall extend invitations to take part in the commemoration, either as high commissioners or as ambassadors, including those from the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union.

We shall, of course, wish to ensure that this does not become a divisive issue, or give grounds for offence to our allies, past or present. As the Prime Minister has said, we shall need to consult widely before determining the form of the occasion and before making final decisions.

We shall, as always, remember the contribution made by our allies in the second world war and our joint victory over tyranny—not least immense Soviet achievement and sacrifice. The USSR, we must remember, lost over 20 million dead in the second world war.

However, as the Prime Minister said in the House on 15 January, we shall aim in the commemoration to focus not only on the anniversaries but on the achievements of the last 40 years in preserving peace with freedom. We shall, of course, have very much in mind the reconstruction and reconciliation that has been achieved in this time. As we approach this 40th anniversary of the end of the second world war we are mindful that our adversaries at that time are now our allies, and are conscious of the considerable efforts that have been made to build constructively on the sacrifices of the war years and the achievement of reconciliation.

Concern has been expressed as to what the attitude of our close ally the Federal Republic of Germany will be to our holding VE day commemorations.

I should like to set out Chancellor Kohl's approach as spelt out at the press conference following the Prime Minister's recent meeting with him. I quote:

"I explained to the Prime Minister the specific psychological situation in the Federal Republic and I explained to her that two thirds of the population alive in the Federal Republic today do not, from their own experience, remember the terrible things that happened under the Hitler regime, because they were born after it, and it is important, therefore, for us to commemorate this day in being aware of the history of our people and remembering the terrible things that were done in the name of Germany, but is also —in this sense for us a day of liberation and at the same time we must remember all the suffering and all the dead, and so when we commemorate this we commemorate this date by turning inwards and thinking about our past and our future.

It is also important in remembering this zero hour in German history, we should remember the fact that the chance which was offered us at that time was used. We built up the Federal Republic and we have contributed to maintaining peace and freedom and progress for 40 years, and that is the very great achievement of the generation before us, and of course, in all this we must always think back to the by now almost legendary speech of Winston Churchill which he delivered in Zurich, which helped to lay the foundation for this future development."

Those were Chancellor Kohl's words.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear after her discussions with Chancellor Kohl, we see 1945 as a year which saw a new rebirth of freedom; a freedom which we must preserve for future generations.

I should also stress, and this will be reflected in the tone of the occasion, that VE day did not mark the end of the second world war and our commemorations will focus on the ending of the war both in Europe and in the far east and on the heroic sacrifice of the allied forces in all theatres.

Hon. Members have expressed the view in this House that those who fought in the far east should not be forgotten. I can reassure them that the gallantry those men displayed and the suffering and privations that they underwent are not forgotten; and that they will be equally honoured in our commemorations.

However, the hon. Gentleman has specifically referred in this short debate to Victory in Europe day, and I believe it would be appropriate to spend a few moments considering the events that have followed that victory.

In 1945 Europe had been torn apart by the devastating conflict that had embroiled its nations for six years. This year we are able to celebrate 40 years of continuous peace in Europe. It is not by chance that the longest period of peace in Europe this century has coincided with the existence of the Atlantic Alliance.

The overriding purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is the preservation of the principles of freedom and democracy. Its strength lies in the determination of its signatories to do all in their power to safeguard peace and international security, and in their willingness to work together in a wholly defensive alliance. It is a measure of the remarkable success that NATO has had in meeting its objectives that the 35 years of its existence have been marked by an unbroken period of peace in Europe. This has been at a time when we have been faced with the advent of weapons of unprecedented power. There has been conflict and unrest in one or more parts of the world more or less throughout the entire period, and there has been no weakening, indeed the opposite, in the challenge posed by the Soviet Union and her Warsaw Pact allies.

What, then, has been the key to the continued effectiveness of our transatlantic Alliance? There have, of course been difficulties and differences of opinion—this is natural in an alliance of independent nations. But it is the main strength of NATO that its members, with common aims and interests, can discuss and resolve their problems together. NATO is an association of free states, joined together to preserve their security by collective self-defence, and to strengthen peace by means of constructive dialogue. Our solidarity does not conflict with the ability of each country to pursue its own policies. We are a partnership of equals, with none dominant and none dominated, but we are committed to close consultation and co-operation in pursuit of our successful aims.

In addition to guaranteeing our security, we of course see the need to build the foundations of lasting peace, to develop balanced East-West relations and to contribute to peaceful progress worldwide. We shall continue to pursue these ends with our allies in NATO.

Probably three fifths of our population were born after the end of the Second World War, including many hon. Members of this House. I myself was born midway through the war in 1942. It is as easy for my own and following generations to forget the tyranny, the inhumanity, the bloodshed, the destruction and the suffering of the conflict as it is to be unaware of the fortitude, the courage and the bravery demonstrated by our forces and civilians and by those of our allies.

The peace and freedom which we in the West enjoy was not won easily and must never be taken for granted. We in this country have so much to be thankful for.

[Mr. John Lee]

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 29 January 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is my intention to object to all 18 Bills. Could they be put together and objection be taken to all of them at once?

Mr. Speaker: That might save time. Objection is taken to all of them. I shall read through the list quickly, and the Chairman of Ways and Means will then name a future day for all of them.

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BILL
BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL
CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL BILL
C-POULTRY COMPANY LIMITED BILL
FELIXSTOWE DOCK AND RAILWAY BILL
GOSPORT BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL
GREATER LONDON COUNCIL (GENERAL POWERS) BILL
HARROGATE STRAY BILL
HASTINGS PIER BILL
LINCOLN CITY COUNCIL BILL
LLOYDS BANK (MERGER) BILL
NATIONAL BANK OF NEW ZEALAND LIMITED BILL
PLYMOUTH MARINE EVENTS BASE BILL
ROYAL BANK OF SCOTLAND BILL
SCARBOROUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL
SOUTH YORKSHIRE PASSENGER TRANSPORT BILL
STREATHAM PARK CEMETERY BILL
YORKSHIRE WATER AUTHORITY BILL

To be read a Second time upon Thursday.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Trident

1. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now announce his revised estimate of the cost of Trident.

2. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the latest cost estimate of Trident.

6. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the most recent dollar-sterling exchange rate of which the review of Trident costs has taken account.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Heseltine): Each year the long-term programme of my Department is re-costed as part of a planning process. Established convention indicates that I should assume a dollar exchange rate of £1 to $1·38. The updated Trident figure on this basis, and at average 1984-85 prices, is £9,285 million. Approximately 55 per cent. of the work by value is planned to be undertaken in the United Kingdom. I see no case for changing the conventions on which this Government and previous Governments have worked. However, in view of public interest, I am making available to the Select Committee on Defence and the Public Accounts Committee an indication of the effects of the changes in the exchange rates so that those wishing to predict exchange rate changes over the procurement period of the Trident programme will be able to do so at the exchange rate that they consider appropriate.

Mr. Strang: Will the Secretary of State admit that that cost is a gross underestimate, taking into account the current dollar-sterling rate? Will he further admit that the 55 per cent. figure in the United States is also an underestimate? Is it not outrageous that thousands of millions of pounds are to be spent in the United States on American technology and jobs? How can the right hon. Gentleman defend that situation to the millions of unemployed people in this country?

Mr. Heseltine: No doubt inadvertently, the hon. Gentleman has got the figures wrong. The figure that we believe to be right is about 55 per cent. of the cost in the United Kingdom, as opposed to 45 per cent. as the hon. Gentleman says. The issue is whether Britain needs its own independent nuclear deterrent, and whether the D5 Trident system is the appropriate one. That was the decision reached by the Government, and upon which they were elected. It would not be difficult to persuade the British people, employed or unemployed, that the security of these islands depends on Britain's independent deterrent and associated defence policies.

Mrs. Clwyd: The Secretary of State will no doubt recall telling the Select Committee on Defence on 22 May 1984 that the whole submarine will be built here. How can he say that when £17 million worth is being built in the United States and another so-called design contract costing $63 million has been given to General Dynamics

Corporation? Does he not recognise that, to use a favourite phrase of the Government, he has a grossly uneconomic weapon, which should be scrapped forthwith?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Lady does not believe that Britain should have an independent nuclear deterrent, and nor does the Labour party, to which she belongs, but that party was soundly beaten in the election, one of the reasons being precisely that conviction. I do not have the record of my evidence to the Select Committee in front of me, but I shall check it. The submarine will be part of a contract that we intend to place with Vickers. We think that within that contract the American contribution could be about 10 per cent.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is there not a point at which the exchange rate will reach such an extreme that the missile system cannot be ordered without it causing immense damage to other conventional defence spending, unless the matter is fudged by extending the procurement life, presumably even beyond the life of the missile system?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman has asked two questions, the first of which concerns the changing assumptions in the period concerned. Ministers have given no authority to change the assumptions on which the costing has taken place. I have added a further instruction to my Department that there will be no change in the assumptions and that, subject only to security considerations, if there were in my view to be a need to change the assumption I would report that fact to the House. Otherwise, the position remains as it was when Sir John Nott first explained the circumstances relating to D5 to the House in March 1982. There will not be a spread, as has been suggested. I agree that trying to predict 18 or 20 years ahead for a programme of this type produces some elements of guesstimate at the tail end of the period.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the scale and impact of the programme on the defence budget. It is a very large programme, but the House will take account of the fact that, when the Tornado programme was in its early stages, it was a larger proportion of the defence budget, which, in turn, was smaller than it is now. I do not remember there being a great outcry from the Opposition that there was no way in which we could accommodate the Tornado programme in the smaller defence budget of the time.

Sir Anthony Buck: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to emphasise that the programme will enable us to retain a capability which successive Governments have thought it appropriate for us to have and that more than half the money that is to be spent will be spent in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. and learned Friend is correct. He and the Government believe that an independent British nuclear deterrent is an essential part of the strategy that has kept the peace in Europe for a record period in contemporary history. As those policies patently have worked, and continue to work, we believe that they should be continued.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that cost can be assessed only in relation to effectiveness? Is he worried that the development of star wars defence systems might render Trident ineffective? Does that make a case for the development of alternative non-ballistic systems, which might also be cheaper?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises an important question, but the time scale in which those questions will be answered provides the answer to his question. The star wars project is a research project which will cover a period of time which will ensure that, even if the Americans determine to go ahead with the project—nobody knows whether they will have the capability or, in the end, will take such a decision—the fact remains that we should have Trident in service long before that. It would play a critical role in the defence of the West long before the star wars project could be implemented.

Mr. Steel: Will the Secretary of State confirm that three things have changed since the Government first took their decision: first, that the cash cost of the project has virtually doubled; secondly, that the time over which it is planned to repay it has been lengthened twice; and, thirdly, that the value of contracts to British industry has declined as a proportion of the total? Does he agree that those changes mean that we should re-examine the programme and decide whether, in the interests of British defence and industry, we should go for more spending on conventional defences?

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman will know that we have increased the defence budget by about £3,000 million in real terms and that that enhancement is broadly continuing into the future. It has given us vast extra resources, part of which will be spent on Trident. I have read the right hon. Gentleman's speeches in which he suggests that assumptions have been changed. How does he square that with the comments of my predecessor, Sir John Nott who said:

"I can confirm that we are talking about large numbers of jobs for British industry and a huge programme which will stretch over the period of 18 years."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1982; Vol. 19, c. 979.]

If the right hon. Gentleman had the courtesy to reflect that statement in his speeches to the House, his facts would be more accurate than they are without such reference.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Trident programme is unique, in that the envisaged costing covers the whole programme and everything that is required for Trident? All other defence expenditure costing does not include everything. For example, the Tornado programme did not include hardened shelters and the other necessary facilities. The same is true of warships and everything else. Does my right hon. Friend agree that when people talk about the cost of Trident it is the whole cost, whereas for all other defence programmes it is not?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend has made a most important point. It is especially relevant to his example of the Tornado programme. It took up a bigger proportion of the defence budget. It was a more expensive programme on a lower defence budget. The costing for it gave us only an aircraft that could fly. The weapons systems with which it had to be equipped and the infrastructure from which it would fly had to be added to the cost. That shows dramatically that, although the cost of Trident is large, because it is of such significance to the defence of the United Kingdom it is containable in our much larger defence budget.

Mr. Duffy: Even if the Secretary of State can contain the financial cost of Trident, is he not incurring greater opportunity costs in terms of the Alliance's real needs, which, on the military side, are sustainability in Europe

and, on the political side, conventional initiatives that will raise the nuclear threshold? Is he not in danger of appearing to behave as irrelevantly to the real needs of the Alliance with his Trident programme as President Reagan is with his star wars programme?

Mr. Heseltine: It was precisely because the Government wanted to increase conventional capability that we took decisions which have added £3,000 million to the defence budget in real terms. Precisely for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman has put forward so articulately, we could not understand the proposal to reduce the defence budget by one third, on which he campaigned at the general election.

Sir John Farr: I recognise the importance of Trident to us, but is my right hon. Friend aware that it would be much easier to support this policy if there were a bigger percentage of home-produced content in the weapon? Will he re-examine the weapon's control system to see whether it is possible for British contractors to quote for that part of the contract?

Mr. Heseltine: I agree with my hon. Friend that it would be attractive if, in the concept of the two-way street, there were a larger United Kingdom component in the Trident programme. It was one of the many contracts in existence when we joined, and it is extremely difficult for contractors to break into a pattern of industrial organisation of that sort. Attempts are being made and a significant number of companies are involved in the process, although not as many as I should like. That has to do with the companies themselves, not just with the attitudes of the British or American Governments. I would not want to pretend that, where we had to make a major decision about this uniquely important defence system, we were able to negotiate offset arrangements of the sort that characteristically we would want. Whereas on the concept of the two-way street the Government have a 2:1 adverse ratio, in the not-too-distant history it was a 4:1 adverse ratio.

Mr. Denzil Davies: In case the Secretary of State has not heard this news, let me tell him that the pound is not standing at $1·38 but is hovering around $1·10. That puts another £700 million, as he well knows, on the figure that he has given to the House. Therefore, the figure is £10 billion, not the £9·2 billion that he mentioned. Why does the right hon. Gentleman make himself look so ridiculous by pretending that all that money can be found without making substantial and savage cuts in Britain's real defences? Apart from a perverse vanity, what is the point of going ahead with this weapon, which no rational person could contemplate using, and which, if it were used, would turn our island into a pile of irradiated rubble?

Mr. Heseltine: Are we to gather from the right hon. Gentleman's statement that the nuclear weapons which the Labour Government thought so necessary were useful, whereas the Trident programme is not? The Labour Government consistently maintained Britain's indepedent deterrent and, in secret, modernised it through the Chevaline process. Yet this Government, who are merely continuing the same programme, have apparently lost that support.

Experimental Aircraft Project

3. **Mr. Carter-Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the present standing of the experimental aircraft project.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Adam Butler): The experimental aircraft programme is a joint venture by the Ministry of Defence and industry to bring together and demonstrate in one aircraft specific advance technologies which will be applicable to a variety of advanced aircraft. The design and construction of the experimental aircraft are progressing satisfactorily and it is on schedule for first flight in 1986.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Is the Minister aware of the urgent need for a fighter aircraft? Will he make a decision on the European fighter in March? If not, in the interests of defence, the RAF and the work force, will he go it alone?

Mr. Butler: I am interested in the fact that the hon. Gentleman has managed to switch the question to one about the European fighter aircraft, about which a question will follow soon. The experimental aircraft is not a prototype for the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend try to obtain data from this most important technology demonstrator and pool the data with that obtained from the French on the ACX aircraft, since both experimental aeroplanes will provide the technology needed for the Euro fighter, which we all hope will form the front line of the five air forces which have agreed joint staff targets?

Mr. Butler: I am glad that my hon. Friend has pointed to the advantages of and need for collaboration in such matters. I hope that what he suggests will be possible.

Mr. McNamara: Can we expect the French to share their research secrets with us, when the French Government have allocated nearly three times as much money to the ACX project as we have allocated to the European fighter aircraft project? Why will the Government not invest more money, in the interests of British industry and jobs?

Mr. Butler: Again, we are straying into the question about the European fighter aircraft. I can only refer to the understanding that exists with regard to collaboration in aircraft matters. If we are to go ahead with the project, it will be essential to exchange technological information.

Nuclear Missiles

4. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether, in the light of the recent accident involving American service men handling Pershing II missiles in Germany, he will review safety precautions for handling missiles with nuclear warheads in transit in the United Kingdom.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Stanley): As I told the hon. and learned Member on 13 November, the arrangements for the safe transport of nuclear weapons remain constantly under review.

Mr. Janner: Recognising, as I hope the Government do, the anxieties about the dangers inherent in the handling and transport of nuclear missiles, will the Minister answer a simple question: are local fire and police authorities informed when missiles are to pass through their areas?

Mr. Stanley: As I told the hon. and learned Gentleman previously, guidance is issued to some chief constables and fire officers. I cannot go further than that, because it is not the Government's policy, any more that it was our predecessor's policy, to give any information about the routes or methods of transport of nuclear weapons.

Mrs. Currie: With regard to the movement of nuclear weapons and their resting places, did my hon. Friend notice the comments of Mr. Roger Spiller, the male vice chairman of the CND, that the campaign at Molesworth, unlike the unsuccessful campaign at Greenham common, will not be left to women this time because "Molesworth is more important than Greenham common"? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that shows that the philosophies and practices of the CND are not only wrong and foolish, but sexist to boot?

Mr. Stanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I assure her that the addition of a male element will make this campaign no more successful than the previous one.

FH70 Ammunition

5. **Mr. McWilliam** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning FH70 ammunition procurement.

Mr. Butler: Deliveries of FH70 ammunition began in 1978 and procurement of certain kinds is continuing. The allocation of work on the FH70 programme is governed by a memorandum of understanding agreed by the participants to the programme.

Mr. McWilliam: Is it not a matter of some concern that the FH70 ammunition, which was due from Germany at the beginning of December, appears not yet to be available to us? It is three months late.

Mr. Butler: There have been some delays, due to problems in the Defence Procurement Executive of the German Government, but that does not alter the position with regard to the placing of the order. Much as I would have liked it to go to the royal ordnance factories, it was out of the question that it should do so under the terms of our understanding.

Mrs. McCurley: In the light of my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), can he tell us whether the final cost of the contract for the FH70, which has gone to Germany, will be more than it would have been had the contract been carried out in this country?

Mr. Butler: I understand that the prices are competitive in this matter.

Mr. McNamara: As the ammunition is used in the main battlefield Howitzer, will the Minister of State give an undertaking that it is not the intention now or in the future to adapt the Howitzer to take either nuclear warheads or the enhanced radiation weapons?

Mr. Butler: I can give the hon. Gentleman a categorical no. If I am mistaken, I shall let him know.

Mr. Merchant: In regard to the FH70 order, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the excellent record and delivery times furnished by the royal ordance factory at Birtley for previous FH70 orders and compare these with the apparent unreliability of the German source?

Mr. Butler: I have explained that the delays which have occurred in regard to the project have been within the Defence Procurement Executive, not, so far as I am aware, within German industry. Nevertheless, I am prepared to pay tribute to the royal ordance factory in the way that my hon. Friend would like.

Nuclear Tests (Radiation)

7. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the evidence given by his Department to the Australian Royal Commission currently in London investigating the safety of the United Kingdom nuclear test programme in the 1950s.

Mr. Butler: Her Majesty's Government are co-operating as fully as practicable with the Australian Royal Commission. Twenty-five witnesses are being assisted to give evidence to the commission. They include high-ranking staff who were in responsible positions during the test programme, and the first to be called was Lord Penney. The Ministry of Defence has also made available a large number of trials and other reports and is providing the commission with access to and guidance on the massive volume of contemporary material relating to the test programmes.

Mr. Hamilton: Have not the Government been criticised by the commission for refusing access to certain documents which it thought were vital? If so, is this not another example of the Government being more concerned to avoid political embarrassment than to show concern for national security?

Mr. Butler: No. On the contrary, we have gone out of our way to be helpful. We have released documents ahead of the 30-year rule; we have given members of the commission access to Aldermaston; and we have assisted them in looking at the material. But—and I hope the hon. Gentleman will agree with me—quite rightly we are witholding information which is still classified, and for good reason.

Sir John Farr: When will the report on the tests being conducted by my right hon. Friend's Department into British service personnel who were in that area in the 1950s be available, and when will the findings of the tests and analyses be published?

Mr. Butler: The report will not be available until the autumn of 1986, due to its complexity. There would be no point in having the report if the findings were not made generally available.

Scottish Junior Soldiers

8. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning Government proposals to transfer the training of Scottish junior soldiers to England.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): Representations have been received on this subject from Members of both Houses of Parliament, representatives of local authorities and from members of the public.

Mr. Bruce: Will the Minister acknowledge that he and his colleagues have totally failed to make a case for the

proposed closure and that the only case they have made is that they will save £3·382 million? In the context of the defence budget, is that not a paltry sum to end 200 years of starting the training of junior infantry men within Scotland? Will he reverse the decision and continue to ensure that Scottish regiments' recruits for the infantry are trained within Scotland?

Mr. Lee: I know of the hon. Gentleman's interest in this matter, but the closure of Bridge of Don is part of an overall scheme which will reduce the number of establishments from 21 to 13 and save about 100 civilian jobs overall and £8 million worth of capital costs, and also substantial running costs. The decision has been taken and it is irrevocable.

Mr. Pollock: Does the Minister appreciate that these proposals continue to cause grave disquiet among many of my constituents, who remain deeply unhappy at the prospect of losing an important visible regimental link at Bridge of Don? Is it not a fact that the argument on unit costs could be transformed by a simple policy change whereby more junior training took place at Bridge of Don rather than elsewhere? Will he examine that option carefully before any final step is taken?

Mr. Lee: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, which he has expressed on a number of occasions in public and in private. We have looked at all the options. In 1983-84, 183 recruits went through Bridge of Don, whereas 785 went through the Shorncliff establishment in Kent, so there is really no comparison.

European Fighter Aircraft

9. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the proposed European fighter aircraft.

14. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current position of collaborative negotiations on the proposed European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Butler: The feasibility study on the European figher aircraft is continuing and we expect to receive reports on the outcome of the industrial aspects of that study shortly. Discussions are also proceeding at Government level on a range of activities affecting the programme. Defence Ministers will meet in the spring to review the latest position.

Mr. Thorne: May we be assured that, should we go ahead with the production of a European fighter aircraft, a major portion of the production work will take place in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Butler: If we follow precedent in this matter, the work sharing will be according to the number of aircraft that the respective air forces need.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Will my right hon. Friend accept that rumours of a deferment of the meeting of Defence Ministers of the countries likely to be involved in the project, originally scheduled for the spring, respresent yet more success for the French, one of whose objectives seems to be to delay this project at any costs either to the benefit of their industry or to the detriment of ours? Does he appreciate that, in those circumstances, British Aerospace and other potential partners on the United Kingdom side are expecting a firm stand to be taken when the meeting eventually takes place?

Mr. Butler: I said in my main answer that the Defence Ministers intend to meet in the spring to review progress and that the results of the study will be available shortly. That being the case, I hope that we can make progress on this matter. On the other hand, anybody with experience of the project will know that difficulties have arisen in the past, that compromises have been necessary and that there may be considerable argument before we can decide whether to go on to the next stage. It is the intention of the Government as a whole to make this collaborative project work if we can because it will be to the advantage of our Air Force and industry.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister confirm that the basic weight of this aircraft should be between 10 tonnes and 11 tonnes, because it would then be likely to meet the operational requirements of the RAF?

Mr. Butler: No, Sir. The work is being done around a weight of 9½ tonnes, with some opportunity to investigate a variant on that.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is my right hon. Friend aware that as up to 800 of these aircraft could eventually be produced for the countries interested in obtaining them, this is a matter of enormous importance for the development of future technology and employment prospect in Britain, especially for companies interested in tendering under the programme?

Mr. Butler: The sales prospects for this aircraft within NATO and to third countries will be greater if it proceeds as a collaborative venture than if, for instance, we are forced back on to a unilateral solution.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is considerable concern in the aircraft industry lest this project ends in fiasco? Is he further aware of the feeling in the industry that the Secretary of State for Defence is being led by the nose by the French? Is it not a fact that the requirements of the French air force and of the RAF are different, in that the RAF wants a combat fighter while the French want a ground attack fighter? Will he now say whether, if the project is cancelled and does not go ahead, we will build our own aircraft?

Mr. Butler: I shall certainly not answer the last part of that supplementary question directly because, first, it is our intention to try to make the project succeed, and, secondly, if we cannot go ahead with all the partners which are at present involved, it obviously makes sense to see whether it would be sensible to proceed with other partners. My judgment is that industry in Britain is much more realistic and pragmatic about this matter than is the right hon. Gentleman.

Joint Defence Consultative Process

10. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the developments within the Western European Union of the joint defence consultative process originally proposed last summer.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes. The Rome meeting of Western European Union Foreign and Defence Ministers last October was an excellent start. I am looking forward to the next meeting with my WEU colleagues later this year.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. Does he think that, apart from the framework of

the discussions, this process is capable of producing beneficial side effects and results — as, for instance, British weapons sales to the French in greater measure? Is my right hon. Friend optimistic that we may be able to sell the ALARM missile system to the French?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will be aware that one of the matters about which the Ministers gathered in the WEU felt strongly was that we should not indulge in overlapping with other or existing organisations. Arms collaboration with our allies—the French would feature prominently in that collaboration—is very much seen as the preserve of the independent European programme group, where we have recently taken decisions and hope to move forward on a very significant range of collaborative projects.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: Can my right hon. Friend say to what extent he wants the WEU to evolve into a uniquely European voice upon defence and arms limitation matters?

Mr. Heseltine: I believe that the Ministers from all the countries who attended that meeting realised that there were a range of reasons that brought us together. It was very much a formative experience for Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers to meet one another. There is shortly to be another meeting. I have no doubt that in both that forum and a range of other appropriate fora, arms control will be a very live issue in 1985.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the Secretary of State agree that the French are very much cooling off with regard to the suggested new liaison and that it is very unlikely that the optimism he has displayed will prove to be of any import? The important element is the French, and the French are no longer willing and happy to participate in this exercise.

Mr. Heseltine: The Labour party has been so unsuccessful in speaking on behalf of the British people that I am not surprised that it should now speak on behalf of the French. I doubt whether its views will be any more attractive in France than they are in Britain.

Chemical Weapons

11. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the stockpile of chemical weapons by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its allies.

16. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's defensive capability against chemical weapons.

Mr. Heseltine: We view the massive Soviet chemical weapons capability with particular concern. We believe that total abolition is the best answer and are continuing to work in Geneva for a comprehensive, verifiable and worldwide ban on such weapons, including the destruction of existing stocks. In parallel, we keep our defensive measures under careful review in the light of the threat. A substantial investment has been made over many years to provide our armed forces with defensive protection against chemical attack.

Mr. Greenway: Can my right hon. Friend shed any light on why the Soviet Union is currently running heavy troop training programmes in protective clothing for chemical warfare, bearing in mind that this country abandoned chemical weapons nearly 30 years ago, that none are deployed currently in Western Europe and that the Soviet Union has at this moment 300,000 tonnes of chemicals for military use?

Mr. Heseltine: I am the first to share my hon. Friend's anxiety about the training exercises in which the Soviet Union involves itself, including those involving chemical weapons. I believe that it would be far better employed in pursuing as actively as we and our American allies wish to pursue the arms control proposals that are on the table.

Mr. Proctor: Bearing in mind that when, in the late 1950s, the United Kingdom renounced the offensive use of chemical weapons there was no similar response from the Soviet Union, what are the present prospects for the success of the talks?

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand that it is extremely difficult to forecast accurately the prospects for success in arms control talks. All that one can say on behalf of this Government is that we shall make every endeavour to bring those talks to a fruitful conclusion.

Mr. James Lamond: Will the "every endeavour" that we are prepared to make include trying to convince the Americans that the challenge inspection facilities of chemical manufacturing plants should be extended to all plants, whether or not they are state-owned?

Mr. Heseltine: If the hon. Gentleman follows the details he will be aware that the Americans have explained their attitudes on this, which will have an effect upon a wide range of plants in the United States outside those owned by the Government.

Mr. Conway: Is my right hon. Friend happy with the priority that is given in our armed services to nuclear, biological and chemical training? Does he anticipate the early introduction of the next generation of NBC protective clothing?

Mr. Heseltine: I can assure my hon. Friend that we maintain our research into those matters and update the equipment as appropriate from time to time. I cannot tell the House that I am satisfied with the existing situation. I do not see how any Secretary of State for Defence could be when a country, in alliance, that poses the threat to our interest has such large stocks of chemical weapons and we have none.

Mr. McNamara: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the United States has stocks of chemical weapons in Germany? Is he aware that the Opposition support wholeheartedly attempts by Her Majesty's Government to obtain a comprehensive ban on all chemical weapons and any efforts being made to improve the capability of NBC protective uniforms? What lessons have been learnt from Operation Lionheart in that respect?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the United States' stocks of chemical weapons are of a very aged character, that there has been no updating of those stocks for a significant period and that they are of a limited scale. We are still studying the lessons of Lionheart in our Department. As I have already said, we shall continue to research and update the protective equipment in that area.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Secretary of State confirm that it will be no part of the review that he announced earlier to allow the Americans to stockpile chemical weapons in British bases?

Mr. Heseltine: I have no proposals of that sort before me.

Ethiopia (RAF Aircraft)

12. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will extend the Ethiopian tour of duty of Royal Air Force transport planes for a further three months.

Mr. Stanley: Our offer to extend the airlift to the end of March and to review the position again nearer that time has been accepted by the Ethiopian Government. I am glad to tell the House that the British RAF and Army detachment in Ethiopia has now airlifted some 6,000 tonnes of relief supplies, and has taken part in recent trials in the air dropping of supplies to more inaccessible parts of the famine area.

Mr. Wallace: I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House will pay tribute to the work done by the RAF. The public, having responded so well to the appeals that have been made, think that it is important, both for distribution purposes and psychologically, that the Government continue their commitment. Will the Minister give the House more reassurance about the future extent to which food can be taken to the Tigré and Eritrea regions of Ethiopia by the RAF?

Mr. Stanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said about the contributions made by the armed services. Undoubtedly, they have been strikingly effective in the utilisation of the two Hercules that we have out there. We shall continue the dropping operation by conventional landing techniques, but, as I have said, we have just started exploring the possibility of air dropping. Whether we shall be able to do that will depend upon whether we can put together arrangements for the landing of ground parties, which is obviously crucial when dropping by free fall.

Sir Hector Monro: Will my right hon. Friend go further and warmly congratulate the Hercules squadron —both the aircrew on their exceptional airmanship and the ground crew on their exceptional servicing record— thus keeping the squadron going on short runways and in difficult conditions, and thereby playing an important part in the relief of this difficult part of east Africa?

Mr. Stanley: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I can certainly bear witness, from my experience out there just before Christmas, of the difficult landing and take-off conditions which the RAF has successfully dealt with, not least in coping with the considerable problems represented by the bird strikes, which took out about 9ft of the leading edge of one of the wings of the Hercules just before Christmas. All concerned have done outstandingly well.

Mr. O'Neill: I congratulate the Government on their work, but will the Minister confirm that the cost of the work is being borne by the Ministry of Defence and will not come out of the Overseas Development Administration budget?

Mr. Stanley: No, that is not quite correct. For the first three months of our contribution the costs were borne exclusively by the Ministry of Defence, on the defence budget. With the extension of the operation from the beginning of February, we have agreed to share the costs equally between the Overseas Development Administration and the Ministry of Defence.

Royal Observer Corps

13. **Mr. John M. Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he last reviewed the role and resources of the Royal Observer Corps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The role and resources of the Royal Observer Corps are kept under regular consideration in conjunction with the Home Office. The corps continues to provide an excellent service and there are no present plans for a review.

Mr. Taylor: While I thank my hon. Friend for his reply, may I ask him to say whether he is committed to sustaining the resources and morale of those who serve the Royal Observer Corps, and will he from time to time say how the great majority of the British people appreciate its vigilance?

Mr. Lee: I am delighted to have this opportunity of paying tribute to the Royal Observer Corps. Its morale is excellent. It does a first-class job for us. There are 11,000 serving members at present and the corps costs less than £5 million a year. It is a first-class unit.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Dykes: As there still is great public anxiety on the subject, will my right hon. Friend undertake this afternoon to look at the subject again and reassure the House and the nation that the Government will look twice at the dangers of imposing any additional forms of taxation on pension funds or lump sum payments?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the concern about this subject. I refer my hon. Friend to the statement that was made in the House, in response to questions, by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As my hon. Friend will be the first to appreciate, I cannot say anything more at the present time, but I do urge him to look at that statement by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Kinnock: Three weeks ago the Government were against the idea of increasing interest rates to defend sterling, but they did increase them and it did not work. Two weeks ago the Government scorned the idea of intervening to defend sterling, but they did intervene and it did not work. Can the Prime Minister tell us what she is going to do now?

The Prime Minister: I recall the right hon. Gentleman saying on 15 January that he was absolutely against speculation against the pound and that he thought it was

"irresponsible and irrational". If that is what he thought then, I hope that that is what he thinks now, and that he thinks that the action that has been taken to stop this is right and well judged in the circumstances.

Mr. Kinnock: I do think it irresponsible and irrational, but it is the right hon. Lady who believes in the market system and not us. Her response again today will impress nobody, either at home or abroad. It is the right hon. Lady who has surrendered policy-making entirely to the whims of the market. The result is chaos, a crisis of confidence and a huge rise in interest rate burdens on both business borrowers and home buyers. Is the right hon. Lady going to change her policies in the light of that experience, or will she go on with the same mixture of panic and paralysis that has brought us to this mess?

The Prime Minister: I am not quite sure whether the right hon. Gentleman is objecting to what we have done or saying that we should have done nothing. In fact, the action that my right hon. Friend took was to maintain the financial strategy that has brought inflation lower for a longer period than any other Government have done previously and which, in spite of the effects of a coal strike —*[Interruption.]*—for 10 to 11 months last year has kept the current account in surplus.

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Lady's strategy is coming apart at the seams, and she knows very well that it is coming apart at the seams. What we want is a real strategy to give proper growth and recovery to our economy, and all we are getting from the Government, especially now, is dithering and, again this afternoon, dodging. That will only mean more on the dole and more in debt. We have not a crisis of confidence in the country but an absence of confidence in the Government. Are the Government willing to change their policies, and will the Prime Minister really help by chucking out the Chancellor?

The Prime Minister: The action taken has been such as to impose financial discipline on all sections of the economy, including the Government. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that gross domestic product is at its highest ever level. I hope that he is pleased about that. Fixed investment across the economy is at its highest ever real level. Retail sales are at their highest ever real level; they have increased by 4 per cent. in volume. Profits increased by 20 per cent.—*[Interruption.]*—in the first three quarters of 1984. The Government's record on inflation is second to none. If the right hon. Gentleman listens to what is being said about unemployment, he will understand that the most important thing in tackling unemployment is to keep down inflation.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat what I said last week during Prime Minister's Questions. The Leader of the Opposition gets a fair hearing and it is only right that the Prime Minister should get an equally fair hearing.

Mr. Hordern: As interest rates have been increased to a level that must put at rest any fears that there may have been about inflation, and as the markets are now offering the best opportunity ever seen for our exporters and business men to do business abroad, what reason have we to complain?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend will be aware, markets are opening up because of the strength of the dollar and the weakness of sterling compared with the dollar. He will be aware also that it is vital to stay competitive on wage costs. The people who can benefit most from that are those who are best able to take advantage of the present exchange rate. My hon. Friend will know that our wage costs are rising and that the Opposition support every wage claim. At the same time, the wage costs of our competitors are either remaining stable or decreasing. If the Opposition want to improve the prospect of employment, they must help to keep down unit wage costs.

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson: As, in part, sterling's problems stem from uncertainty over oil prices, and as over-production at a time of depressed demand leads to a disorderly market, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government have reserve powers to limit production and depletion in the North sea? Will she consider using these to underpin the light crude oil price and so help to bring back stability to the oil market?

The Prime Minister: The policy that we pursue is really the same as that of the United States. We do not have powers to restrict production in the North sea, but we have powers to purchase 51 per cent. of that production at whatever is the market price. I think that we must stick to that.

Mr. Steel: When will the Prime Minister recognise that the rest of the world does not share her rosy view about her handling of the economy and that it is possible that the rest of the world is right and she is wrong? Since she spoke on "Woman's Hour" and said that the pound was undervalued she has had to increase interest rates to their highest level for 150 years. Will she explain to the House why it is that the pound does not do what she tells it to do?

The Prime Minister: I note what the right hon. Gentleman says about interest rates. He will note that interest rates in real terms are not as high as they have been in the United States, and I am often urged to follow the course of the United States.

Q2. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hamilton: In view of the shambles in which the Prime Minister finds herself, does she not think that it is now appropriate for her to dispose of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the national interest? As she cannot find a satisfactory alternative, will she say whether the promised tax concessions will be implemented in the Budget? If they are, will that result in more new real jobs, in her terms?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman must await the Budget. I remind him that the Government have raised the thresholds of personal taxation by 16 per cent. That means that income that is tax-free has been increased by 16 per cent. The previous Labour Government lowered thresholds.

Mr. Grylls: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although the high interest rates that have had to be introduced are a worry and a difficulty for industry, business in Britain will, nevertheless, support the Government while they continue to keep inflation down? Indeed, business would probably send the Government a

message saying that they must try harder in dealing with inflation, because inflation destroys both large and small businesses.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is always a disappointment to have to raise interest rates, but the effect would be far worse if inflation were allowed to increase again. On 7 February 1978 the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said that

"in terms of promoting employment opportunities throughout the country . . . nothing is more important than containing inflation."—[*Official Report*, 7 February 1978; Vol. 943, c. 1271.]

Q3. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Prime Minister aware that, at the weekend, all over Scotland there was snow, and temperatures at well below freezing, old people suffering from hypothermia and pneumonia, and yet still there was no exceptional weather payment? How much longer must the north of England and Scotland suffer these arctic conditions? How many more old people must die before the right hon. Lady changes her mind?

The Prime Minister: This question is asked on every occasion, and on every occasion I give the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends the same reply: this matter is under review. The main heating benefit is the regular heating amount paid. The heating amount paid to pensioners under this Government far exceeds the amount paid under any previous Labour Government. This Government have everything to be proud of in the way in which they have looked after the heating allowance for pensioners.

Sir Bernard Braine: I comment on the proposed celebrations of VE day. Does my hon. Friend recall that the war started with the cruel dismemberment of Poland and that, in what followed, Polish pilots helped to defend this island and Polish troops fought with distinction alongside our own troops? Yet, when the war was over, those Polish troops found that they had lost their homeland. I ask my right hon. Friend, most respectfully, whether she will ensure that Polish veterans living in this country, and Czechoslovaks who shared the same fate, will have an honoured place in any parades or church services?

The Prime Minister: I gladly join my right hon. Friend in paying tribute to what Polish troops did in wartime and to the gallant way in which they fought throughout the war. We shall ensure that his point is taken fully into account.

Q4. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes: Has the Prime Minister seen the estimates that, if the coal strike ends, consumption of oil will decrease by between 500,000 and 1 million barrels a day? If the right hon. Lady is so good at predicting what will happen to the economy, will she predict what will happen to the price of oil in that event? And what will be the effect on the pound?

The Prime Minister: Anyone who could predict that would not be on this earth, and I doubt whether they can even predict that up aloft.

Q5. **Mr. John Browne** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Browne: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, of the factors affecting sterling, many — such as the value of the dollar, the price of oil, the world recession and the size of the United States' deficit — are completely outside the Government's control? Does my right hon. Friend accept also — *[Interruption.]* — that the majority of my constituents, many of whom do not vote Conservative, think that she has done and continues to do an outstanding job?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend, and all reasonable people would agree with him on the facts. The price of oil is outside the control of the Government. Total production is far too small to have an effect on the price of oil. The rise in the dollar is also outside the control of the Government. We have done all that we can about that by taking part with the G5 nations in co-ordinated intervention. We are left with two problems, which are the decisions that have been taken about the price of oil and the coal strike.

Q6. **Mr. Geoffrey Robinson** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Robinson: Will the Prime Minister explain to the House why real interest rates in this country are now double those in Germany? Is it not a reflection of a complete lack of international confidence in her and her Government?

The Prime Minister: No, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Gentleman will study the international comparisons he will find that West Germany has run a strict financial policy for many years. Therefore, it has brought its inflation down further than ours. In West Germany it is 2·1 per cent. He will also find that it has kept its public expenditure under control and that it made considerable sacrifices for two years. West Germany has — *[Interruption.]* I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is interested in the reply or whether his hon. Friends are just interested in shouting. He asked me about West Germany, and I pointed out that its inflation is lower than ours through a strict financial policy. In answer to a previous question, I pointed out that it keeps its wage costs down. Its unit wage costs are lower than ours. It has kept a strict control of public expenditure. In the past two years West Germany has cut unemployment and maternity benefits and delayed pension increases. With that strictness over the past two years, and some of the sacrifices made by her people, it is not surprising that the deutschmark should have risen against sterling.

Mr. Kinnock: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it arise out of Question Time?

Mr. Kinnock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As you may know, Mr. Speaker, early today we asked for a statement from

the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the Government's economic policy, and such a statement was refused. In view of that, the Prime Minister's utterly inadequate responses on that matter, which is of central importance today, and because of the Government's bungling economic policy as evidenced by manufactured trade and output figures, unemployment figures — *[Interruption.]* interest rates figures and the current turmoil, I wish to give you notice that we shall be tabling a motion censuring the Government for their utter mismanagement.

Interest Rates

3.33 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer the question of which I have given him prior notice. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Labour party has —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I called the hon. Member to ask a private notice question. It is only fair that he should be heard. I cannot hear.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Mr. Speaker, the Labour party has illusions of adequacy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member should ask the private notice question that he gave to me.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: If I may be allowed to do that, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer the question of which I have given him prior notice—if he will make a statement of the current level of interest rates.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): At noon yesterday, following a rise in market interest rates, one of the clearing banks raised its base rate from 12 per cent. to 14 per cent. The Bank of England raised its dealing rates by a corresponding amount when it dealt in the bill market at 12.15 pm. The other clearing banks followed within the next hour or so.

Yesterday afternoon I gave evidence on these and related matters at considerable length to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, under the Chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), which I understand will be reporting to the House shortly.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Is the Chancellor aware that the Government's "outstanding" record, to which his hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) referred earlier, is the highest level of unemployment since the 1930s and now the highest level of real interest rates since Britain came off the gold standard in 1931? Is he aware that the Government bear a very heavy responsibility for that record because they have been responsible for the uncertainty and confusion about exchange rate policy, because they have taken no action on oil prices or the rate of depletion of our North sea oil, as his hon. Friend the Member for Winchester also pointed out, and because the international markets are reflecting their lack of confidence in the non-oil sector of our economy?

Will the Chancellor now make clear exactly what the Government's exchange rate policy is, at what level he expects to keep the pound and whether he is prepared to take action on oil prices or on the rate of North sea oil depletion? Is he aware that if he does not do that he and his colleagues will be causing the people of this country to pay the price of the Government's own incompetence and blind devotion to economic dogma?

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Gentleman should know perfectly well that no Chancellor is ever prepared to comment on market tactics and matters of that kind which would benefit only speculators and others and would be of no benefit to our country.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that those who dominate the exchange markets of the world are seldom, anyhow in my experience, much preoccupied with the British public sector borrowing requirement; and that until we apply our minds to their practical concerns rather than to our own theoretical shibboleths we are unlikely to be able to restore sterling to its proper level in world exchange markets?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is a much travelled man with great experience of financial operators throughout the world. Nevertheless, in my experience, there is and always has been considerable concern in the markets, among finance ministries and indeed within the IMF, as some Opposition Members will recall, about the public sector borrowing requirement of this and other countries and about the budget deficit of the United States, a matter about which my hon. Friend himself has expressed concern in the past.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): As the Bank of England is now intervening to protect the pound, and as the Chancellor has restored minimum lending rate and is prepared to co-operate with other economies to protect the pound against the dollar, does he still hold to the dogma that free market forces should be allowed to operate?

Mr. Lawson: Of course free market forces will operate. It is one of the illusions of right hon. and hon. Members on the Labour Benches that by a wave of a wand they can abolish free market forces. As I have said on a previous occasion, the decision taken by the Finance Ministers of the five major industrialised countries of the Western world a fortnight ago in Washington was that the time had come when it would be appropriate from time to time to intervene in a concerted way in the foreign exchange markets. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] That was of course fully in line with the Williamsburg declaration which was signed some time ago.

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are hardly laughing matters.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): On the influence of the crude oil price on sterling, would not my right hon. Friend agree that the status of sterling as a petro-currency can be and probably is being very much exaggerated? Might we not do better to free ourselves completely from involvement in trying to fix the international oil price and to withdraw the price-fixing function of the British National Oil Corporation?

Mr. Lawson: My right hon. Friend is correct in saying that markets attach excessive importance to the value of North sea oil in our economy as a whole, sizeable though it is. Indeed, there is an idea that we are almost a one-commodity economy, whereas in fact oil and gas account for about 5 per cent. of gross domestic product and only 8½ per cent. of our total tax revenues. The price of oil is set by the market, not by BNOC.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): In view of the Chancellor's statement that public expenditure levels may have played some part in the fall of the value of the pound, could it be that world markets do not share his view that the £5 billion spent on fighting the miners was a worthwhile investment? Taking into account the fact that, since the fall in the value of the pound, not a single pit in Britain is uneconomic, would it not be wise for the Government to settle with the miners, who are responsible for building so much of our industrial future?

Mr. Lawson: The right hon. Gentleman's paranoia is well known. The Government are in no sense fighting the miners. They are supporting the working miners and the coal industry.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is it not true that one of the unfortunate but inevitable consequences of the rise of interest rates by more than four percentage points in recent weeks has been to add more than £1,000 million to the costs of British industry? Will my right hon. Friend therefore pay attention to the strong arguments for taking action in the Budget directly to reduce the costs of industry and so to help to offset that adverse effect?

Mr. Lawson: I shall take note of what my hon. Friend has said when I make my Budget judgments and frame the Budget. It was with this in mind that I abolished the national insurance surcharge in last year's Budget. However, I think that my hon. Friend is basing his calculation of the effect of interest rates on industry on an assumption that may well not be correct — the assumption that the present level of interest rates will remain in force for a full year.

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): Now that sterling has fallen to a relatively realistic exchange rate with the deutschmark, will the Chancellor embark on negotiations with a view to joining the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system?

Mr. Lawson: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is a matter that we keep continually under review. I do not think, however, that recent events have changed the balance of the argument one way or the other with regard to joining the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that one of the major features of the speculation against the pound in recent weeks has been the fear that the Chancellor may be getting soft on inflation and in particular that his control of the wider monetary aggregates may be rather too loose? Is not the prescription required to steady the market's nerves, therefore, the reverse of that suggested by many hon. Members? Should we not keep firm control of public expenditure and concentrate on increasing demand for industry's products through tax cuts rather than cutting costs in other ways?

Mr. Lawson: I agree very much with the thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): Does the Chancellor realise that, whether he likes it or not, the international financial world regards the pound sterling as a petro-currency? Is he aware that the policy that he as Secretary of State for Energy and his predecessors followed, of aggressive over-production, is now undermining the value of oil in the world market and is leading to the problems that he is encountering, especially higher interest rates? Will he contact OPEC to see what he can do with it to keep the value of oil stable? He will find that that is beneficial to the United Kingdom economy.

Mr. Lawson: North sea oil has been one of the great successes of the British economy in the past few years. The policies that we have pursued have considerably assisted that success, which has led to the creation of many jobs in Scotland in the oil industry and in the offshore supplies industry.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the public find it difficult to understand why the Opposition, whose stewardship of the pound sterling has been nothing short of an unmitigated disaster, take such pleasure at the pound having a rough ride? Does he agree that reactions of this type do not help stiffen the currency in international markets?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right. He will be aware that, against the EMS index, the pound sterling is higher today than it was when we took office in 1979.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): Will the Chancellor take this belated opportunity to remove some of the uncertainty which still prejudices the pound and therefore interest rates? Will he make it unequivocally clear that he has now abandoned the policy of allowing the pound to float freely?

Mr. Lawson: The policy of the Government under my predecessor and me has been that the sterling exchange rate is always taken into account in assessing the correct financial policy at the time.

Financial Services

3.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Tebbit): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the Government's proposals to establish a new regulatory framework for the financial services industry. These proposals are published in a White Paper which I have today laid before the House. Subject to the parliamentary timetable, I plan to introduce a Bill in the next Session for their implementation.

Modern technology and intense international competition are bringing about rapid changes in the financial services industry. The responsibility for responding effectively to these changes lies principally with the industry. The Government's task—in this sector as in others—is to create an environment in which it can do so. This is best done by allowing market forces to operate responsibly but without unnecessary constraints, in a way which promotes efficient and competitive business.

A prerequisite for an internationally competitive industry is a clear regulatory framework within which practitioners and customers can deal with confidence, and which safeguards the interests of investors. This regulatory framework must be capable of adjusting to changes in the shape of the markets, and of accommodating rather than stifling innovation.

This the proposals set out in the White Paper are designed to achieve. They will assist enforcement, deter fraud and malpractice, improve disclosure and lay down the principles on which business should be conducted. The proposals cover both a new regulatory framework and a new institutional structure through which it will work.

First, the regulatory framework will be based on new and comprehensive definitions of investment and of investment business. It will be an offence to carry on an investment business in the United Kingdom without authorisation. To obtain such authorisation, an investment business will have to show that it is fit and proper, and will be required to observe detailed rules for the conduct of business based on principles to be set out in the legislation. Breach of those rules will be subject to sanctions up to and including the withdrawal of the authorisation to trade.

There will be a number of important further changes. I intend to rationalise and update the legal provisions dealing with offer documents and the advertising of investments, first to make it clear what must be disclosed, and second to establish standard provisions on civil and criminal liability for omissions and mistakes. I also propose to liberalise some restrictions on the unit trust industry and to enable it, subject to appropriate safeguards, to offer a greater variety of schemes to the public. Commissions and other payments to intermediaries will be disclosed. As far as possible, the marketing of life assurance contracts will be treated in a manner similar to the marketing of other investments.

The institutional structure is designed to implement the new regulatory framework. It is based on my belief that the crucial tasks of authorising investment businesses and keeping high standards of business conduct among those so authorised can be discharged much more effectively by those closest to the market — practitioners and their customers—than by Government. Malpractices can be identified and dealt with more quickly by those people than by Government regulators.

I therefore intend to build upon what is best in self-regulation. I shall propose legislation to confer on the Secretary of State the necessary powers to grant authorisation to investment businesses and to enable him to delegate regulatory responsibility, including the power of authorisation, to one or more bodies composed both of those who provide and those who use financial services. Before doing so, I shall require to be satisfied about the composition, constitution and proposed rules of these bodies, and I shall have power to withdraw delegated powers if such a body fails to continue to meet the criteria. Steps are already in train to set up the bodies. I hope that those concerned in the financial services industry will press ahead so that the structure is in place by the time the legislation is on the statute book.

The Government see great advantages in the system of self-regulation within a statutory framework. At the same time, we recognise that self-regulation should receive statutory backing only if there is proper accountability. The White Paper sets out the detailed means by which accountability of these bodies to Government and Parliament will be achieved. I shall highlight three particular statutory safeguards. First, there will be a right of appeal on authorisation and on penalties for breach of the rules to an independent tribunal to be appointed by the Secretary of State. Secondly, the Secretary of State will have the power, to be exercised on the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, to revoke or amend rules which have anti-competitive effects. Thirdly, the Secretary of State will have various powers of appointment. I believe that our proposals combine the advantages of self-regulation within a statutory framework and proper accountability to Parliament.

I have today set out the Government's aims; our proposals for a new regulatory framework; and our proposals for a new institutional structure. The White Paper contains many details which the House will no doubt wish to study and then debate. I look forward to the contribution to be made by people both within and without the House, especially those with knowledge and experience in these matters. We have much benefited already from the advice of Professor Gower, of the Governor of the Bank of England, and of the groups chaired by Mr. Jacomb and Mr. Field.

The Government's proposals offer advantages to investors, industry and commerce, and the financial services industry itself. To the investor, our proposals offer more comprehensive protection against fraud or negligence, and better and fuller information on which to make investment decisions. To industry and commerce, they offer the prospect of keener and more innovative financial services and, therefore, of finance at cheaper rates. To the financial services industry, they offer a system administered by those familiar with the markets without unnecessary Government involvement. The high standards which we seek to promote will be in the interests of all.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): First, may I tell the Secretary of State about the areas in which there will be less controversy than others? Following the scandals of recent years in the City which led to the Gower investigation, it was clear that some action had to be taken to improve the inadequate protection offered by existing legislation, and we welcome the intention to strengthen legislation in respect of fraud and malpractice and to

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require greater disclosure and, I hope, higher standards. We also accept the desirability of a scheme of authorisation whereby there is control over those allowed to offer advice and services in investment. We shall study the White Paper and subsequent legislation with care to ensure that they reflect properly those widely shared aspirations.

Is the Secretary of State aware that the real concern in recent years has been about not only inadequate legislative provision but about the capacity for its enforcement? Too many scandals have occurred not just because the law has been weak but because there was neither the will nor the mechanism to ensure that it was properly enforced. Is the Secretary of State aware that, in succumbing so easily to the pressure for self-regulation from interested parties, he has missed a great opportunity to set up an independent and expert standing commission to supervise and enforce the new laws?

Is the Secretary of State aware that when such major new developments are afoot in the City, which may lead to enormous changes in practices, habits and business techniques and may affect standards unpredictably, it is an ideal time to make the running on behalf of the public interest, and the City's future, by appointing an independent and effective commission to supervise and enforce the new rules? Is he aware that such a commission would be able to enforce the law more expertly, effectively and independently than would the confused jumble of provisions that he has just announced, and that, as Professor Gower said, it could easily be designed to avoid the complexities of the United States model?

After one year's deliberation, can the Secretary of State explain more clearly the nature of the bodies to which he is delegating so much public responsibility? Why has he not yet decided whether there will be one body or two? Is it not true that he appears to be delegating not only enforcement but the initiative to set up and organise the new bodies? Is it not surprising that he says that he hopes the new structure will be in place in time for the legislation? Why does he not ensure that it is in place in time for the new legislation?

Despite the padding, circumlocution and waffling of the right hon. Gentleman's statement, is it not clear that, instead of seizing the opportunity to act boldly and decisively by supporting the new legislation with an independent commission at a crucial time in the City's development, he has ducked the issue by making no substantially effective change in enforcement? Is he aware that the impact of his retreat from public responsibility will be not only less effective protection for the public, but the possible weakening of the potential business effectiveness of the City in the climate of fierce international competition that lies ahead?

Mr. Tebbit: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for emphasising those parts of the White Paper and the aims on which we generally agree. I agree that there have been major difficulties with law enforcement against fraud in the City. That is why we formed the permanent fraud investigation group, which reports to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, on 1 January. That is also why we have asked Lord Roskill's committee to consider the way in which fraud trials should be conducted, and especially to consider the role of juries or assessors in such trials.

The major step forward that we have taken is to ensure that no one can trade in an investment business without authorisation. That is a step towards the prevention of fraud rather than the prosecution of fraud, and I am sure that we are as one in saying that we must prevent rather than prosecute.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has a contempt for the City and its practitioners——

Mr. Smith: I did not say that.

Mr. Tebbit: That may be so, but the solution which he proposed is strongly opposed in the City, whereas my solution has wide support in the City among practitioners and users.

As to why the Government propose two bodies instead of one——

Mr. Smith: They do not.

Mr. Tebbit: The White Paper proposes two bodies. I have said that if it is decided that it would be better to operate with one body I should be happy seriously to consider that proposal.

However, the right hon. and learned Gentleman may well be aware that there is a historical difference between the way in which activities in the City have been regulated and the role of the Department of Trade and Industry on the one hand in relation to the insurance industry and unit trusts and on the other hand of the banks and other organisations in relation to other securities. If he thinks about it for a little longer, he may well conclude that it may be right to start off along the lines which the City itself has proposed.

Mr. Peter Hordern (Horsham): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government's major priority in all this is the protection of the public? Can he confirm that the self-regulating agency which he proposes to put forward will give adequate protection to the public either by the direct representation on that self-regulating agency of outside members, say, non-executives, or a supervisory body which may investigate faults or other matters brought to it by members of the public about practices in the City?

Mr. Tebbit: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that the key in all this is the protection of the public. If the City is not seen to be a clean place in which to operate it will lose business. Thereby, gradually those who are practitioners will be losers as well. We look for efficiency, competitiveness, confidence by the investor and flexibility and vigorous enforcement against wrongdoers in the proposals which I put before the House.

In regard to the membership of the bodies, it is the intention that the members of the SIB and the MIB, the two bodies proposed, should include lay people and users of the services, as well as practitioners

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Is the Minister aware that the development of a statutory framework for self-regulation in the City is to be welcomed? Can he explain why it has taken him so long to come to the conclusion that it should be one or two bodies? Why has he not accepted the representations of quite a broad spectrum of people, including the *Financial Times*, that there should be one statutory independent body regulating the City? At a time of the creation of more and

more financial conglomerates, would not this make greater sense? Will he not, therefore, reconsider his decision and move in that direction, otherwise his proposals look very much like a limp hand in a velvet glove?

Mr. Tebbit: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening when I explained to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) the reasons which led to the interests in the City, practitioners and their customers and users proposing that there should be two bodies rather than one. It may well be that as time goes on there will be a change of view about this and that the two bodies might be merged. If that was the view which emerged, I would not oppose it. Equally, I do not think it would be appropriate at this stage for me to try to force down the necks of those who provide and use the services a solution which they do not want.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Is my right hon. Friend aware that we hope that the Bill will be given proper and mature consideration and will not be enforced before the changes come about? Is he aware that the Stock Exchange arrangement, which has led to rather a shambolic position, should not be repeated on the City as a whole? Will he agree that, wonderful and proper though the Bank of England is in the influence it should have on the City, not every institution should be subject only to its wishes? I hope that Parliament will reserve the right to the nomination of people and will not always have to accept what the Bank of England wishes because it has often been proved wrong on many things.

Mr. Tebbit: There will be proper and mature consideration of the Bill when it comes before the House. That is the way of the House on all occasions, as we all know so well from our experience in Committee—well, most of the time. When my hon. Friend reads the White Paper he will find that the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board will be appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with the approval of the Governor of the Bank of England and the members will be appointed conversely by the Governor with the approval of the Secretary of State. It will be a joint operation. The Secretary of State will appoint the chairman and all the members of the Marketing of Investments Board.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): I accept, of course, that the prime consideration is the protection of the investor, and I welcome the appointment of Lord Roskill and his committee to investigate fraud case trials, but is it not a scandal that for years crooks in the City of London have been getting away with it, although evidence has been forthcoming, because there has been a refusal to prosecute in cases which cry out for prosecution? Has this not given rise to great strength of feeling that the Government should act much more urgently? Is not the difficulty that the Minister finds himself in that the machinery he proposes must necessarily take a long time to set up and in the meantime many further serious criminal offences will be committed in the City of London without fear of prosecution, if the examples of recent years are followed?

Mr. Tebbit: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about offences which are committed but where prosecution is not carried through to conviction. As the hon. Gentleman knows, many such frauds involve persons overseas who, as foreign nationals, are not unduly anxious to come to the Old Bailey to offer evidence. As he also knows, in many cases there have been difficulties about setting out extremely complicated facts in a way which juries can fully understand and the case goes on for a long time. I am sure that under the new system, where the rules for the conduct of business will be much cleaner, clearer and consistent across the whole market, it will not only be easier to see those who have offended, but also at a much earlier stage to prohibit from trading those whose practices, even if not regarded as criminal at the moment, are in contradiction to the code under which business should be carried out in the City.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must have regard to the fact that there is to be another statement, a Standing Order No. 10 application, a ten-minute Bill and further business. I shall allow questions on this statement to go on for another 10 minutes. I hope in that time to be able to call everyone who wishes to ask a question.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): In welcoming the White Paper proposals as a good balance between the protection of the consumer and the encouragement of innovative forces in the City, may I express to my right hon. Friend one disappointment? If it is felt appropriate that the purchaser of a life assurance or investment contract should be protected, why should the protection not be extended to those who purchase motor car insurance, household insurance or insurance covering valuables, because the mis-arranging of such insurances can bring just as much hardship as the mis-arranging of life assurance or investment contracts?

Mr. Tebbit: I share entirely my hon. Friend's concern about the damage which can be done if such matters are badly or incompetently arranged. However, the Gower report and the White Paper relate to the investment and securities industry. The non-life aspects of insurance are not normally regarded as investments. Therefore, they are not covered in the White Paper.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): May we be told how the Bank of England could act as an independent adviser in the case, say, of Johnson Matthey when the bank has already offered £75 million in the rescue programme? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, in the light of the fraud that is occurring, the bank will be placed in an invidious position?

Why have the Government decided to allow a self-regulatory system to the casino economy—the City—but are insisting on trade unions being subjected to a legal straitjacket? Is it not a fact that, although the Conservatives came to power claiming that they would reduce the number of quangos, the Government are now setting up another one, to be headed by the right hon. Gentleman and to be overlorded by the iron lady with the plastic pound?

Mr. Tebbit: I should, first, inform the hon. Gentleman that I have not asked, and do not intend to ask, the bank for advice on the matter to which he has referred. Secondly, I am extremely grateful to him for raising the question of what one might call parallel treatment between the City and the trade union movement. Has he considered what would happen if the Secretary of State for Employment took him seriously? The Secretary of State

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would lay down the rules under which the trade union movement operated and would appoint the members of the TUC and the executives of the trade unions, and when trade unionists transgressed against the rules they would be prohibited from carrying on work as trade unionists, and if they did so despite that prohibition they would be sent to prison.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that most people who wish the City well and wish to see it continuing to be a successful part of the British economy will welcome the fact that in the regulation there is a minimum of Government involvement? As the power of the new City bodies will come from Parliament, through my right hon. Friend, how will Parliament be able to judge their success or failure? Will there be an annual report to Parliament from those bodies, for example?

Mr. Tebbit: The answer to the latter part of my hon. Friend's supplementary question is yes, the boards will report annually to the Secretary of State and those reports will be laid before Parliament. There will be accountability in other ways, as the Secretary of State will have power to require the amendment or withdrawal of the rules of the boards under certain circumstances, principally if they conflict with international obligations or if they are judged to be detrimental to competition and not justified in the interests of investor protection. Thus, there will be considerable parliamentary accountability.

I share my hon. Friend's view, as expressed earlier in his supplementary question, that it is better to have rather less Government involvement in the day-to-day regulation of these matters. The experience of most of us is that those in the City, the practitioners, are far quicker to detect the black sheep among their colleagues than perhaps are the Government.

Mr. Skinner: Black sheep indeed!

Mr. Tebbit: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) tempts me again. Trade unionists detect black sheep among their members, and that is why the NUM and many of its senior members are being sued in the courts by members of the NUM.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that every cloud has a silver lining and that the investment by the NUM of its funds in a bank in Liechtenstein has resulted in the union getting almost £1 million in profit, because the money was invested in dollar bonds rather than in sterling?

While that may have occurred by way of an historical accident, may we be told what effect the right hon. Gentleman's statement today will have on the activities of those companies in "the square mile" for which that is a daily occurrence and for which speculation against the pound is a way of life? I refer to ICI and the other multinationals, whose profits are paid for by ordinary working people. What effect will the right hon. Gentleman's statement have on that state of affairs?

Mr. Tebbit: It will not have much effect; and it is difficult to answer questions which are inspired by paranoia rather than by experience. I hope the hon. Gentleman can assure us that the NUM, which is so against speculation and windfall profits, will be donating the profit which it may have made, and to which the hon. Gentleman referred, to some worthy cause.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, inasmuch as the day-to-day regulation will not affect the ability of the City to respond to innovation, competition and development, he will still retain powers in exceptional circumstances to appoint inspectors to investigate certain scandals which may take place in the City?

Mr. Tebbit: Yes, indeed; those powers will be unaffected.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): In view of the acknowledged technical nature of the prospective legislation, the need for confidence in the machinery and the fact that the Secretary of State said that it will require mature consideration, will the right hon. Gentleman consider the new public Bill procedure for the legislation?

Mr. Tebbit: I am not sure that I should do that on my feet. I hope that we shall have adequate debating time for the matter, and although, as I said, I am wedded to the basic structure—and, indeed, to much of the detail of the White Paper—equally, during the progress of the legislation through the House, and with the advice of many people outside it, we may discover better ways of doing some of what we propose to do than we see at present. I hope that the House will look at the legislation in that spirit. Certainly I shall.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I join in giving a general welcome to the White Paper and to the thought which my right hon. Friend and his colleagues have clearly given to it. Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is a rich opportunity, before legislation is introduced, to gain some consensus on an all-party basis? If my right hon. Friend re-reads the report of the debate on the Gower report, he will find that a clear consensus emerged from that debate, a consensus which, on the basis of his statement, does not seem to be reflected in the decision to have two supervisory bodies rather than one. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend is open to suggestions on that. Will he bear in mind that the City institutions and interests which suggested that there should be two bodies rather than one do not necessarily have the protection of the investor but, rather, the protection of their own interests at heart?

Mr. Tebbit: I note carefully what my hon Friend says. It will be better if we can establish as much consensus as possible in this area, but it is not just consensus in the House that is needed. It is also consensus among the users and suppliers of the services. The principal area where the official Opposition and the Government may pull apart on these matters is on the question whether there should be a Government-operated statutory Stock Exchange Council-type of operation or whether it should be based principally on self-regulation within a statutory regulatory framework.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I assure my right hon. Friend that the proposals will be widely welcomed, subject to further study of the White Paper. Is he confident, however, that the Stock Exchange, preoccupied with its own internal deregulation at the same time as the new regulatory structure is being established, will be able to do it in time and meet its target date, which has been

agreed with the Government? Is he confident that the cost of the new structure will not be oppressive, either on practitioners or customers? Does he expect the Bill in the autumn of 1985 to include elements of the EEC's proposals on securities control?

Mr. Tebbit: I have not fully considered the matter to which my hon. Friend refers in the last part of his supplementary question, but I shall do so. As for the cost, it is certain that, whatever structure we have, the practitioners and users in the City will bear that cost, so they will have a strong interest in making sure that it is done as economically as possible.

The answer to my hon. Friend's point about the Stock Exchange is that I am still confident that it will meet the deadline. Indeed, it undertook to do so in the compact with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson).

London Regional Transport

4.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement about the recent court judgment concerning the payment of grants to London Regional Transport by the Greater London council.

The Government took over responsibility for London Regional Transport on 29 June 1984, part way through the present financial year. Before we took over, the GLC had budgeted and precepted to pay grants to London Transport for the whole of 1984-85. Parliament therefore granted powers in section 49 of the London Regional Transport Act for the GLC to be directed to continue paying grants to LRT until the end of March 1985.

Accordingly, I made a direction on 29 June 1984, on the facts known to me at that time, requiring the GLC to pay a total of £281·3 million in grants to LRT in instalments up to the end of this financial year. The main factors which I had in mind in determining this figure included the GLC's decisions about revenue and capital grants to London Transport for 1984-85; LRT's financial needs for the remainder of the year, as assessed at that time; and the GLC's decision that LT should lease £27 million of assets, which imposed future liabilities on LRT. This was in accordance with the Government's intentions, as I made clear during the passage of the legislation.

The House will be aware that the direction was subsequently challenged by the GLC, and has recently been quashed by the High Court. It is clear from the judgment that the court took a different view of the way in which the powers under section 49 of the London Regional Transport Act should be exercised from that which I told Parliament the Government intended in taking the powers in the first place.

The effect of the judgment would be to reduce the money available to LRT by over £50 million at a very late stage in the financial year. A corresponding amount would accrue to the GLC. The Government regard this as contrary to the interests of ratepayers and LRT's passengers.

After studying the terms of the judgment, I have concluded that any new direction which could be made under the existing legislation either would not accomplish what was originally intended or would be vulnerable to further legal challenge, thus failing to resolve the damaging uncertainty which now exists over LRT's financial position for 1984-85 and beyond. Nor am I confident that an appeal would satisfactorily resolve the problems over the interpretation of section 49 which the judgment has brought to light.

In the circumstances, the Government consider that the matter can be settled only by the authority of Parliament. I shall shortly introduce new legislation to enable Parliament to determine once and for all the amount of grant to be paid to LRT by the GLC in 1984-85, and thereby ensure that the original purpose of section 49 of the London Regional Transport Act is carried out.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his proposal to use Parliament to avoid compliance with a High Court judgment is a constitutional outrage, that any such attempt to legislate will be strenuously and rigorously opposed by all those

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Members of the Opposition who happen to believe in the rule of law, that any Labour Minister who behaved in the same cavalier manner as the right hon. Gentleman would be pilloried, if not torn to pieces, by the whole of Fleet street and that any principal holder of ministerial office, after being condemned of illegality by a High Court judge, after telling blatant untruths in this House and after swindling the ratepayers of Greater London of about £50 million, ought formally to apologise to the House and tender his resignation?

The fact that the right hon. Gentleman, with typical bluff and bluster, proposes to act in the way that he has outlined in his statement means that he intends to use the Government's majority to force through retrospective legislation in order to flout the verdict of a court, to condone his own improper and illegal behaviour, to defy the traditions of this House and to earn the contempt and derision of all true democrats, who deplore his shameless arrogance and political chicanery. If the right hon. Gentleman had a shred of decency he would not be bothering the House with this appalling statement; he would have the courtesy to tender his resignation.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) has rather overreacted. It is clear that the court took a different view of the way in which the powers under section 49 of the Act should be exercised from that which the Government intended when taking the powers in the first place. When I told Parliament what section 49 meant, I really believed it to be true. If that was not the case, I should be misleading the House if I did not seek to put section 49 right so that it does mean what I said it meant.

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it was made abundantly clear during the discussion of this clause in Committee that the unspent balance of moneys raised from the Government and from ratepayers for subsidising London's bus and tube services was to be paid over to LRT? That general principle was in no way dissented from at the time by any member of the Opposition. It would be an outrage to the ratepayers of London if the money raised from them for that purpose were to be applied by the GLC for any other purpose.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is quite right. I made the intentions of the Government quite clear. The fact that what I told Parliament does not appear to have been reflected in the court's interpretation of the legislation means——

Mr. Snape: It means that the Government were wrong.

Mr. Ridley: No, it does not mean that they were wrong. I said that the legislation does not mean what I told Parliament it did mean. Therefore, it is perfectly proper for me to put that error right in the way that I have suggested. May I underline my hon. Friend's perfectly reasonable statement that money taken from the ratepayers and passengers of London for the purpose of transport in London should be used for that purpose and not for any other. That is all that the Government seek to do.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The Secretary of State has clearly revealed his total incompetence. He does not even understand his own legislation. Will he tell the House what is the true figure? Is it £50 million, £60 million or £73 million?

Mr. Ridley: The exact figure will be in the Bill. The time to discuss the precise way in which it is computed will be when we reach the legislation. When announcing the intention to legislate it is not the normal practice to discuss the details of a Bill, let alone complicated figures which will involve fairly complex argument, in order to explain to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) what they mean.

Mr. Tim Eggar (Enfield, North): Ratepayers in Enfield and elsewhere in Greater London paid rates on the understanding that they would be used for subsidising London Transport. Would it not be quite outrageous if the result of the interpretation of an Act, which was quite clearly expressed by my right hon. Friend, was that money could be spent by the Greater London council subsidising the women's committee, the police committee and other outrageous purposes for which the GLC tends to spend ratepayers' money?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is quite right. I find it extraordinay that the Opposition should seriously resist his proposition that money taken from his and other hon. Members' constituents who are London ratepayers should be used for a totally separate pupose from that for which it was raised.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Despite the huffing and puffing of Opposition Members, my right hon. Friend should be aware that the ratepayers of London welcome the action that he is to take. It is perfectly in line with the Government's intentions, as expressed on the Floor of the House and in Committee. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is just a last gasp attempt by this moribund GLC, before abolition, to frustrate the intention of the House and, indeed, that it is typical of the behaviour of the appointed members from the GLC on the LT board just before vesting day?

Mr. Ridley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It was because of the extraordinary behaviour of the members of the board just before vesting day that we had to make this direction in rather a hurry. The principle must not be overturned by what has happened. What I said to the House about the meaning of the section is what we have to do. We are talking about large sums of money. It would be quite improper for this money, which has been taken from the ratepayers for one purpose, to be used for another.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Does the Secretary of State recall that during the Committee stage of the London Regional Transport Bill he resisted an amendment which would have prevented this problem? Does he also recall that normally the attitude on the Conservative Benches is that decisions of the court produce not uncertainty but certainty, and that that is the place where such matters ought to be resolved? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept, if he did not do so before, that this is the best illustration of the fact that when Governments and Secretaries of State seek to interfere more and more in the affairs of local authorities and local services they do not know what they are doing, and that the best remedy is to do what we are trying to do in Committee upstairs in order to prevent any Secretary of

State from interfering in London affairs any more than happens at the moment? Will the Secretary of State please accept that we do not want any more of this kind of interference? He cannot get it right. He never has, and he never will.

Mr. Ridley: I am not sure to which amendment in Committee the hon. Gentleman is referring, but many of those amendments would have failed to take the money that should have been taken from the GLC and apply it for the purpose for which it was precepted by that authority. We had every right to appeal against the judgment if we had wished to. In order to shorten the period of uncertainty, and, indeed, to remove uncertainty about the figures, it is obviously preferable that the appeal should take the form of legislation, so that certainty can be made clear. We cannot have this important matter subject to further legal challenge. I do not believe for one moment that the hon. Gentleman can sustain his argument that this is interfering with the GLC. The intentions of Parliament in an Act have proved not to be met by the way in which the legislation was drafted, and the only remedy is to put the legislation right.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is not the GLC effectively trying to prevent the ratepayers from benefiting from the investment that they made in LRT through the 1984-85 precept? Is that the situation that my right hon. Friend is describing?

Mr. Ridley: The sum of money is large—well over £50 million. If that sum is not paid over to LRT, fares will have to rise extremely high, further taxpayers' money will have to be provided or there will have to be an increase in the precept for next year in order to put right the gap which will appear in LRT's finances if we do nothing.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Are not the perils of over-centralisation and the legislation related to it the real lesson of this sorry affair? Will the right hon. Gentleman use his excellent imagination to foresee the perils which await him if he persists with the legislation currently in Committee? Will he also agree that next year £69 million of ratepayers' money is to be paid for the GLC in respect of non-written-off debt? Will he take the opportunity in the forthcoming legislation to rectify that monstrous imposition on London's ratepayers?

Mr. Ridley: I can see no conceivable way in which the issue of centralisation or devolution arises on the statement that I have just made. The statement arises out of a piece of legislation to which the House gave its assent last year. Nor do I see how it is possible for me to take into account any other matter concerning the GLC, because all that I am dealing with is the judgment, which is the subject of this statement.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that the GLC doubled fares and rates for Londoners in its first year of office and has since spent several million pounds on a completely spurious campaign, lying to pensioners and saying that they will lose their travel passes when the GLC is abolished, when the passes in question have since been guaranteed in law by the Government? Will my right hon. Friend guarantee that the GLC will not be allowed to get near London Transport, which it made such a mess of when it did?

Mr. Ridley: I give my hon. Friend the guarantee for which he asks. It is a somewhat sad prospect to have to go over the arguments of 1984 about the London Regional Transport Bill. That is what I regret about the need for this. All the fears, scares and rubbish that was talked at that time have been proved to be untrue. The only thing that has gone wrong is that the legislation needs amendment in the way that I have suggested.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Does the Secretary of State expect the House to take his statement seriously? There is no damaging uncertainty at present; there is crystal clear certainty. The court has said clearly that the Government got it wrong, and the legislation is there to prove it. Will the right hon. Gentleman reflect on the fact that his statement has created extra uncertainty about the GLC's budget-making process for the forthcoming financial year? Does not his statement and the intended legislation make nonsense of the rate-capping legislation of his right hon. Friend the Secretary for the Environment and his attempts to set a rate limit for the GLC?

Mr. Ridley: No, Sir. There is at present in place no direction to the GLC, because the one that I made was quashed by the High Court. A new determination has to be made one way or another. Instead of making a new direction, I shall bring in a Bill which will have the amount of money named on the face of it.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: I am sorry, I did not answer the hon. Gentleman's second point. I am in close touch with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, and he is content with this legislation, which will be completely in accordance with what he is doing.

Mr. Marlow: Why is it that where there is a difference of opinion between the Government and a British court it is proper for the Government to bring before Parliament legislation favouring the Government's view rather than the court's view—I support that—yet when a European court disagrees with the Government it is impossible to bring forward legislation which the Government want, as we saw yesterday? Is it that Parliament can overrule British courts, but has no power when it comes to foreign courts?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend tempts me on to ground on which it is beyond my competence to give him a full answer. I can tell him only that I believe that he is right to say that when a British court interprets an Act of Parliament in a way different from what Parliament was told, it is correct for Parliament to seek to use its sovereignty to change the law. There is a great difference between using sovereignty to change the law, and criticising the judiciary, which my hon. Friend will know is one thing that I have not done.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is not the Secretary of State proposing to indulge in a shabby little manoeuvre to condone his robbery of money from the GLC and the people of London? Is not his proposal, in the Bill that he will put through, yet another example of the dangers of centralising local government around people such as himself who do not even represent London constituencies and who have no understanding of the needs or operations of London Transport? Will not the proposals that he intends to bring forward create further chaos and confusion, which he will then use to blame the GLC, through his friends in the press?

Mr. Ridley: I cannot accept the implication of the hon. Gentleman's words, that the money belongs to the GLC. The GLC precepted the ratepayers of London for the express and explicit purpose of passing the money on to LRT. How it can then be said that because it rated the money it should not give it to LRT baffles me. The hon. Gentleman has not told us what he thinks the £50 million plus, the windfall to the GLC if the Government did not take this action, would and should be spent on. He seems to think that further burdens should be put upon the ratepayers to make good the shortfall and that the GLC should be left with a surplus which it could spend on anything that it liked.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Has not the court's decision shown that the Secretary of State is a law-breaker in this matter, and has not his statement today shown that he thinks he is above the law, even his own law? Is not the taking of the vendetta against the GLC into new retrospective legislation a constitutional disgrace? Has he not shown his incompetence and should he not now give the GLC back the money that he has robbed from it so that it can be used for the benefit of London ratepayers?

Mr. Ridley: I do not claim to be a lawyer, but I can at least identify that the hon. Gentleman knows even less about these matters than I do. The idea that it is wrong for Parliament, which is sovereign, to change the law is something that he ought to know about.

Coal Industry Dispute

4.38 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): I hope that the Secretary of State for Transport, the real architect of the miners' strike, will stay and listen to this application.

In the light of the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition regarding next Monday's debate, I seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 10 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the Government's prolongation of the miners' strike."

That the matter is specific and important can be in no doubt. The provocation and prolongation of the dispute by the Government make it the longest and bitterest national dispute this century. It has arisen as a direct consequence of the Government's generalised attack on working people and their organisations and was predicted in the House in maiden speeches in the summer of 1983.

Throughout the dispute the Government have refused to justify their actions here in the House of Commons. Despite the fact that the matter has been debated daily in the media, in clubs, in pubs and on the estates, the one place held up as the epitome of democracy, the national debating chamber, in which no debate has taken place is here in the House of Commons.

The matter is urgent because today and every day that the Government refuse to withdraw their attack on over 100,000 jobs in and around the mining communities at least £20 million is wasted and 140,000 miners and their families suffer another day of the privation and starvation policies of the Government. By the end of this week, that daily total will have reached £100 million—sufficient to build in Coventry a large new general hospital and half a dozen new comprehensive schools, with enough small change left over for 1,000 new council houses. Eleven months of this dispute have destroyed those much needed facilities for 50 cities the size of Coventry.

The dispute should have urgent consideration so that the House can examine the role of certain individuals, such as Mr. David Hart, the adviser to the Prime Minister, who, in *The Times* on Saturday, said that the time for a negotiated settlement is past and that the Government should score a victory over Mr. Scargill. Some hon. Members may wish to raise also the role of Lord Chapple whose personal advice to the then Secretary of State for Energy, now the Chancellor of the Exchequer, clinched the appointment of Mr. Ian MacGregor to the National Coal Board.

If the Government do not concede and withdraw the hit-list of pit closures, then on Monday 11 February the Yorkshire and south-east regions of the Trades Union Congress will call for a one-day stoppage. If the House does not debate this issue, if the Government do not withdraw that pit closure list, the stoppage on Monday 11 February will receive wider support from the trade union movement, leading to more generalised strike action.

If the House is the national debating chamber, that you, Mr. Speaker, have so often said it is, in the light of the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition about the subject for debate next Monday, a Supply day, I ask that today's or tomorrow's business be suspended and that a debate on the miners' dispute be granted.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the Government's prolongation of the miners' strike".

I have listened with care to what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House, at least at a time when these talks are in progress.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Relating to your ruling that you will not accept an application under Standing Order No. 10 while the talks are proceeding, I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that that is a political, not a constitutional, point. As a matter of fact, I understand that the discussions that have taken place this morning are now over.

The point that I put to you, Mr. Speaker, is that Parliament is here to consider whether something is urgent, not whether a discussion in Parliament would assist one side or the other. I put it to you that if the view put forward is that if it is too early, it is hypothetical, if it is immediate, it is delicate, and if it is over, it is not urgent because it is too late, the judgment that you have given is that Parliament can never play a part in discussions.

There is nothing whatever in Erskine May, nor is there any precedent of any of your forebears, to say that Mr. Speaker takes into account what is happening outside Parliament in respect of its outturn, but only whether it is specific, urgent and should be a matter covered by Standing Orders.

Because the Government will not have a debate—and my right hon. Friends have now tried, with an unprecedented refusal in my knowledge of an application under Standing Order No. 10 from the Front Bench—everything points to your interpreting the rules of the House free from any interests, which of course you do not have, Mr. Speaker, in the outturn of the talks.

In those circumstances, Mr. Speaker, I beg you to consider very carefully whether it is right that you should be driven, by the dilemma in which you find yourself, into giving a political judgment about whether a debate would be "helpful" or "unhelpful" to negotiations in which the whole country is interested.

Therefore, on that point alone, Mr. Speaker I ask you to consider the ruling that you have given and the precedents for it, and to tell the House more clearly the basis on which you reach a judgment and whether it is now to be something unconnected with the House but more directly related to discussions or negotiations going on outside Parliament.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would you advise the House, and in particular myself? Am I right in thinking that if the Opposition Front Bench wants to discuss this matter it can use an Opposition Supply day—the earliest is Monday next—to do just that?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that when we had a discussion on this subject several days ago and I suggested that we should strip away the cold language and get down to the basics, you gave the clear impression that, if the matter were pressed by the Opposition Front Bench, there would be half a chance. Yesterday, an application was made by the Front Bench. It had, somewhat belatedly, joined the Campaign group and others who felt that it was necessary to have a debate. That application was turned down. Now you have turned down an application under Standing Order No. 10 because of talks. You have also held out the prospect that there are opportunities, as suggested by the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), for the Opposition to use one of their Supply days in order to have a debate, and you have to take that into consideration because it is a possibility.

You will also have heard today, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition state in clear and unmistakable terms that, because of the Government's failure to deal with the economy properly and with the 14 per cent. interest rates and the fact that we have an iron lady with a plastic pound running the country, he would table a censure motion against the Government. It has crossed my mind, and it has probably crossed yours, Mr. Speaker, that that might well take place on Monday when the Opposition have a Supply day. Personally I should like the debate to take place sooner.

The important thing to remember, which I hope you will bear in mind, Mr. Speaker, is that there are conflicting issues for Supply days, and the issue of the economy is very important. Therefore, it is necessary for Mr. Speaker to use the opportunity that he has under Standing Order No. 10 to grant a debate which is absolutely necessary because of those other conflicting issues which have arisen.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have been reading and listening carefully to all the rulings that you have given on the applications made under Standing Order No. 10. So far 24 applications have been made in respect of the miners' dispute, and you have been minded to grant only one of them during that period.

In view of your remarks last week and yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that you considered this an urgent and important matter and that you would consider it further as time went on and more applications were made, I wonder what plans you may now have in respect of any further applications that may be made under Standing Order No. 10.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has pointed out, the debate next Monday is likely to be not on the coal dispute but on a different aspect of the country's economic problems. I believe—and I trust you will agree, Mr. Speaker—that the expenditure of £5·2 billion of public money by the Government on the mining dispute, without a vote in the House, and the use of Department of Health and Social Security regulations and the police and, perhaps more importantly, seriously and recently, the categorical refusal by the Secretary of State for Energy yesterday to answer questions about voltage reductions and the security of future power supplies in the country, mean that the House, of all places, must discuss the miners' dispute. This is not because we wish to demonstrate to the House once again our support for the miners, but so that Ministers can answer the serious points about which everybody outside the House is asking questions and talking. I do not believe that the House can go on blindfolding itself to the seriousness of the situation outside Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: I intended to go no further than what I said last week and yesterday—namely, that I think that we should debate this important matter when it is helpful to the situation. That is what I have said previously.

The House and the right hon. and hon. Gentlemen who have made applications under Standing Order No. 10 in the past have drawn attention to the importance of seeking a settlement to this extended and damaging strike. I hope that that is still the situation in the House. If that is interpreted as a political judgment, I am sorry; it was not so intended. It is simply that I thought that the House took the view that there is an appropriate moment to discuss this matter when it would be helpful to the resolution of the dispute. That is the position.

Mr. Skinner: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that a further point of order can arise from what I have just said.

Mr. Skinner: I wish to raise a separate matter, Mr. Speaker.

In taking the line that you have adopted over the past two or three days, you have mentioned, quite properly, that you would want a debate when it would be most helpful to the resolution of the dispute. I do not suggest for a moment, Mr. Speaker, that this line can create difficulties for you in future, but when the nation has been faced with conflicts in the past, industrial or otherwise, we have debated them, irrespective of whether our debates would resolve the issues. There is no better example than the fact that, during the Falklands war, we had several debates on that subject, and it cannot be denied that the debates took place before the conflict had ended.

Mr. Speaker: I have nothing to add to what I have said already.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has become clear, in the course of exchanges about Standing Order No. 10 applications, that you have decided to depart from the formula which you have used on many occasions previously when you have decided to refuse a Standing Order No. 10 application, which is to refuse to give your reasons, as you have said you are instructed to do by the rules of the House.

I believe that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was correct when he said that by giving your ruling today you were taking a political decision by seeking to judge the helpfulness or otherwise of the debate. That matter has not normally fallen within your rulings or those of your predecessors. If such judgments have been made by you, Mr. Speaker, you have normally kept them to yourself. As there have been many other opportunities when the Labour Opposition could have raised the issue of the miners' dispute from the Opposition Front Bench, would it not be better, Mr. Speaker, to revert to your established rule not to give your reasons for refusal?

Mr. Speaker: That is very wise.

Severe Weather Payments

4.53 pm

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the refusal to grant fuel allowances to those in Scotland."

In the course of my brief remarks I shall seek to persuade you, Mr. Speaker, that it would be extremely helpful to 5 million people if the House could discuss the matter.

You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that over the past two weeks or so there has been considerable comment, especially from Scottish Members, but from others as well, about the discriminatory nature of the existing system of severe weather allowances. The Department of Health and Social Security has given special allowances to those in the south of England who are affected by exceptionally cold weather. The trigger point for the allowances is 105 in Plymouth, whereas it is 129 in Aberdeen. In other words, there can be the same levels of temperature in different parts of the United Kingdom where the level in one area will attract supplementary benefit and heating allowances, whereas it will not in another. This discriminates effectively against those who live in colder climates.

The matter is specific because yesterday afternoon a statement was made by the DHSS—I gather that it was made informally—that no allowances were to be made to those in Scotland, notwithstanding the severe weather which it has encountered over the past 14 days. I gather also that a parliamentary answer will become available this afternoon that will confirm my information.

Those who have studied these matters will be well aware of the very snowy conditions in Scotland, especially in the Highlands, which have cut electricity supplies in many areas. In certain areas the temperature has been minus 22 degrees Celsius, which is extremely cold by any standards. Curling bonspeils, which are very rare events, are taking place because the ice on the lochs is sufficiently thick, due to the low temperatures, to support that sporting activity.

The matter is important because hundreds of thousands of people are affected adversely by the discriminatory actions of the DHSS. Up to 5,000 old people will die every year in Scotland because of insufficient money to buy adequate fuel to provide sufficient heat to maintain themselves at a living temperature.

No other subject has caused so much public concern in Scotland in recent weeks as the one that I am putting before you, Mr. Speaker. Scotland is being treated effectively as a second-class area. I ask you to consider adjourning the House, under Standing Order No. 10, to allow us to discuss this important matter. It is extremely urgent, because a good part of the winter is still before us.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the severe weather payments which were made available to southern England last week which have been denied to those in Scotland this week, Scotland having suffered atrocious weather conditions in the past seven days".

I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said. I regret that I do not consider the matter which he has raised as appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. Therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

Protection of the Rights of the Elderly in Home Ownership

4.56 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to enable those who go into Part III Accommodation under the National Assistance Act 1948 to assign up to a half share in their freehold or long leasehold property to a companion who has been residing with them for not less than five years and to assign the remaining share of their freehold or long leasehold property to the local authority, the capital value of which share shall become an interest in the local authority old people's home in which the assignor is to reside.

In recent years we have been making major strides in introducing the pride and joy of home ownership to those in all walks of life. As a result, the percentage of owner-occupiers has increased from 52 per cent. in 1973 to 60 per cent. in 1983, and it continues to rise. Having spent a lifetime of care and thrift, it comes as something of a shock for the elderly to be deprived of their assets in the evening of their lives. This is a matter of concern to many who deal with the elderly, including Age Concern.

When the aged enter an old people's home, they are expected to make a contribution towards their keep in addition to the £30 or thereabouts that is deducted from their old-age pensions if they have assets exceeding £1,200. Those in that position will find that a sliding scale is applied which will consume their assets at a rate of 26 per cent. per annum. This is a much higher percentage than the one which was felt to be too high when it was taken up in a private notice question earlier this afternoon. The sliding scale moves to the full cost of staying in an old persons' home, which can be as much as £150 a week. Unless a spouse or child under 16 years of age is left at the previous principal residence of the person entering the home, this property can be included in the individual's assets. This leads in many instances to considerable anxiety and hardship, especially when the person left behind has been living in the premises and sharing the cost of upkeep for many years, and finds himself or herself thrown out by a local authority which is anxious to reduce the residual bill that is left for the ratepayers.

In my constituency, there were two sisters who lived together in a family house from 1934. They lived first with their parents and then they shared the costs of upkeep between themselves. Unfortunately, their parents left the property to the elder sister, who was 18 years the elder, on the understanding that she in turn would leave it to her younger sister. When the elder sister had to go into an old persons' home at the age of 84, the local authority applied pressure for the sale of the house and offered a bed-sitting room flat to the younger sister.

After considerable negotiations, the authority agreed to the purchase of a one-bedroomed flat over which it has a charge. It allows the younger sister to occupy the flat, but sends her bills quarterly to cover the balance of her elder sister's charges after receiving her old-age pension and occupational pension. Currently the bills exceed £3,000 after the balance between the sale of the home and the purchase of the flat has been taken into account. This is a very worrying factor for a retired lady of nearly 70 years of age without other means.

It is open to the local authority to waive these charges but, as a prudent authority over the past 20 years, it has little money to spare, especially in the light of the current

[Mr. Neil Thorne]

rate support grant proposals. Apparently, if there is a shortfall in payment to a local authority old people's home, this is made good by the ratepayers. Those who cannot meet the full repayment in a private or charitable home have their payments made up by the taxpayer. That hardly encourages conscientious, caring local authorities to look after their elderly residents in these days of rate capping and manpower targets.

In 1984 the Government issued a consultative document on new regulations and guidance for assessing ability to pay charges for part III accommodation. That document was followed last Thursday week, on 17 January, with a local authority circular which, in paragraph 6, stated:

"Paragraphs 17 to 23 of the Memo of Guidance give advice to authorities as to some circumstances in which they should exercise discretion. But these are not the only circumstances in which it might be appropriate to do so. It would also be reasonable for example for an authority to exercise its discretion where a person who has been caring for the resident continues to live in the dwelling. Authorities should look at each case on its merits and decide, having regard to all the relevant circumstances, to what extent (if any) the value of a former dwelling should be reduced in the assessment."

My Bill will seek to allow by right all those entering old people's homes to assign up to a half share in their principal residence to a companion who resides with them for not less than five years. My Bill also seeks to permit those entering council old people's homes to purchase a share of up to a full proportion of the total value—for example, a one fortieth interest in a 40-place home. That will enable weekly charges to be reduced to a share of the running costs and will enable the occupier to benefit from any appreciation in the value of the property. Any shortfall in meeting the running costs out of pensions or other funds would be accumulated with interest and set off against the capital value on vacation of the premises, with the local authority repurchasing under a right of pre-emption at the district valuer's figure.

At the moment, many advisers recommend that their elderly clients should dispose of their assets before entering a home so that they can leave the bill to be met by the ratepayer. I believe that many would welcome the opportunity to purchase an interest to give themselves the dignity of home ownership throughout the remainder of their lives and avoid the present encouragement to dispose of their assets prematurely. Clearly, this would be of advantage not only to the elderly but to ratepayers and taxpayers.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Neil Thorne, Sir Gerard Vaughan, Dr. Michael Clark, Mr. Gerald Bowden, Mr. Bowen Wells and Mr. Michael Marshall.

PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE ELDERLY IN HOME OWNERSHIP

Mr. Neil Thorne accordingly presented a Bill to enable those who go into Part III Accommodation under the National Assistance Act 1948 to assign up to a half share in their freehold or long leasehold property to a companion who has been residing with them for not less than five years and to assign the remaining share of their freehold or long leasehold property to the local authority, the capital value of which share shall become an interest in the local authority old peoples' home in which the assignor is to reside: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 March and to be printed. [Bill 65.]

Orders of the Day

Representation of the People Bill

Considered in Committee

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

Sir John Farr (Harborough): On a point of order, Mr. Walker. How far do we intend to proceed in Committee today? Is the draft list of selections by the Chair the final list? Does that list allow for the new clauses that were tabled for consideration?

The Chairman of Ways and Means: New clauses are normally considered at the end of the Committee proceedings. The selection list is provisional and extends as far as we might reasonably expect to go today. We hope that the hon. Member's wish to reach the new clauses is fulfilled by the end of our proceedings. I assure the hon. Member that we have not ruled out the selection of new clauses.

Ordered,

That the Bill be considered in the following order: Clauses 1 to 10; Schedule 1; Clauses 11 to 22; Schedule 2; Clause 23; Schedule 3; Clauses 24 to 27; New Clauses; New Schedules; and Schedule 4.—*[Mr. Mellor.]*

Clause 1

EXTENSION OF PARLIAMENTARY FRANCHISE

5.5 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 2, line 12, leave out

'or treated for the purposes of registration as resident'

With this, I shall speak also to amendment No. 16, in page 2, leave out line 19.

There is a certain amount of indecision in the Bill as it stands, and I hope later to give examples. As the first Member to move an amendment, I point out that the Bill is a long one, comprising 27 clauses and a number of schedules. As I am sure that we shall examine the Bill carefully, and word by word, I shall try to make progress and keep my remarks succinct at this stage. I hope that the Government will listen carefully to what I say. I hope that, if they are persuaded by some of my arguments and reasoning, they will be generous enough to admit that there is merit in some of the amendments and accept them. If they do not accept the amendments because they are incomplete, I hope that they will take the amendments and bring them forward again on Report as Government amendments.

The amendments are not complete. I do not believe that it would be sufficient to leave amendments Nos 11 and 16 without adding extra words to them. The amendments seek to define a little more closely the conditions under which a person qualifies as an overseas elector. I believe that if a person moves from this country he should be registered as an overseas elector according to permanent residence when he was last resident in this country. A student can be registered at a university in London while his permanent residence is in another area; for example, in Northumberland. Students can properly establish residences in both places and appear on both registers at the same time. After graduating, the student could go abroad for, say, 10 years. I believe that it would be wrong if he continued to be registered as an overseas voter in that area of London where his name is on the electoral register.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can help on this point. If his amendment is accepted, will it have the effect of precluding a person who was a service voter, but who has left the armed services, from having a vote?

Dr. Marek: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. He anticipates what I was going to say. I said that the amendments were incomplete.

This case need not be confined to students, but could include landlords and business men. A person may conduct a business in a particular town in a particular constituency, but live in another constituency not too far away. Although his permanent residence is somewhere else, that person could be registered in both places. It would be wrong, if that business man sold the business and said that he was going to work abroad for a number of years, for him to be registered for the place where he had his business. If that person returned, he would return to his home and not to where he had his business.

As I understand the Bill, it allows people, such as students, those with jobs in different parts of the country, and others properly to register in more than one place. They would then be able to decide whether to register as an overseas voter for constituency A or B. That would be wrong. If they are to be treated as overseas voters, they should be registered for the place in this country of their last permanent residence.

I agree that if the amendments were accepted without any addition voters such as service men would not be able to vote. That applies also to patients in mental and other hospitals. It would be wrong for me to insist that because the hospital was their last place of residence they should be registered for that hospital. For that reason, the amendments are not sufficient in themselves.

I should like to refer the Committee to two documents. The first is Cmnd. 9140, "Representation of the People Acts". On page 26, paragraph 7 states:

"The right to vote should be extended to British citizens resident abroad who have previously been registered as electors. The right should be exercised in respect of the constituency in which the elector was last resident before he or she left. Separate arrangements would have to be considered for young people who left the United Kingdom before they reached voting age."

Perhaps it is a loose form of words, but the document states:

"The right to vote should be exercised in respect of the constituency in which the elector was last resident."

To me, that means where the elector lived, where his home was, and where he spent his evenings and slept. It does not mean the artificial words,

"or treated for the purposes of registration as resident."

The Government's reply to the first report from the Select Committee on Home Affairs sets out the Government's views. I hope that those views have not changed since they published that reply and that they will agree with me on that point.

I should also like to refer the Committee to Home Office circular RPA 200. On page 8, under "Residence", it states that

"on the one hand, a person is not to be registered for an address where he is staying temporarily on the qualifying date and, on

[Dr. Marek]

the other hand, a person is to be registered for his normal place of residence even though he may be temporarily absent from it on the qualifying date."

Clearly, my amendments must be supplemented, perhaps on Report. The intention is that the person should be registered at his normal place of residence even though he may be temporarily absent. To continue the analogy, overseas electors should not be given the choice whether they are to be treated as electors for the place where they are ordinarily resident, or—there may be a safe Labour or Tory seat or some other consideration—to say, "I wish to be registered as an overseas voter for the seat where I had my business or where I was at university." He may not necessarily be resident at the university for three years; he may have been there for one year doing a diploma.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is not the hon. Gentleman's argument directed at the practice of multiple registration? Is not the evil against which he is now inveighing merely an extension of the choice available to those who are multiple registered to those who happen to be overseas at the time?

Dr. Marek: I shall not comment on the hon. Gentleman's remarks at this stage, because I am sure that multiple registration will be discussed later. I am not seeking to argue that we should change the current practice of allowing students to register at two places. A student who spends 30 weeks a year at university can establish residence in that university. If he then spends the remaining 22 weeks of the year at his home, he can establish residence at his home.

There is a distinction between that and what the hon. Gentleman invited me to consider. The distinction is that the overseas voter leaves both addresses at which he has been resident and moves abroad for five, six, seven or 10 years. His links with his registered address must necessarily become weaker as time passes. If the Committee decides that that person should be allowed an overseas vote, it should be allowed only for his normal place of residence — his home. That is partially recognised in Cmnd. 9140 and RPA 200 also talks about that.

5.15 pm

RPA 200 states:

"The question of whether or not in borderline cases a man is to be regarded as resident is . . . one to be resolved 'on a commonsense jury basis . . . by the ordinary understanding of man in the use of ordinary words in the English language'."

If decisions are to be made in that way, they will be much more difficult if we have the words,

"or treated for the purposes of registration as resident".

If those words are deleted, we would be saying that the person is "resident at that address". It would then be necessary to table further amendments to ensure that service voters, hospital patients and the other categories mentioned in RPA 200 could nevertheless be registered as overseas voters at their normal addresses.

Precision is the necessary prerequisite for such a provision. We must know where we are. We do not want electoral registration officers to have to make value judgments, or to have these matters going through the courts, with arguments going backwards and forwards. We should legislate precisely. We can start by removing the words that I have mentioned, and we could table further amendments to satisfy the conditions contained in RPA 200.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are two reasons why the Committee should not accept the amendment. The first is the one that I raised in an intervention. In its present form, the amendment would undoubtedly prevent service voters who subsequently go abroad from having a vote. It would have the same effect on mental hospital patients. I do not doubt that it would be possible to build in a host of exemptions to take account of those difficulties, but I am against complicated legislation. I do not want to see the Bill further complicated, unless there is a pressing need.

The second reason why the Committee should not support the amendment relates to the point made by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said that he does not like the consequences of multiple registration. However, once we accept the principle that, for example, students may have two residences for the purpose of an election address if they are resident in this country it is nonsense not to carry forward that principle to when they go abroad for the relevant period. It is inconsistent. The hon. Gentleman should strike at the basic problem or accept the consequences.

Dr. Marek: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that a student undertaking a course at a university well away from his normal residence should be treated, during a period abroad, as an overseas voter entitled to a vote at the place of study, even if he has been there for only one year?

Mr. Hogg: I am saying that if it is right for him to vote as a resident at the university, which is a fairly tenuous connection in any case, I do not think it a particular mischief for him to carry that address forward if he goes abroad. The problem lies more in multiple registration than in being abroad.

Mr. Beith: I am glad that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) tabled the amendment, as it highlights one of the several difficulties arising from multiple registration and the way in which the concept of residence for registration purposes has been diluted in recent years. It has become apparent from a number of cases in both England and Scotland that what used to be understood by residence no longer holds in relation to electoral registration. It does not mean that the person lived or slept at the residence on the night, as in the case of the census, or was merely temporarily absent. It is possible to claim a number of residences at one and the same time on very general grounds. A person registered in several places can then choose where to exercise his vote.

The issue raised by the amendment is whether the person concerned should be able to exercise that choice from Tenerife, just as he can already exercise it from London, Liverpool or anywhere else in the United Kingdom. In other words, can he, as an overseas voter, exercise the same choice as he could within the United Kingdom? The amendment treats the symptom rather than the ailment. It is sometimes necessary to do that if the ailment cannot immediately be cured, but serious administrative difficulties arise. If we do not establish a procedure to check whether a person is resident where he

claims to be resident in the United Kingdom, how can we do so in respect of the limited number of overseas claims? That is the basic problem.

As the problems of multiple registration will arise at several points in our consideration of the Bill, it is not without value that the Government have been required to consider them at this early stage. The idea that residence can be claimed and granted in respect of a large number of places strikes at the ordinary meaning of the word "residence", as the hon. Member for Wrexham pointed out. The use in the Bill of the phrase

"treated for the purposes of registration as resident"

underlines that problem.

I doubt whether the amendment can be made workable, although it seems to me even more illogical, undesirable and unfair to allow a person resident abroad to choose between several constituencies than for that to be possible from a base within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I find the amendments somewhat strange and confusing. I should have thought that both categories of electors should be treated in exactly the same way. It seems unfair, and indeed contrary to the Labour party's views, to seek to increase democracy by trying to ensure that everyone in this country can exercise the vote while seeking to deny people that right if they have to go abroad to work or study, although they may have played an active part in the electoral process in the past.

I believe that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) is more concerned about the practicalities of multiple registration. Certainly, one must always check very carefully against the electoral register to ensure that nobody votes more than once.

Dr. Marek: The hon. Gentleman is indeed confused. I am certainly not seeking to deny any student, or indeed anyone else, the right to vote as an overseas elector. I am merely seeking to ensure that he is registered and casts his vote according to his normal residence, not some artificial residence with which he has no strong links.

Mr. Bruinvels: A student registered both at his home address and at his university address may take one year of his course at the Sorbonne. The hon. Gentleman is surely not saying that such a person cannot choose the constituency in which he wishes to cast his vote. That would seem thoroughly unfair. I do not see why students should be treated differently from other people.

As the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has said, we shall be discussing multiple registration at several points in our consideration of the Bill. The electoral registration officers will perform their duties. I am sure that the hon. Member for Wrexham is not seeking to cast aspersions on them. It seems thoroughly unfair that a person who goes overseas should not be able to cast his vote in the constituency of his choice. So long as he keeps in touch with the United Kingdom—he may still be paying rates and taxes here—he should have the right to vote. I strongly oppose the amendment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): I am glad to have the opportunity to reply to the first substantive debate in the Committee. It has been a well informed debate and I hope that it sets the scene for those to come in the several days of our consideration of this matter.

I will deal first with the effect of the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and then with the substantive point that he has raised, as that is clearly of more concern to him than drafting points. The effect of the amendment would be precisely that described by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) in his formidable address. My hon. Friend's contribution was all the better for being short and he made the two points that needed to be made. I shall reply in the same vein but at rather greater length.

The amendment would merely omit the provision whereby service voters are deemed to be resident at a particular address. Three years ago, voluntary patients were linked to that provision. If a person in either of those categories moved overseas the amendment would prevent his voting. I know that that is not the hon. Gentleman's intention, but that would be the effect of his amendment.

The hon. Gentleman is really concerned to narrow the choice of people registered in more than one constituency. Our provisions would use the definition of residence contained in the 1983 Act. That definition does not make any distinction in quality between the two qualifications which may be acceptable to the electoral officers of the constituencies concerned. The electoral officer has regard to the guidance of the courts, which have established that a person is entitled to registration in respect of a particular address if there is a substantial degree of permanence.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) pursues a lonely but dignified crusade against multiple registration.

Mr. Beith: It is not lonely.

Mr. Mellor: I meant by reference to some of his other crusades. Nevertheless, it has been held that a substantial degree of permanence can attach to more than one residence at the same time. That is why, as my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham has explained, it is difficult to address that matter in the Bill. I should say in defence of the draftsman that a good deal of effort has been made to try to ensure that the provisions do not become an excuse for people to do more picking and choosing other than on the one matter that has already been exposed. The Bill has been carefully drafted to ensure that where someone, within the qualifying period, has been registered in subsequent registers in different constituencies, he may qualify as an overseas elector only in respect of the last constituency in which he was registered.

It is recognised that some people may, within the seven-year period or whatever period the House may decide to be appropriate, have been registered in different constituencies in different years. That is taken care of. It is also carefully provided in clause 2 that a person may make an overseas elector's declaration only in respect of one constituency. If a person makes more than one declaration in a certain year, one for a first constituency and another for a second, the second declaration cancels the first. That is provided for by clause 2(5). Clause 2(4) provides that, if a person makes more than one declaration on the same day, both declarations are void.

5.30 pm

There is a difficulty if someone who wishes to qualify as an overseas elector is able to show that, when he was last registered in the United Kingdom, he was registered in two places. It is hard, within the definition of resident used throughout the 1983 consolidated statute which the

[Mr. Mellor]

Bill follows, to determine which residence has the greater permanence. That is not a judgment which the statute gives us a basis for making. I hope that the hon. Member for Wrexham will agree that, even if we were to conclude that it was desirable to try to establish which of the two residences was the more permanent, it would not be a very worthwhile exercise.

I take the hon. Gentleman's point. He has uncovered the only occasion on which someone qualified as an overseas elector has a choice as to which constituency he should vote in. In drafting the legislation, we were at pains to avoid giving someone the opportunity to elect in which constituency he wanted to vote. Manifestly, some constituencies are more attractive than others to the individual elector. As the hon. Gentleman has percipiently noticed, the only exception occurs when, on the last occasion that a person was registered in the United Kingdom, he was registered in more than one place. As several hon. Members have acknowledged, it is an inevitable corollary of the existence of multiple registration—with which one may or may not agree—that someone in that position who then moves overseas should have a choice.

I hope that my explanation shows that we have thought about the problem and have sought to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point. However, I fear that I cannot offer him any hope that we could remove the option that exists in that narrow case.

Dr. Marek: I am grateful to the Minister for having had the matter considered by his Department. I only wish that some way could be found to limit people's choice. The situation is clearly undesirable, and finding a solution would be better for everyone. This is not a political point.

I hope that we shall be able to return to the substance of the amendments on Report if any new idea comes to mind. Meanwhile, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 2, line 14, leave out paragraph *(c)*.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments:

No. 14, in page 2, line 14, leave out 'seven' and insert 'five'.

No. 66, in page 2, line 14, leave out 'seven' and insert 'ten'.

No. 69, in page 2, line 14, after 'seven', insert

'or such other period, being not less than seven years as the Secretary of State may by order determine; and no order shall be made under this section unless a draft therefore has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament'.

No. 30, in clause 3, page 5, line 8, leave out 'seven' and insert 'five'.

Mr. Powell: This group of amendments deals with the first major area of principle with which the Bill is concerned. Essentially, the amendments offer the Committee a choice. The Bill stipulates a period of seven years as the cut-off point for residents overseas beyond which they would not qualify to vote in this country. The official Opposition's amendment, No. 30 suggests five years. Amendment No. 66 suggests 10 years. The amendment in my name leaves the period at large.

It might not be inappropriate for me to observe that it is only once in a generation that Parliament considers major extensions to the franchise. There have been a number of measures over the years, but the last major debates on the representation of the people occurred in the 1940s. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) is the only veteran of those days. It may be another generation before we reconsider the laws relating to our franchise.

Clause 1 deals with an important issue of principle: who should qualify to vote in our elections? In making that choice, we must reflect on the fact that social conditions change over the decades. The social background to the debates of three decades or more ago was very different from that of today. First, it is plain that the population is much more mobile within our country. People move much more often than they used to. Secondly, it is much more likely that people will go abroad than used to be the case—allowing for the circumstances of the couple of years or so following the end of the second world war, when there were still substantial numbers of servicemen abroad. The number of British subjects working abroad at present may well run to a million or more, and they are to be found in every corner of the globe. Many of them—perhaps the great majority—

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): How can the hon. Gentleman give a minimum figure of a million when on Second Reading the Secretary of State estimated half a million and when, in answer to a question that I put down, the Home Office admitted that that figure was only an estimate?

Mr. Powell: As the right hon. Gentleman says, my figure is an estimate. I do not accept the estimate made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. My information, which has been drawn from a number of sources, suggests that the figure might be very much higher. At bottom one can only guess.

Sir Edward Gardner (Fylde): I have no doubt that my hon. Friend has seen "The Government Reply to the First Report from the Home Affairs Committee", in paragraph 2.8 of which the Government estimate that

"of the roughly three million British citizens resident abroad perhaps 600,000 ar so are of voting age".

Mr. Powell: As there are no accurate statistics, we have to guess. It is clear that conditions exist today which make it much more likely that British subjects will serve abroad for a period. We already make provision to enable Crown servants and British service men, abroad for a temporary period, to vote. Such provision should be extended to a much larger number of people.

The cut-off point is a matter of judgment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has opted for seven years. The House is now being asked to consider a series of different judgments. We are debating not the principle of whether the franchise should be extended to British subjects who are resident overseas, but for what period during their absence they should qualify to be registered. We should remember that registration is the crucial element in determining who is able to vote. The franchise rests only with British subjects resident abroad who have registered to vote. Figures that have been made

available through the Library show that for France, which has a generous law towards its nationals who are resident abroad, although many qualify, few vote. There might be many reasons for that. Although some British subjects have left permanently and are therefore unlikely to want to register, many others have every intention of returning. The date of their return might be determined by a fixed contract. Although some might return after a fixed period of service, others have an open-ended contract and might return at any time.

Information that I have been given through the European Assembly suggests that there might be 250,000 British subjects living in the European Community who would qualify for registration if they were so minded. However, a large proportion of them would be excluded by the seven-year rule. I know people for whom seven years would be too short but who have every intention of returning to and retain substantial links with Britain. I have in mind a man who works in Greece. He is the highest sterling earner in Greece and is able to contribute substantially to our balance of payments through shipping and insurance. His children are at school here and he has a house here on which he pays rates. However, the house is let, so he does not qualify because he is not resident here on the qualifying date. We should also consider those who go to the orient. People who serve companies that are based substantially in the far east have to undergo an extensive period of training to learn Japanese or Chinese, for example. We often hear that the business man who seeks a contract must be in China for 10 years before getting the slightest idea that there might be a contract going. Nevertheless, such people intend to return to Britain at a convenient time.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): My hon. Friend seems to be arguing that, once a person who is registered in Britain goes abroad, he should have the privilege of having a share in choosing a Government in Britain although he has no property here, pays no rates, pays no taxes and makes no contribution to Britain. Is there not an argument for saying that people who are abroad in those circumstances and who do not retain their connection with Britain should be told that there is no representation without taxation?

5.45 pm

Mr. Powell: There is such an argument but it is not necessarily convincing. The principle of no taxation without representation has not been imported into our law and it would be a bad principle to import. If my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) were appointed a Commissioner to the European Community and he served two terms there lasting eight years, he might be able to retain a residence in Britain which he did not let. He would be able to return to that residence and qualify for registration. He would be able to continue to register because he could afford a second home. The people who will be discriminated against are those who are unable to afford a second home, which is a prerequisite to registration.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Is my hon. Friend entirely right? I accept that someone who has a second home and who is resident here on the qualifying date has the franchise, but does he agree that it is not sufficient for that person to be here only during the night of the qualifying day? Must he not be resident in order to justify registration?

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend might have stated the law, but I should be extremely surprised if the practice of registration was not that a person qualified as a result of being resident purely on the qualifying date. My hon. Friend's argument is fascinating and arcane, but I believe that residence on the one day is all that is required. That is why it is not unknown for people who are staying with friends on the relevant night sometimes to find that they are on the electoral roll. The form refers to only one day, although occupiers are told that it can be filled in in advance.

The amendments will set the pattern for the future. It may be a further generation before these matters are substantially reviewed. Although we may discuss whether the clause will stand part of the Bill, we are at present discussing the choice of four different periods — five years, seven years, 10 years and at large. The pace of social change is developing in such a way that we would be wise to opt for the longest period, that is, at large. Many people retain permanent connections in and intend to return to the United Kingdom. They would be excluded even under the seven-year rule. As we have allowed for the principle, it would be appropriate to take it to its full extent by eliminating paragraph *(c)*, which my amendment seeks to do.

Mr. Kaufman: I wish to speak to amendments Nos. 14 and 30. As the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) said, we are not debating the principle of the expatriate vote. The Opposition remain totally opposed to the clause, and on clause stand part my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) will explain why we oppose it. As the hon. Gentleman said, these amendments deal with the content of the clause rather than with the principle behind it.

The hon. Gentleman advanced his case in a peculiar way. He admitted that he was providing what might be a massive franchise at a guess by offering the expatriate franchise at large. His reason for providing it was extremely dubious — that more British people travel abroad for longer periods now than was the case in previous generations and centuries. That is strange. The number of people who travelled from this country to colonise large parts of the world, which resulted in the British Empire and then the British Commonwealth, was larger in absolute numbers and far larger in proportionate numbers than those who travel abroad on short contracts now. There has been no change in the social circumstances. The change that could justify his amendment, were it to be justified, is the change in the methods of communication, which make it theoretically possible for a ballot paper to be sent to distant parts and returned. The reliability of a ballot paper reaching its destination and being returned on time must take account of the extremely dubious record on reliability of certain overseas post offices, but I do not wish to go into that now.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise a further difference, which is that the improvement in communications and in the media enables people resident abroad to follow and retain an interest in affairs in the United Kingdom to a greater extent than was previously possible?

Mr. Kaufman: If the hon. Gentleman means that people resident abroad can gain through newspapers knowledge of what is taking place in the United Kingdom,

[Mr. Kaufman]

it depends on which newspaper they read. If he means that they obtain information via the electronic media, the coverage, for example, in Nepal of affairs in the United Kingdom is minimal, not necessarily representative and, therefore, proportionately satisfactory.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The right hon. Gentleman probably underestimates the effectiveness of electronic communications in conveying news, and the high standard of communications of the BBC world service abroad, which may even be higher than its service within the United Kingdom. When I travelled in the Punjab recently, I heard the results of a match between Brora Rangers and Keith Athletic. That is a remarkable piece of information which few Scottish newspapers carried.

Mr. Kaufman: Presumably the hon. Gentleman would base the casting of his vote on such a consideration.

The principle will be debated on clause stand part. I speak to amendments Nos. 14 and 30, which reduce the period from seven to five years. The Opposition believe that, if the Committee unwisely decides to endorse this principle, it is right to limit its scope.

As the Bill stands with the seven-year period, the expatriate franchise could include two general elections and any intervening by-elections. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) pointed out, the link with this country of a person who is abroad grows weaker as the period of absence extends. A person who remains out of the United Kingdom for two general elections cannot claim the right to participate in displacing or endorsing a Government under which that person has not lived. Such a person has not paid that Government's taxes, and has not experienced that Government's policies at first hand. His connection with the United Kingdom will have grown tenuous, and will at best be second hand and gained from listening to whatever uncertain communications there may be on the BBC world service and from buying the overseas edition of *The Times*, the *Daily Mail*, or whatever.

We have a constituency system of parliamentary elections. Under it a person votes not for a Government but for a Member of Parliament to represent him or her. An overseas voter who has not lived in the constituency in which he or she has a right to vote will not be in direct contact with the issues and problems of the constituency. As a parent, he will not have experienced the education system or been able to campaign about school closures. As a sick person he will not have used the National Health Service, been in hospital or been able to form an opinion about health provision. As a driver, he will not have used the roads or public transport and, therefore, cannot know about those issues. He will not have been a householder who has paid rates and, therefore cannot have an opinion about local government finance policy, the rate support grant policy and other matters which form the nexus of issues on which people base their vote.

Mr. Beith: The same gentleman might have experienced the nationality of his children being threatened by legislation introduced by the Government, might have had his taxation substantially altered, favourably or unfavourably, and might have had the services of the British consulate removed from the place in which he lived.

6 pm

Mr. Kaufman: He might even have been blown up by a British nuclear weapon, in which case the matter would not arise. Such a person will not have been able to play a direct part in the affairs of the constituency, even so limited a part as signing a petition, or the major part of being active in a political party, residents association, ratepayers association, the women's voluntary service, the scouts, ex-service men's associations, or any of the organisations that make up the web of community that exists in Britain and in which those who live outside the country cannot participate.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if a person who ordinarily resides abroad were permitted to vote in more than one general election, subsequent to the passing of the Bill, those accumulated votes could influence the outcome of a general election?

Mr. Kaufman: That is true. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) has a colleague who was elected with a majority of only seven votes at the general election. It would be perfectly possible in a general election, with the Government's estimate of an average of 800 such votes in each constituency, for a result to be swayed by those votes. In a narrowly contested general election, of which we have had three during the past 20 years, it may be possible for the Government to be changed as a result of the casting of such expatriate votes.

What is more, it is extremely unlikely that someone who benefits from the expatriate franchise will have had personal contact with the candidates opposing the sitting Member of Parliament, although at some stage before he left the country, he may have met or corresponded with the Member. If this fancy franchise is to be invented, it should be limited to one statutory length Parliament, during part of which it is likely that the voter would have had a chance to live under the Government on whom he would be delivering a verdict, and during which he would have observed and experienced the services of the Member of Parliament for whom he would vote. An elector who has lived in Britain for part of the Parliament which will end with the general election in which he has an expatriate vote should have been able to shoulder the burden, if there was any, and to reap the benefit, should there be any, of the Government upon whom he will deliver a verdict. He should also have had the chance to meet the sitting Member of Parliament and to become involved, to some extent, in local issues. He will at least have paid some taxes.

I do not know whether the gentleman who has done the country so much long-distance benefit from Greece has also been sending cheques regularly to the Treasury as part of his contribution to the nation's well-being; he will not have paid rates; he will not have paid domestic telephone bills; he will not have paid fuel charges; he will not have experienced all of the burdens upon which citizens have the right to express an opinion when they cast their votes in a general election.

We believe that five years is a reasonably long time for anyone to be away from the country and yet have a definite intention of returning. We are dealing with the absence from the country of the entire family. If the rest of the family stays in Britain and is resident here, while the person applying for the vote is absent, the latter will almost

certainly retain the potential for a residential qualification. If he has residence, he retains vicariously, and possibly personally, all the obligations except the payment of income tax.

Our amendment stretches the benefit in favour of the applicant, because it could allow him to vote in a by-election in which he would not know the would-be successor to the Member of Parliament who had vacated the seat, although he might know his opponents, if they had previously been candidates in an election when he was still resident in Britain. As by-elections have developed in recent years, they have concentrated much more on special rather than general issues, and on local as well as national issues. If we make it possible for him to vote in a by-election, we shall have extended the benefits of this dubious franchise as wide as they should go.

To go beyond five years—the statutory length of a Parliament — would stretch the theoretical residential qualification to the point of mockery. The fact bears repeating that the British franchise is based not only upon the constituency but on residence, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, albeit in a different context. What makes this franchise fancier than any other fancy franchise that we have had for a long time —certainly since the abolition of the university vote—is that it is based not on residence but on option. That being so, it should not be a franchise at large, as proposed by the hon. Member for Corby, but it should be strictly limited to the length of one normal Parliament. The hon. Gentleman's amendment would allow someone a voice in the Government of the country without having experienced the effects of that Government.

Our contention is that five years is the maximum for which any logical and democratic justification can be found for the expatriate franchise. That is why we shall ask the Committee to accept our amendment.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): I am pleased to support the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), which stands also in my name.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) seemed to position himself in an awkward corner as a small islander among the Socialist internationals. To try to attach importance to the size of the group whose enfranchising we are discussing is completely immaterial to the debate. As other hon. Members have said, that becomes more irrational as communications become easier. The communications aspect applies not only to the delivery of the vote, or the ability to vote—the ballot paper—through increasingly speedy mails, but to the ability of those who live abroad, sometimes very far away, to visit Britain regularly.

I speak from personal experience. I lived in the United States of America for almost eight years, which, under the Bill as it stands, would disfranchise me in British elections. However, I had every intention of returning to Britain, as I did, and I visited Britain regularly — sometimes as many as three times a year. That is not a picture of someone losing his roots in or connections with Britain, or of someone experiencing vicariously what the country was going through during that period.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Does my hon. Friend not attach importance to the issue already raised by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)—that in this country we vote for candidates in a single constituency, and that the longer the period that has elapsed, the less is the likelihood that the individual will have a close connection with the constituency, particularly as the information which he obtains about affairs in the constituency while he is abroad is likely to be small? I have much sympathy for the proposition that five years, rather than seven, would be appropriate, bearing in mind that that is approximately the length of one Parliament.

Mr. Rathbone: I anticipated that point and will return to it in a moment.

There is nothing peculiar in this country in voting for a candidate in a constituency. It may be called something different in other parts of the world, and almost always is, but in almost all electoral systems people vote for a candidate or, in some cases, a series of candidates from one geographical area.

To take up another point raised by the right hon. Member for Gorton — representation being tied to taxation—we have all been brought up with, and I think abide by, the thesis of no taxation without representation. When that is turned on its head it becomes an incredibly peculiar statement, particularly from the Opposition. By taking that line the right hon. Gentleman is saying that only those who pay taxes should have the right to vote. Many people right now vote legally, straightforwardly and regularly, yet may not pay income tax, capital taxation, local taxes or even indirect taxes because of the narrowness of the way that VAT is drawn. *[Interruption.]* It is conceivable. The right hon. Gentleman may not have them in his constituency, but I have them in mine. If he ties the right to vote to having established that right through paying taxes, he is starting down a most uncomfortable route.

Dr. Marek: Although the people to whom the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) is referring may not pay taxes directly, every time they go to a shop they pay tax. More important, they place themselves under a liability to pay tax.

Mr. Rathbone: The hon. Gentleman has raised a good point. His right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton did not make that point. It would be very difficult to measure when a person had made himself available to pay taxes to an extent sufficient to earn the vote. For instance, on that line of argument, every visitor to this country pays taxes when he makes purchases. Does he automatically have the right to vote? I do not think the right hon. Gentleman would argue that.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The hon. Gentleman said that when he was living in America for eight years he visited this country regularly. Presumably on entering Heathrow he became eligible to pay tax indirectly. Can he tell me who does not pay tax in Britain? I am fascinated by the concept that somebody does not pay tax in some way.

Mr. Rathbone: I have just deployed the argument. If we are referring to direct taxation, I can produce instances. If it is indirect taxation, many people are disfranchised, because they pay taxes from time to time on a visiting basis. On that line of argument they should be given the right to vote. What is marvellous about this discussion is that it illustrates so beautifully how complicated is the whole attempt to tie representation in any way to the

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payment of taxes. That was the line that the right hon. Member for Gorton was pursuing. It should not bear any consideration by us.

Mr. Stanbrook: My hon. Friend is asking that people who will live perhaps thousands of miles away from this country for the rest of their lives may take part in deciding what sort of Government we should have, even though they make no contribution to the welfare of the country. Surely that is the basic argument, apart from the argument about taxation. The basic question is: what are the people to whom my hon. Friend is referring contributing for the privilege of helping to determine the Government of the country?

6.15 pm

Mr. Rathbone: It is difficult to measure. Opposition Members should not laugh, because it is a serious point. The fact that a person is living on the other side of the world does not mean that he is not contributing to the welfare of the country. Many of the people we are talking about are making a direct contribution — perhaps by payments to their families, by payments for educating their children, by a contribution to a pension plan or a retirement fund, or in innumerable other ways. They may also be making a contribution by way of improving exports to the countries in which they are living by developing contacts for future services and exports to those countries. Why should we apply such measurements only to people who are living abroad? Why not apply them to people living in this country? We would tread a very dangerous path if we were to start to try to qualify by behaviour someone's right to vote.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Gentleman is reaching a point that I wanted to make. Once one starts weighing the contribution to the country, one is indeed in difficulty. Some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues might say that those who have been unemployed and supported by the state for a certain time should be deprived of the vote.

Mr. Rathbone: I very much doubt whether that was in the mind of any of my hon. Friends. It is a dishonourable suggestion. All sorts of qualifications — honourable, dishonourable or somewhere between the two — might be applied to individuals. Thank goodness, years ago we moved away from a property or any other qualitative qualification for the right to vote.

On Second Reading I pointed out that other countries operate a reasonable system of establishment of a right to vote in perpetuity for citizens living abroad. There are six bases on which a French citizen can establish a right to vote—in the commune of birth, in the commune of last domicile, in the commune of last residence, in the commune where one of his antecedents is or has been registered, in the commune on the electoral register of which one of his children is registered, or in any commune of choice of more than 30,000 inhabitants. That is a broad spectrum under which a French citizen living abroad, for whatever period of time, can register his right to vote. That encourages the French citizen who is living abroad to participate in what is going on in his country and to vote accordingly.

Mr. Ron Hayward (Kingswood): Does my hon. Friend not find it amazing, as the French people do, that senior employees of Airbus Industrie, who are contributing to the general wealth of Europe — of Britain, France and Germany—and who are resident in Toulouse, are not able to vote because they have been resident as senior salesmen there for many years? It is a cause of some amazement to the French that British citizens in that position, helping the European export effort, are not able to vote in their own country.

Mr. Rathbone: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that pertinent illustration of the point that I was making, showing the contrast with the situation applying to French nationals. Parallels are often drawn between the constitutions of this country and those of France and the United States. Sometimes they are parallel, but in some respects they have diverged, and two of the three have more liberal ways of allowing their citizens to vote.

The United States guarantees the constitutional right to vote to those who live outside the United States of America, subject to two conditions: first, proper registration within the person's state of residence; and, secondly, that the person has a valid United States of America passport, a national identity card or other national registration card. That is a timeless and basic right of United States of America citizens.

One should look warily at the conclusion that a period of time is any illustration of the links that one has with one's country. There are those who have lived abroad for many years, perhaps even decades, who are extremely close to this country, who follow matters here and who visit and have relatives and interests in this country. Though they are incredibly tied to Britain, it is ludicrous that they should not have the right to vote here.

There are those who have gone away for two years and who feel completely divorced from this country, who have no interest in what goes on here, who have re-established their families perhaps on the far side of the world and who never think about Britain, or, if they do, it is of no importance in their lives.

I plead with the Home Secretary to reconsider the matter. It is, of course, his intent to try to strike an agreement with the Opposition on an important constitutional development which, as has been pointed out, comes once in a blue moon. In this part of this constitutional reform, a part which will affect so many people—though "many" is not the important quotient—it is for those who might have the right to vote if they did not have the time barrier to that voting that I ask his reconsideration.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): The hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) was right to stress the fundamental importance of this debate, because it goes to the underlying principle of our representation. We are, after all, considering the constitution of the House, the manner in which hon. Members are elected to compose the House and, thereby, to decide the nature of the Government and, to some degree, to keep control over the policies and administration of the Government.

Our representation in this House never has been a representation of all who are British citizens, wherever they may be in the world. As the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) pointed out, that is an alternative approach which other democracies, such as France and the United States, have taken. That is not the principle on which this House is, or has been, constituted. It has been constituted

on the principle of geographic identity and representation, and the election of a person responsible for the representation of that constituency. It is, in a sense, a congress of constituencies.

The Government find themselves in the difficulty of falling between the two alternative principles. They have moved away from the principle of geographical representation and have appeared to embrace the principle of citizenship. Yet they have settled down in a middle position, where the principle of citizenship is qualified by the length of last registration in a constituency in the United Kingdom. The anomaly of their position is amusingly illustrated in clause 2 (3) *(b)*, which requires that the declarant must be a British citizen.

Under our existing law, a citizen of the Irish Republic, if he is resident in a constituency in the United Kingdom, is a parliamentary elector in that constituency. The Government do not propose to say in the Bill that he has been registered in a constituency, that he has been away for only seven years and that therefore he can still vote in that constituency. They place citizenship as the deciding criterion of his qualification when he is not resident in the United Kingdom. That illustrates the anomaly and contradiction of attempting to combine a geographical representation, as we essentially have it in this House, with a citizenship representation of those living outside.

Any effort to find a criterion which will satisfactorily identify persons not living in a constituency and who should help in deciding the outcome of an election in that constituency proves to be a failure. One criterion which has been quoted is that of intention, and we have been told, "Here are British citizens who lie abroad for the good of their country," as it used to be said of British ambassadors, "and, dear folk, they have the intention of returning home one day."

Maybe they do, and maybe they do not. There is no means of ascertaining that or of foreseeing its fulfilment. And in any case, where should they then be registered? Should they be registered and able to vote in the constituency in which they were born and perhaps brought up—say a mining constituency in west Yorkshire—even though, owing to the course of their career and success in a commercial life, Torquay, Bournemouth, Eastbourne or some lush area in the home counties may be their intended place of eventual sojourn?

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman is wrong to focus on the constituency in which the vote is to be cast. He should begin by asking whether it is just to deprive such a person of a vote. If the answer is that it is not just, it then becomes a matter of mechanics as to where the vote is cast.

Mr. Powell: If the vote is given the mechanics must follow, but I do not accept any recognisable criterion of justice. We are concerned with the application of a system, and it is incompatible with the system on which this House is constituted that we should extend the franchise to British citizens wherever they may be in the world and whatever may be their relationship with this country. Still less satisfactory has been the criterion of the benefits which they confer on the home country. It would go ill with many of us if we had to explain to the registration officer the benefit that we confer on the United Kingdom before he would agree to register us at the address where we are resident. That illustrates the difficulty of arguing a case on some preconceived principle of justice or fairness for those who have no local identification in this country to enjoy the franchise.

6.30 pm

The difficulty in which the Government find themselves is shared by the Opposition in endeavouring to modify the principle in the clause as it stands. It was ingenious, I admit, of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) to argue that five years is the length of a Parliament and that after five years, if a Parliament has run its full length, there will be another show on the road. However, on any logical consideration, five years is no more satisfactory than seven years as an arbitrary dividing line between those who are identifiable with a constituency by the simple fact that they live there, that their home is in that constituency and that they are part of the local community, and the alternative principle, towards which the Government have partially lurched, of conferring the franchise upon all citizens, wherever they may be. It seems to me that the right hon. Gentleman is on firmer ground in rejecting that principle when we come to consider the clause.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I believe that the new principle that we are trying partially to shoehorn into our constitution is not acceptable. Therefore, we shall oppose the Question, That the clause stand part of the Bill. However, as five years is, so to speak, a lesser evil than the seven years of the unsatisfactory arrangement in the clause as it stands, then five years be it, rather then seven, though there is little of a logical character to be urged in favour of that choice.

Mr. Beith: A fascinating picture has been painted for us tonight, in particular by the Opposition Front Bench. It is the picture of the properly qualified voter, the person who reads a good newspaper and is familiar with the political events of this country, who follows closely in the electronic media, as they were described, the to-ings and fro-ings of British politics, who pays his taxes and rates, who knows, and has had personal contact with, the candidates standing in the constituency in which he intends to vote and who genuinely resides at the place in which he has an electoral qualification. Those are all the characteristics which, it is said, persons living abroad lack. Therefore, they are the reasons why they should not have the franchise extended to them for five years, seven years or for an indefinite period, as proposed at the start of this debate.

All hon. Members know that if those were to be the relevant criteria we could challenge almost every voter who comes into a polling station. Indeed, there is a provision for party agents to be present in the polling stations and to challenge voters. If they could apply those criteria as well as the criteria which they can now apply, such as being the person one claims to be, they would have a field day. Very few voters in any of our parties would get over the threshold. Therefore, we begin with an unrealistic picture. It is unrealistic in this sense. I refer to the last of the qualifications that I mentioned. It assumes that a person is always genuinely resident in the place for which he has an electoral qualification.

The point is that we are now debating not whether we should give the vote for five or seven years to persons who are working abroad, but whether we should extend the franchise to those who have been unable to maintain a residential qualification in this country by means of

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ownership or occupation of property. We are talking about extending the franchise to many who are probably the less well off among those who are working abroad: those who have been unable to preserve their electoral rights in Britain by owning property and filling in forms relating to that property in the United Kingdom.

As was pointed out earlier, those who are reasonably well off will probably have opted, for other reasons, to maintain a residence in this country and perhaps not to let it out, so as to be in a position to fill in annually the form that keeps them on the electoral register. As many hon. Members know, it is by no means necessary to complete the householder's form year after year in order to remain on the electoral register. The tendency is for names to remain on the register unless evidence is produced that they ought to be taken off it. Therefore, very many people who now live overseas, some of whom may suffer from the serious disadvantages mentioned by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)—that they have not read the overseas edition of *The Times* and have not paid their taxes—are qualified to vote because of their occupation of property in this country, while others do not qualify.

It is to the generally less well endowed category, those who have been unable to preserve a residential qualification in this country, that the amendments to this clause are addressed. They include people who work for international institutions like the United Nations, the European Community, people in trading activities, missionaries and those who are engaged in low-paid service overseas, including an increasing number of manual workers. If there has been a social change in recent years, it is probably reflected by the increase in the number of manual workers who go, for example, to work for a number of years in the Gulf states, where work is available in the construction industry.

Therefore, we are referring to a range of people, some of whom have votes and some of whom do not, entirely according to whether they have been able to maintain property in this country. There is no reason to assume, as some hon. Members who have criticised this proposal have assumed, that links with this country tend to diminish as time passes. I know of no basis for that assumption. Indeed, there is considerable evidence to suggest that those who are forced to be absent from this country for a longer period develop an increasing affection for, and sometimes a concern to return to, this country. There is no evidence to suggest that a period of absence from this country reduces involvement and commitment.

I am very glad that tonight the right hon. Member for Gorton did not use the arguments relating to bank robbers who are resident in Spain—arguments which seemed to carry with them the underlying assumption that all of those who live abroad are tarred with the same brush and display some kind of basic disloyalty to this country. It may be that the right hon. Gentleman is saving those arguments for the debate on clause stand apart, but he has concentrated until now upon the more limited argument relating to qualification.

The Government sought initially to exercise a judgment about the period for which it was reasonable to give an electoral qualification to those who had been unable to preserve one by having maintained a residence in this country. The Government decided upon seven years. If newspaper reports are to be believed, there is reason to believe that the Government may be persuaded by the Labour party's argument that if we are to extend the franchise we should do so only for five years, not for seven, thus reducing the effect to the period of one Parliament and one general election. I am opposed to that reduction. I have put down an amendment stating that we should consider a period of 10 years. That period might be more widely accepted.

I sympathise with the argument of the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) that there is no obvious reason for setting a time limit upon this qualification. I accept the view that the qualification can continue indefinitely. Indeed, there are a very large number of people who have looked for redress of what they consider to be an injustice in this legislation but who will not get it because they have already been working abroad for more than five or seven years and, in doing so, have been serving the interests of this country.

There is something fundamentally ill-advised about bringing forward a legislative proposal that is designed to remedy an injustice, only to find that the proposal does not serve to remedy the grievance. The sense of injustice is perhaps greatest among those who have been working abroad for five, six, seven, eight, or 10 years, very many of whom are working in the interests of this country. If those people, by the limitations imposed by these amendments, do not get relief from injustice, what purpose have we served? That is why I am so critical of a limitation even to seven years. I am even more critical of a limitation to five years. I believe that we have aroused expectations. Indeed, the speech of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to the Conservative party conference helped to arouse the expectation that something would be done about what is felt to be a real grievance.

It is certainly felt to be a grievance when set alongside the practice of so many other countries which rate their citizenship more highly than do we. British citizens working abroad feel that almost every other country in the world sets a greater store by the standing of its citizens working abroad and makes a more genuine assumption about their loyalty than do the British Government. That feeling will be even stronger and will not be assuaged if we give the impression that we are legislating to remove this grievance, and yet so limit the offer—in this case five years—that many will not benefit at all, while those who do benefit will be lucky if they get a vote at one general election.

Charles Hargrove, better known as a former correspondent of *The Times*, but now the chairman of the British Conservative Association in France, makes the point in a letter which he has written to my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal party. He said:

> "The Government has at last acknowledged that voting rights should be attached to British citizenship but has nevertheless included a restriction that is justifiable neither in principle nor in practical politics, i.e., to limit the voting right to those who have been abroad for less than seven years—on the grounds that, beyond this time limit, a Briton's links with his mother country would have become too tenuous. We argue from direct personal experience that the facts belie this assumption. Loyalty to Britain, and the willingness to defend and promote British interests, cannot be determined by a fixed time limit."

I share his view and I think that it is a mistake for the House to arouse the expectation that the Bill will remedy a real sense of injustice and then so to limit that remedy that it does not prove to be a remedy at all.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The approach of the right hon. Members for South Down (Mr. Powell) and for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) to this matter is uncharacteristically narrow. The approach of the right hon. Member for South Down has essentially been to ask whether it is right that a person resident abroad should have a vote in a constituency from which he has long departed. Answering that question in the negative, he goes on to be critical of the general approach adopted by the Government. That is the wrong approach for the reason that I shall shortly mention. The first question to ask is whether it is right to deprive of a vote a British citizen who intends to return. If the answer is that it is not right to deprive such a person of a vote, we have a lesser question as to the place of voting.

The Labour party, in this matter as in others, is extremely reluctant to see the franchise enlarged. Indeed, it is putting itself in the rather bizarre position, as has been described by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), of arguing in favour of something approaching a property, rate-paying, tax-paying, education—*[Interruption.]*—or residential qualification. The right hon. Members for South Down and for Gorton ignore the much broader consideration which is raised in the debate — the concept of loyalty, of allegiance, of affinity. That is a matter which the right hon. Member for South Down often comes to in other contexts — allegiance, affinity, loyalty or blood. All those justify the proposition that British citizens resident abroad have, prima facie, a right to vote.

Mr. Kaufman: Does the hon. Gentleman regard it as a sign of loyalty to nip off to the Channel Islands or somewhere else to dodge tax?

Mr. Hogg: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman asked that question. I shall come to it later when the House deals with amendment No. 29 which he has tabled. I support amendment No. 29 because it is undesirable that people who have renounced their domicile of origin should have a vote. But that is a narrow point. I take his point in so far as it goes, but it does not go to the root of the matter. The root of the matter is allegiance and affinity. If a person has undiluted allegiance and affinity to Britain, prima facie he has a right to vote.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman explain how he evaluates allegiance, loyalty and affinity? If he can define and judge whether somebody truly has loyalty and allegiance, he may carry more hon. Members with him, but I suspect that with such abstract concepts he will be hard put to say that he can identify loyalty in one man but not in another.

6.45 pm

Mr. Hogg: There are two answers to the question that the hon. Gentleman has fairly posed. The first is that if a person does not have the allegiance and affinity of which I have spoken he is not likely to want to cast a vote. In a sense, the casting of a vote is the manifestation of the affinity and allegiance. I accept that that is a subjective judgment and the hon. Gentleman may take a different view, but I think that it is a view that will be shared by many hon. Members.

In the end it comes to a question of balance. Where do we strike the balance in such matters? I would rather ensure that everybody who deserves a vote has a vote, even if it includes a few unworthy folk, rather than, in the desire to exclude all unworthy folk, exclude people who should, in all conscience, have a vote. I would rather err on the side of enlarging the franchise than on the side of restricting it. Those are the two answers that I would give to the hon. Gentleman.

I have tabled amendments Nos. 66 and 69. Amendment No. 66 provides for the same term of 10 years as that proposed by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. There is no great magic in seven or 10 years, but because I am in favour of enlarging the period I go for 10 rather than seven or five years.

Amendment No. 69 is a little more important because it gives my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department the power to alter the period. I envisage a power to extend what I hope will be a 10-year period to a longer period, subject to an affirmative resolution of the House. The justification for that is that in the course of time many of the fears that have been put forward in the debate will seem to be misplaced. People will come to realise the injustice of excluding people from the franchise. If that is the view, it is right that we should enlarge the period. As has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), it is rare that the House has a chance to discuss election matters of this kind. To find time for primary legislation to enlarge the period would be difficult. Therefore, I prefer to do it by way of delegated legislation subject to an affirmative resolution of the House.

Mr. Fisher: By using the word "subjective" the hon. Gentleman gives away his case. He is making a value judgment about those abstract virtues which he suggests should be the qualification. The charm of the right to vote by a residential qualification is that no value judgment is made. If the hon. Gentleman has to make a value judgment, he puts himself in an impossible position. He can surely see the distinction between an objective test and a subjective value judgment.

Mr. Hogg: All questions that deal with justice are in the end subjective in their character. What is just or unjust is essentially a subjective test. Absolute standards cannot be applied. I am asking the House to form a collective view, albeit subjective, as to what is just, and I have put forward my arguments.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that were amendment No. 69 to become law it would give the Secretary of State an awesome power to alter the voting pattern in Britain? He could shorten or lengthen the period depending on whether it was in his interests. That would make it a recipe for gerrymandering.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman does not understand the real purport of amendment No. 69. It deals only with the period relevant to the overseas voter. That is the only period that can be altered — in this case from seven years to whatever period might be desired. But it is subject to an affirmative resolution of the House, not a negative resolution. It must have the affirmative approval of the

[Mr. Hogg]

House. That is a device to avoid the difficulty of bringing the matter back by way of primary legislation. If we rely on that, we shall never have the matter back in our lifetime.

Mr. Bermingham: With great respect, the hon. Gentleman misses the point. If the amendment were to become part of the Bill the Secretary of State would be in a position, if he thought it in his interests to do so, to pass a resolution in order to enhance the period for the overseas voter. The Secretary of State tends to belong to the governing party which tends to command a majority in the House. Therefore, for purely political ends the Secretary of State could alter the period to his party's advantage, and that is something that we have never permitted.

Mr. Hogg: As I would expect of the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), that is an ingenious argument, but, as I would also expect of him, it is wholly wrong, for this cogent reason. We cannot tell, for example, how many overseas voters there are.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Have a guess.

Mr. Hogg: Far less can we tell what are the political affiliations of overseas voters. I am sure that, being well advised, they are all Conservatives, but that may change in the course of time.

The point I seek to make is that no Secretary of State can form a very clear view of the political affiliations of overseas voters. If we are indeed vexed with this question, we should be much more vexed with the position which enables the Prime Minister to call an election as and when the Prime Minister chooses. That is a much greater power in this context than any power that the Bill may give to the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I am glad to have the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg). I seek to reply first to the point that the hon. Gentleman made at the beginning of his remarks, when he said that the question—and he seemed to imply the sole question—that we should ask is whether it is unjust for individuals who are expatriates from the country to be denied the vote. He seemed to suggest that that was the sole matter that we had to decide and that that injustice should be remedied.

I can understand that many thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, of people serving this country perfectly well —and, of course retaining allegiance to this country— all over the world are in that position and feel that sense of grievance. It may be that sense of grievance partly which has given rise to the amendment, although I shall come to some more esoteric points in a moment. But it cannot be that that is the sole question to be decided. However much our sympathy may be for persons placed in that situation, it is the responsibility—not the right, but the duty—of the House of Commons to decide what would be the effect of applying that principle to the constitution of the country as it currently operates.

The argument that has been put forward on this aspect —and the hon. Gentleman made no attempt to reply to it — is overwhelming. If the vote is afforded to expatriates, some advantage may be given in removing an injustice for some individuals, but serious injury will be inflicted on the constitution. That has to be taken into account. Those matters must be accepted, or at least understood and argued in the House of Commons by hon. Members.

I do not expect the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) to apply his mind to these matters, because the Liberal party has long since abandoned any idea of sustaining the principle that we should uphold the doctrine that a Member of Parliament represents his constituency. Most hon. Members have considered that to be a very important principle. Indeed, I believe it is one of the principles that have enabled our democracy to be a better and more adult democracy in some respects than democracies of many other countries. I say that in no boasting or, I hope, chauvinistic spirit. However, we know that the Liberal party and, in latter days, catching up a little breathlessly, the Social Democratic alliance, have long since abandoned that principle on the high ground that it would suit their members to move a system of proportional representation. They have not concealed their view. Nobody can accuse them of that. But they have elevated it into the highest principle of all.

On some occasions the leader of the Social Democrats, or the leader of the Liberals—I forget which, but I dare say that they are interchangeable in this respect, if not in others—has insisted that, after any election in which there was a balance, the most essential principle that would need to be settled beyond anything to deal with unemployment, the cost of living, foreign policy or nuclear weapons would be satisfying the demand of the Social Democrats and Liberals for proportional representation. Thus, the Social Democrats and the Liberals elevate this to a very high place. It cannot be placed higher. If that is the situation, we do not expect any sympathy from them.

I was slightly surprised by the second reason advanced by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed for wanting to tear up this part of the constitution. It was that high expectations on this subject were aroused at the Conservative party conference, and he thought that those expectations should be satisfied. It is the first time that I have ever heard a spokesman for the Liberal party say that we must satisfy that monstrous regiment of men and women who assemble at the Conservative party conference. I shall come to them in a moment because they are relevant to the debate. I do not expect for a moment that we shall have any support from the Liberal party or the latter-come-lately Social Democrats on the subject. A few years ago they were not so passionate about proportional representation and tearing up the relationship between the Member of Parliament and his constituency, but they are now. However, I shall leave them aside.

I agree entirely with what was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). The amendment that he has tabled is not, of course, even a second best; nor does he claim it to be so. He said that it is a modification of one of the worst parts of the Bill. It is, I suppose, one of the simplest axioms of our modern politics that any amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend is better than one tabled by the Home Secretary. In this case, I am sure that that is true. On that basis alone, I would be happy to go into the Lobby with my right hon. Friend, just as I am happy to accept his views on almost every subject. I do that in this case with slight reluctance, as he will understand, for the very arguments that he advanced. It is difficult to make anything resembling a silk purse out of this sow's ear of

a Bill. It cannot be done. My right hon. Friend can have no great expectation of success in that enterprise. If any Member could do it, my right hon. Friend could, but it cannot be done. I suppose that that is the worst part of a bad Bill.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone), who supports the amendment, got into some very deep water. He said that the numbers do not count. The implication of the hon. Member for Grantham is that the numbers do not count. Under the present arrangements, if the numbers of people voting in a general election to decide the Government of a country were to be the equivalent of, say, half the total electorate, would anybody be fool enough to suggest that it would not matter if half of them paid taxes and half did not?

The principle of the numbers is, therefore, very important. The numbers of those who are to be included in the Bill is important. We have not been given the answers yet, and we do not know whether we shall be advised of them. I know that an amendment has been tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton which deals specifically with this matter. That amendment, as I understand it, will not allow the Government to go ahead with the Bill until they have given detailed evidence of the numbers involved. Of course we are entitled to know what the numbers are, because they could significantly alter the situation.

The argument of the hon. Member for Grantham, that many people in the country do not pay taxes, is nonsense. The Bill proposes — and this is novel in our constitutional procedure, as far as I know—that people who do not pay taxes are deliberately to be given votes. If that principle is to be incorporated in our constitutional or electoral practice, it ought to have been properly discussed. According to the Liberal party, it was discussed at the Conservative party conference, and that is enough for the Liberal party. As long as it was discussed there and got a thumping vote, the Liberals support it.

Mr. Beith: Will the right hon. Gentleman accept, as I did, that the Home Secretary appeared to be addressing himself at the time not to the Conservative party conference but to a far wider audience, and that the expectations that he aroused were not in that body but among those overseas who might obtain the vote? Should a person in this country who, by the very extent of his poverty, has had no income and therefore has paid no taxes for a period of time be deprived of the vote?

7 pm

Mr. Foot: I am not in favour of depriving anyone of the vote if he has residential qualifications in this country. If the hon. Gentleman is seeking to build the whole of his great fabric of change in the constitution on that slender basis, the edifice will collapse even quicker than the structure that he proposed in his previous argument, and that was pretty weak. The hon. Gentleman should think rather more carefully. We are talking about a considerable number of people in different parts of the world who will have the power to settle elections in this country and results in individual constituencies without having participated in any of the normal processes of electoral appeal.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has poured scorn on all the methods by which we, as humdrum candidates, try to put over our views—for example, the reading of newspapers. I suppose that people are still entitled to read *The Times* if they want to do so and not to be jeered at by representatives of the Liberal party for engaging in such an extraordinary activity. I do not claim that I am always successful in elections, but the methods by which we decide them are pretty good. If the methods are to be changed, there must be good reasons for doing so.

By considering these issues in Committee, I believe that we are illustrating our case even more clearly than if we were having a full discussion on the principle. That is often the result of detailed discussion on what the Government propose. It is a form of discussion which exposes their case all the more clearly. In this instance it has exposed the fact that there should have been proper discussion between the parties. I know that the Home Secretary mocks that view. I know also that he has the Select Committee up his sleeve, or something of that sort. However, we do not have government by Select Committees. Select Committees are not fitting substitutes for proper consultation between the parties. The hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), who moved the amendment, said that there had been hardly any discussions or debates on Representation of the People Bills since the 1945 Parliament, of which I was a member. I think that there have been more debates than the hon. Gentleman recalls, but I take his point.

It is true that this is a major Bill which involves an unspecified extension of the franchise in a way that we considered previously not to be right and which many of us still believe to be wrong in principle. If the Government wanted to go ahead with such a proposition, it was their duty to find the means whereby there could be proper and open discussion. I am not suggesting that there should have been secret talks, talks between the usual channels, or any hugger-muggery. The Government should have arranged for open discussions to take place. They are proposing to bring 500,000 or 1 million people into the franchise, whichever party they may vote for. Of course, we all have our guesses about that. There must be discussion with the other parties, even if the Liberal party does not want to attend. The Government should have made their proposal and we should have discussed it. If that had been done, we would have been able to consider these matters properly.

The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), who always raises these matters to the very highest plateau of moral integrity, suggested that the Government have merely misunderstood the situation. I wonder whether they do not understand it all too well. A simpler explanation of their behaviour is that they preferred not to have discussions with the Opposition. In taking that view, the opportunity for discussion is removed and discussion becomes superfluous. As I said on Second Reading, they could have arranged a Speaker's Conference. That would have allowed the issue to be brought out in the open, and people would then have been aware of what the Government were proposing. Perhaps a compromise could have been reached, but I would not have been in favour of it. I believe that the principle of expatriate votes is fundamentally wrong in our constitution. That is why we shall do our best to resist clause 1.

I repeat that it is my view that the Bill was not introduced in a proper way. Presumably the Bill was discussed by the Cabinet. We are talking about the sort of Bill that is introduced only once in half a century, and I

[Mr. Foot]

suppose that the Bill might have been discussed even by the present Cabinet. When it was discussed, I am sure that the interests of the Conservative party were well taken into account. After all, it would have had its representative sitting with them. The spokesman, chairman or manager of Conservative Central Office, whatever he is called, is a Minister and he could have been present. I am sure that that precaution was taken. In this instance he might have plucked up courage and said a few words.

I am sure that the Government received guidance. Even if that did not happen in open Cabinet in case it might sneak out 30 years later, I am sure that consultations took place with Conservative Central Office before the Government went ahead with the Bill. One can imagine Conservative Central Office saying, "It is all right with us, boys"—or girls, or whatever one chooses to say. "We think that you should go ahead. Do not worry. If you read the report of the Select Committee, you might find a few examples that can be used to bolster your case. Try to dress it up as if it is a real constitutional proposal." I do not believe that it is anything of the sort. If this part of the Bill is enacted, greater benefit will be brought to the Conservative party than to any other party. That is one of the reasons why the Government have decided to pursue it.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman has been condemning the Government in robust terms and pouring scorn on the Select Committee's report. Has he forgotten that clause 1 is more restrictive than the enlargement of the franchise that is proposed in paragraph 52 of the Select Committee's report, and that two of the Labour Opposition's Front Bench home affairs spokesmen were parties to the Select Committee's recommendation?

Mr. Foot: All the matters that the hon. Gentleman has raised were discussed on Second Reading. I shall be happy to debate them again now and to answer his questions. Events have illustrated the wisdom of what I and others have said.

It is improper for a Government to say that a Select Committee should be designated as a substitute for proper consultation between the parties or as a substitute for a Speaker's Conference. One of the reasons why Speaker's Conferences have had authority is that they have not been used too often. When major changes have been proposed, there have been attempts by almost all Governments to try to reach sensible agreements. The Government are guilty of a gross dereliction of duty in not taking that course. That is why we should sling out the whole Bill if we have the chance to do so. However, I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton that we should try to improve parts of it if we can.

When we come to decide whether the clause should stand part of the Bill, we shall have the opportunity for a fuller debate. Let us take the opportunity to sling out the entire clause and to trim down the Bill to the clauses which can decently be presented to the House of Commons. If that is done, it will be a slim Bill.

Sir Edward Gardner: I am glad to be able to take up some of the remarks of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). He always makes a compelling and engaging speech even though the arguments that he adduces are entirely unconvincing, as they have been today. He joins the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) in suggesting that there is no need in justice, logic or necessity to introduce the new right that will be created by clause 1, which will give those living abroad the right to vote in our elections.

This measure is no novelty. It does no injury to the constitution. As the Committee will appreciate, we have this provision already. Already people living abroad are entitled by statute to vote in our general elections by proxy or by post. They are known as people with the right to service votes—members of the armed forces and their wives or husbands, members of the Diplomatic Service and the Crown service generally. A number of other people have the privilege of being able to decide by their vote at an election this country's future course and conduct.

The clause seeks to extend that right in the name of justice to those people who are at present isolated from this country and frustrated in their desires to give guidance about the future conduct of the Government. Therefore, it seems to me, as I hope it seems to most hon. Members, that that principle, against which the right hon. Members for Blaenau Gwent and for South Down have been arguing —they say that that principle should not exist and that, if accepted, it will damage the constitution—should be upheld and welcomed by the Committee.

Clause 1 and the amendments we are considering will extend the franchise to people who will thereby benefit. I should like to ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary a question. Perhaps I am entering the realms of speculation and the imponderable, but it is a responsible question to which I hope I shall receive a reliable answer. The Government, in their reply to the recommendations of the Home Affairs Select Committee, suggested that about 3 million British citizens are living abroad and that about 600,000 of them would receive the vote because they had lived abroad for seven years. Can my right hon. and learned Friend assist the Committee by estimating how many British citizens will be enfranchised if the Bill's provisions come into force, first, for people living abroad for seven years and, secondly, for people living abroad for five years?

We are really trying to decide whether we should shorten or lengthen the time a person may live abroad without disqualifying him or her from the privilege of having a vote. Opposition amendment No. 14 suggests a period of five years. I am not entirely convinced by the arguments of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) who suggested that the five-year period should be accepted because that is the statutory life of a Parliament. I do not believe that that is necessarily the yardstick that should be applied in deciding how long or how short the period should be.

7.15 pm

I hope that the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent accepts, in spite of the fact that he does not appear to put much value on the findings and recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee, that the Committee's recommendations, as with all good Select Committees, were based upon the consideration of a considerable quantity of evidence in testimony and documentary form. The Government, having considered the Committee's evidence and having concluded that that evidence could be acted upon, decided that the period during which a person could

remain abroad and retain the vote should be seven years. The Government may be right or they may be wrong—that is a judgment.

As the Bill is drafted, the period is seven years. I shall not argue that that period is precisely right or wholly wrong or something that we should reconsider. One can play around with the figure and state, as in amendment No. 66, that it should be 10 years or state, as in another amendment, that there should be no limit, as my hon. Friends the Members for Corby (Mr. Powell) and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) have argued. One takes into account those good and respectable arguments. But it is all guesswork. No one can pretend—I certainly will not pretend on anyone's behalf—that that guesswork is reliable. We must come to some conclusion.

I am opposed to those of my hon. Friends who believe that there should be no limit. I believe that there should be a restriction. At least for an experimental period, we could have a five-year or seven-year limit. I have two reasons for suggesting that the period should be five years. First, if the Government are prepared to compromise and to come down from a seven-year period to a five-year period, they will not breach any principle. Secondly, this is a constitutional Bill. When we discuss a constitutional instrument, it is essential that we should try, if possible, to have not just a majority in favour but a consensus. By accepting the Opposition's suggestion of five years, we have a better chance of obtaining a consensus than if we voted for seven years. If I may say so, because I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary cannot say this for himself, my right hon. and learned Friend will have been wise in the extreme in deciding, as I hope he will, to accept the five-year period. We badly need the Bill, and we need to remove all obstacles to its passage.

Mr. Bermingham: This measure will extend the franchise, and I have never been in favour of extending the franchise. I shall give my reasons when the Committee considers whether the clause should stand part of the Bill. This is not the time to advance those arguments because we could range widely in discussing these matters.

If we are to extend the franchise, we must fix a time limit, because there comes a time when a person who has gone abroad ceases to have any realistic contact with the United Kingdom.

The argument has been advanced that there should be no limit. The hon. Gentleman who advanced it should consider for a moment the reality of what he was saying. The country receives many immigrants and it is one from which many people emigrate. In effect, he was saying that as years pass and more and more people go abroad we could reach the point when the number of people abroad entitled to vote for an unlimited period could well exceed 8 million.

I am a strong supporter of Select Committees. When Select Committees make recommendations, they are what they are—advice arrived at from the evidence they have heard. They rely upon the Government replying to the recommendations and the House debating them. A Select Committee in no way believes that it can impose its rule upon the House. It merely gathers evidence and expresses opinions. It is against that background that we look at the work of Select Committees.

The hon. and learned Member for Fylde (Sir E. Gardner) seemed to think that the number involved in extending the franchise was about 600,000. I have studied the number of people who voted in the last general election. It was approximately 31·6 million, and 600,000 is 1·5 per cent. of that. If one then discounts that 1·5 per cent. by the average turn-out figure of approximately two thirds, one arrives at the figure that the overseas voting content will be approximately a 1 per cent. addition to the electorate. It has been known for 1 per cent. to decide general elections.

I put that matter before the Committee because when I was exchanging views with the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) it seemed that he entirely missed the point. I ask the Committee to reject amendment No. 69 decisively because although I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman's powers of logic, occasionally, with great respect to him, he seems to miss the point. We shall soon begin to know the number of persons involved in the exercise because they will be recorded constituency by constituency as the votes are registered.

In this day of modern science, it does not take too much ingenuity to work out how to poll those who are resident abroad and who seek to vote in our general elections. It would not be beyond the wit of the then Secretary of State to ascertain whether the total number of external electors —if I may put it that way—were of benefit to his or her party. It is against that background that I felt that this measure would put an intolerable strain upon the democratic political system. That is why I urge the Committee to reject amendment No. 69. It contains basic law. It puts a future Secretary of State in an almost intolerable position. When the matter is thought out logically, we can see that it is not one that we would wish on any Secretary of State.

I similarly ask that amendment No. 66 be rejected because 10 years is too long, for all the reasons that have been advanced. If we have to accept the idea of external voting, five years seems a sensible compromise.

Mr. Hayward: I was interested in the contributions of the right hon. Members for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) and for South Down (Mr. Powell) who, in essence, said that we should not make the change because this is the constitution as it stands. They were implying that the constitution is unchangeable. We should recognise, after reviewing these matters over the years, that change is necessary. Over many centuries we have made many valuable changes to the constitution, such as the enfranchisement of females. If we pursue the argument that we should not change the constitution, we would never have given women the vote. I am aware that there are those who hold the view that it was not a good idea.

Circumstances change. As against 20 years ago, there are many people who do valuable work abroad on behalf of this country. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent asked whether the figures were large or small. The figures are reasonable, and they are likely to grow. For that reason, we should make the change. As we enter into more and more agreements, whether they be industrial or commercial, or in terms of the United Nations or the EEC, more people will work abroad. For that reason, I support the clause which introduces the overseas franchise.

I share the view expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for Corby (Mr. Powell) and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) that, as the periods of such international agreements become longer, it is important that people should be allowed to remain enfranchised in this country

[Mr. Hayward]

for longer. Many people already work in industry in Europe and have been abroad for more than seven years. It is likely that they will be there for seven, 10 or 15 years. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) is not present, but what would happen if Ferranti in his constituency took money from the ESPRIT programme in the EEC, in association with Padua or Rome universities, and many of Ferranti's employees worked there for several years? They would be disfranchised. That is unacceptable. Having accepted the principle that we should enfranchise people who are resident overseas, we should accept it in full and not put a time limit on it.

Mr. Maclennan: I support the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). Before I give my reasons for doing so, I wish to defend the Home Secretary against the accusation that he proceeded improperly in arriving at his conclusion as to how the Bill should be constructed on this point.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was, as usual, locked with the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) in historical conservatism. He put forward the argument that because the Home Secretary had not followed the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference there was something improper about proceeding with this method of extending the franchise.

I must remind the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent of how the Labour party, when in government, treated electoral conferences. He will recall that, because he was there. I was not a Minister at the time, but I was a member of the electoral conference. He will recall that an electoral conference in the 1960s proposed that the voting age should be reduced from 21 to 20. The Labour Government at that time properly took the view that that was inappropriate, and they rejected the recommendation of the Speaker's Conference. There was nothing sacrosanct about it.

Lest the right hon. Gentleman should peddle the illusion that Speakers' Conferences are in some way more pure and less sullied by political consideration than Cabinet discussions or the proceedings of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, let me tell him of my experience at the hands of one of his colleagues when, at a second Speaker's Conference on electoral law, the issue of votes for holidaymakers was considered. I voted in favour of extending the franchise to holidaymakers. I was summoned by a right hon. colleague of the right hon. Gentleman to explain why I voted against——

Mr. Foot: Bill Rodgers.

Mr. Maclennan: If I am forced to divulge the identity, I shall tell the House that it was the then deputy leader of the Labour party who, on the instructions of a Cabinet Committee, summoned me to explain why I had voted against Labour party policy handed down by Transport house.

It is nonsense for the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent now to don a white sheet and speak as though this were some great matter of principle. He is an honourable man who has been in the House long enough to beguile us with historical recollections, but his stance today is clearly humbug. What is the great principle whereby he opposes the extension of the franchise? He says that we need to know how many people will be involved. If he had been more frank, he might have said that it depended upon how many more Conservative voters the Government would reap. The number can scarcely be regarded as a matter of principle, and is in any event incalculable.

7.30 pm

The hon. Member for South Down stood firm on conservative historical grounds—the constitution as it is and always should be. That cannot satisfy those of us who see British constitutional history as a process of development and change to reflect social and political changes. One of the most important political changes in the lifetime of most of the participants in this debate has been the extent to which British citizens now travel, live and work abroad, not just to serve their own narrow interests, but to serve their country's interests. They stay abroad for long periods, but they return from time to time and they are very familiar with what is going on here. As the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) pointed out, communications have also greatly improved in our lifetime. Residents abroad almost certainly have as sharp an awareness of the issues involved in a general election as many people resident in this country.

In my judgment, residence is not as sound a principle on which to stand as the principle of justice. It has long been recognised in the United States and in France that a citizen's most important right is to seek to influence the complexion of the democratic Government of the country to which he belongs. I freely confess that my original thinking and that of my party on this was not dissimilar to that of the Home Secretary on Second Reading. We felt that there might be some diminution over time in the citizen's links with his home country and a consequent decline in interest in the outcome of elections. I thought that on balance that argument suggested the need for some time limit on the exercise of the right to vote, but that has been overborne in my mind by the wider view so eloquently expressed by the hon. Members for Corby and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) that citizenship should carry the right to vote.

I hope that if the Committee divides on this issue, all Members will be permitted to vote freely, without the imposition of the usual party sanctions, and to exercise their individual judgment. I intend to vote for the amendment of the hon. Member for Corby. If that fails, I shall vote for the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) as second best. Indeed, my hon. Friend himself made it plain that he preferred the wider proposition of the hon. Member for Corby.

We are unlikely to have the opportunity to change this law for a long time. The amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Grantham, which would allow alterations through secondary legislation subject to affirmative resolution, is thus deserving of favour if the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Corby is not carried. Nevertheless, it is preferable to arrive at a conclusion today by means of the primary legislation before us. If the Home Secretary's mind has also been changed since he last spoke on this matter, I hope that it has moved in the same direction as my own.

Mr. Bruinvels: On Second Reading I said that the Bill would give many more people the right to vote. In the past, British subjects resident overseas have been unfairly denied the franchise. The number involved is about

600,000, of whom 100,000 work in the European Community. I see no reason why those people should not have the right to vote.

I was not surprised that the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) opposed the change as I recall the boundary commission report which failed to appear until after the 1970 election. On the other hand, the right hon. Gentleman supported the abolition of the House of Lords, which I should have thought would be a fairly major constitutional change. His attitude seems to depend very much on the story and flavour of the day.

The majority of people living overseas still pay taxes and they pay rates on homes in this country. As house owners, they are responsible people. I cannot see how the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) can imply that they act irresponsibly. In my view, they are not tax exiles, and it is time that they had the right to vote. This is democracy at work and the whole Committee should support it. After all, the right to vote is one of the most important rights and privileges of a citizen. Ambassadors and senior diplomats based abroad have the right to vote, as do service men stationed abroad, and the system seems to work well. So what is everyone worried about now?

The people involved, of course, must keep their names on the register. That has always concerned me, because, if they do not do that, they lose their connection with a particular constituency. If, however, they maintain their names on the register—and as house owners they should do so—they ought to be entitled to vote. Are they likely to return to Great Britain or Northern Ireland? That is the test. If the answer is yes, I cannot see why they should not be given the vote. There is no uncertainty in such a case; they have made their position clear.

On 10 December, I said that people living abroad should be allowed to vote, but that seven years was a rather long period and I hoped that the period would be shorter. I refer hon. Members to column 815 of the *Official Report*. Clearly, I must be in favour of a five-year term. However, I also said that the list should be continually checked. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who is not in the Chamber at the moment, maintained that a number of gentlemen living overseas have failed to have their names removed from the register. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary would agree with me that it is against the law for a person to keep his name on the register after he has left his house permanently. I believe that the law would be brought heavily to bear upon those who offend against electoral practices.

As I have made plain, I favour amendment No. 14. I believe that five years is the right length of time. I have some sympathy with the right hon. Member for Gorton, because five years is about the length of time between one general election and another. Paragraph 2.7 of "The Government reply to the First Report from the Home Affairs Committee" suggests that, as time drags on, the link with the United Kingdom becomes more tenuous. Therefore, any absence of more than five years might well justify one in supporting the right hon. Gentleman's amendment. In any case, is anyone likely to keep a house for longer than five years? I doubt it.

Throughout the five-year period, the resident abroad is likely to be represented by the same Member of Parliament. He is likely to come to this country for holidays, and it is likely that his salary will be paid here. He will have a real connection with the United Kingdom. Those who work overseas but keep up their connections with the United Kingdom would strongly resent some of the allegations that have been made about them today. They are not rogues. They are promoting this country, improving business and increasing our exports. Of course, they must nominate their most recent address, and that will be made clear.

What is wrong with a voice from abroad being heard in Britain? If someone has a contribution to make, let him make it.

Mr. Barron: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruinvels: I will give way for one moment only.

Mr. Barron: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because he seems to be very knowledgeable about the situation. Can he tell us how many more people are likely to appear on the electoral register as a result of this measure?

Mr. Bruinvels: I said at the beginning of my speech that 600,000 people would be likely to benefit — 100,000 of them in the EEC. The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) seems to have been blinded by my scientific knowledge. I believe that up to 600,000 people will be involved. However, I shall enter one caveat, as the hon. Gentleman will hear later.

I cannot support the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). That amendment would lead to an infinity. There must be an acid test. The Committee would be shirking its duties and responsibilities if it were to vote for the amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) is now really my honourable friend, as he is no longer a Whip. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] He is keen that the voting right should last for no more than seven years. However, he has also put his name to amendment No. 66, which stipulates 10 years. I believe that both are wrong. The figure should be five. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham that the measures should be passed by both Houses of Parliament, but I believe that it should be done now rather than later.

The Bill is good news. I hope that British citizens resident overseas will now exercise their right. I am sure that they will.

7.45 pm

Mr. Stanbrook: If there were any logic or any consistency of approach in the Government's proposals, or even any simplicity — so that they were at least consistent with the range of our law on the subject— they would have some merit. However, they lack logic and consistency. So, with respect, do all the amendments.

Our electoral roll consists of British subjects, Commonwealth citizens and citizens of the Irish Republic living in this country. The essential qualification is residence in this country. It does not matter that not all the voters are British citizens. It does not matter that many of them have their origins abroad.

What happens when the Government propose to enlarge the franchise? They do not extend to those living overseas the franchise that I have described. They extend a right to vote to people who have British citizenship. That is a special category of nationality not shared by everyone registered here or everyone on the existing electoral roll. If we are to be consistent, these proposals should apply to

[Mr. Stanbrook]

those who are entitled by reason of residence here to a vote, even though their origins may lie in the Republic of India or in Argentina.

Equally, we could have said that the franchise should be restricted to British citizens, so excluding those who do not owe allegiance to Her Majesty. That solution would be consistent and logical. I believe that it would be right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) believes that votes are such a good thing that they should be given to as many people as possible, and that no one should be deprived of a vote—although clause 1 extends the right to vote. He believes that we should extend the right on principle.

My second objection to the proposals is that the basis of the House is representation. We represent the people of our constituencies. We represent their interests, their desires, their thoughts and wishes, the way in which they want the country to be governed and even the day-to-day affairs that concern them. Such representation will not be possible when anyone on the electoral register of a constituency may be living in the south seas, and may have been living there for 10, 20, 30 40 or 50 years and may never have returned to the United Kingdom.

I accept that one should not demand a price for the right to vote. However, the logic of the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) is that people who have not contributed to the welfare of our country for years could be entitled to vote for representatives in Parliament. That is made possible by the way in which the amendment has been drawn.

I believe that the proposals are wholly wrong in principle. The Home Secretary should reconsider the whole matter and introduce a proper Bill based on British citizenship as the qualification for the right to vote. I would support such a Bill.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Leon Brittan): Before I deal directly with this group of amendments, perhaps the Committee will allow me to say something about our general approach to these matters. It was said at the beginning of the White Paper, to which the Bill broadly gives effect, that our stance has always been that

"major legislation of this kind must be put forward only on the basis of the fullest possible consultation between the political parties represented in the House of Commons".

Before presenting the White Paper we sought the views of all parties in the House informally on the Select Committee's major recommendations. The detail of the Bill has been worked out after the most scrupulous consultations with party officials and local authority associations. That does not mean that any one party can, or should, have a veto. There are central issues on which, as we said in the White Paper, our firm view is that legislation is essential. They are the extension of the franchise to people who live overseas, the extension of absent voting, especially for holiday makers, and the increase in the deposit. Those are the fundamental principles that are embodied in the Bill. Once they are accepted, there are many other important issues relating to how far and how fast to go in the implementation of those principles. Those issues are a matter of judgment rather than of principle. It is essential that we proceed with the greatest possible common agreement, or at least acquiescence, between the parties.

The matter was made clear on Second Reading when I said that we regarded our proposals on the franchise, for example, as a "sensible compromise" between those who oppose any extension in principle and those with whom the Government sympathise, who believe that the vote should be given to all British citizens throughout the world, no matter how long they have been away. On the question of the deposit, I said that we accepted that there is no figure that is clearly and absolutely right and can be defended against all other figures. I also said that we should listen with care to what was said.

I hope the Committee acknowledges that I made it clear that it gave the Government no pleasure to introduce absent voting provisions in Great Britain which would not apply to Northern Ireland. It is in that spirit that, since Second Reading, I have engaged in further discussions in an attempt to secure for the Bill as much support as possible, or at least acquiescence, in all parts of the House. I think that my efforts have met with some success. That has inevitably meant that other parties will have to go along with some provisions, often fundamental ones, which they have hitherto found deeply distasteful. For the Government, it has meant a readiness to go less far in the Bill than we should have liked. However, we shall stick firmly to the principles to which I have referred and, in so doing, make some fundamental changes in our electoral system. It is on that basis that, today and in subsequent debates, the Government will recommend that the Committee accepts some of the amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr, Kaufman).

As to the amendments before the Committee, I propose to advise the Committee to accept the amendment that limits the qualification period for overseas electors to five years after departure, and further amendments to clauses 1 to 3.

We have been presented with quite a menu of choices. Some say that we should not change something fundamental in our constitution and that the basis of residence, which has existed until now, should not be altered. The right hon. Members for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) and for South Down (Mr. Powell) have united on this matter, as they have on similar ones in the past. In an historical sense they are right. Residence has indeed been the basis for the franchise, but my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) gave the complete answer to that argument. He said that our constitution has evolved constantly and that it is right to recognise profound social changes that have taken place. It is true that many people now go to live and work abroad for shorter or longer periods of time. Unlike in the past, they do not lose touch with Britain. They have family and friends here, they might have property and children at school here and they are often liable to the payment of rates and taxes. Hitherto, as long as they were abroad they lost the most essential tie, the right to vote. One of the purposes of the Bill is to put that right. It is high time that we did so, and it is essential to get the principle of doing so firmly on the statute book.

Right hon. and hon. Members who oppose the change are right to argue that, if we are making such a fundamental change, it is reasonable to proceed at a pace which, if not acceptable to those who do not want such change, is at least tolerable to them. After all, they represent a substantial section of the population. It is for that reason, among others, that I do not agree with the recommendations advanced by my hon. Friends the

Members for Corby (Mr. Powell) and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone), supported by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), to whom I am otherwise grateful for his defence of the method by which I have put these issues before the House.

I do not agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Corby and for Lewes and the hon. Members for Caithness and Sutherland and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who wished to go less far, but further than is provided for in the Bill or amendment No. 30, because I believe that, as the principle is new, it is right to proceed with caution and general acquiescence and because I accept the argument that there must come a point, although it will vary from person to person, at which a person's links are likely to have been attenuated substantially to the extent that it is unreasonable for that person to expect to enjoy the franchise. It is not right that the extension of the franchise should be indefinite.

Any time limit is arbitrary and the length of time that it takes for links with the United Kingdom to be attenuated will vary according to individual circumstances. There is no right and magic period of time. I therefore listened to the enticing suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) that I should take the power to bring before the House an order to vary the date that is agreed by the Committee. I do not shirk from the responsibility although it would not be mine alone—the House would have to approve any proposition that I put before it. However, I do not ask the Committee to go along with my hon. Friend's suggestion, as we are familar with the limited parliamentary procedures that the passage of such an order involves. Serious principles are involved and I should be unhappy if I or a successor had to make further changes by so cursory a parliamentary procedure.

It is important that the principle be enshrined in the statute book. Although I do not believe in an indefinite period at the moment, I believe that, as time goes on, many of the objections that have been voiced against moving at all will be seen to be invalid. It is likely that a case for a further extension will be made out. Even those who are not convinced that we should move at all will be persuaded, when they see how the Bill works out in practice, that, far from not moving, we should move a great deal further. It is right to proceed on the basis of the maximum consensus or acquiescence obtainable. I therefore commend the five-year limit to the House.

The Select Committee chaired by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fylde (Sir E. Gardner) played an important and crucial part in laying the foundations of the legislation. Although the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent has never been a friend of Select Committees, the House will regard his aspersions on them and the slighting way in which he spoke about them as unworthy of the House and the right hon. Gentleman.

I owe my hon. and learned Friend an answer to his specific question about the numbers involved. An estimate of 600,000 people who would be entitled to vote under a seven-year provision appears in the White Paper. It might be thought that through simple arithmetic five-sevenths of 600,000 would produce the right figure for a five-year qualification. I am advised that the figure would probably be more than that because of the pattern of people going abroad and the period that they stay abroad. It is impossible to be absolutely precise, but the figure would be somewhat more than five-sevenths of 600,000.

I hope the Committee will accept that the spirit in which the Government are approaching the entire legislation is not confrontational. We are building on the Select Committee's report and listening to, but not always accepting, what is said by the other parties. Where we cannot accept what is said because of the basic principles that we wish to see enshrined in the legislation, we seek at least to accept in part and to render tolerable what may not always be acceptable.

In that spirit, I ask the Committee to support the five-year proposition put forward by the right hon. Member for Gorton and not any other amendments that may be put to the vote.

Mr. William Powell: During the past two and a half hours we have had a spirited debate. I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for the way in which he has shown the Government's approval of a principle which I sought to argue, even if he sought to put limits on it.

Those of us who have argued for the amendments have been accused of wishing to tear up part of our constitution. Not for the first time, the House was treated to an eloquent defence of the constitution by the right hon. Members for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) and for South Down (Mr. Powell). The right hon. Member for South Down identified the clash of principle in the amendments. He said that we were a representational democracy, the basis for which was residence plus registration and identified the principle behind the amendments as one of citizenship plus registration. The right hon. Members' eloquent defence of the constitution was the most reactionary that the House has listened to since the days of the Rockingham Whigs.

We live in an evolutionary democracy and the great radical, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, has been most active in seeking to secure a rapid evolution for our constitution. He is a student of both history and literature, and managed to make both Colonel Sibthorpe and the late Squire Thorne seem positively progressive.

I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for his support for the principle, but I shall ask the House to divide on the principle as I have laid it down. I accept many of the criticisms made by my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook). In reality there is little difference in principle between us. However, those who stressed the representational basis of our democracy as being residence plus registration should remember that exactly the same representational principles are fundamental to the French and United States constitutions. Members of the House of Representatives and of the Senate in the United States and members of the National Assembly in France all represent individual constituencies elected on a single basis. In tabling these amendments we are not seeking to challenge that.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 20, Noes 381.

Division No. 80] **[8.4 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Jackson, Robert
Ashdown, Paddy	Kirkwood, Archy
Bruce, Malcolm	Maclennan, Robert
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*	Meadowcroft, Michael
Cartwright, John	Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Freud, Clement	Rathbone, Tim
Hancock, Mr. Michael	Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Hayward, Robert	Shersby, Michael
Howells, Geraint	Steel, Rt Hon David

Wallace, James
Wrigglesworth, Ian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. William Powell and
Mr. A. J. Beith.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Keith
Blackburn, John
Blair, Anthony
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Boyes, Roland
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Butcher, John
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clegg, Sir Walter
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas, Dick
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Durant, Tony
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Farr, Sir John
Fatchett, Derek
Favell, Anthony
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forman, Nigel
Forrester, John
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
George, Bruce
Glyn, Dr Alan
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Goodlad, Alastair
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Gower, Sir Raymond
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Haynes, Frank
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Home Robertson, John
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irving, Charles
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamond, James
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lightbown, David
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Edward
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCartney, Hugh
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
Macfarlane, Neil
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McNamara, Kevin
McQuarrie, Albert
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marek, Dr John
Mariand, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Maynard, Miss Joan
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nellist, David
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pike, Peter
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powley, John
Prescott, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Radice, Giles
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Richardson, Ms Jo
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger

Skeet, T. H. H.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stott, Roger
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert
Watson, John
Watts, John
Weetch, Ken
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Welsh, Michael
Wheeler, John
White, James
Whitfield, John
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ian Lang and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Amendment proposed: No. 14, in page 2, line 14, leave out 'seven' and insert 'five'.—*[Mr. Kaufman.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 382, Noes 21.

Division No. 81] **[8.18 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Keith
Blackburn, John
Blair, Anthony
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Boyes, Roland
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Butcher, John
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cash, William
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clegg, Sir Walter
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas, Dick
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Durant, Tony
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fatchett, Derek
Favell, Anthony
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forman, Nigel
Forrester, John
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
George, Bruce
Glyn, Dr Alan
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Goodlad, Alastair
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Harvey, Robert
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Haynes, Frank
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Home Robertson, John
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irving, Charles
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Key, Robert
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamond, James
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Leighton, Ronald
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Edward
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCartney, Hugh
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
Macfarlane, Neil
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McNamara, Kevin
McQuarrie, Albert
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Maynard, Miss Joan
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers

Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nellist, David
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pike, Peter
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Prescott, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Radice, Giles
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Richardson, Ms Jo
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rogers, Allan
Rose, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'eld)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stott, Roger
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert
Watson, John
Watts, John
Weetch, Ken
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Welsh, Michael
Wheeler, John
White, James
Whitfield, John
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robin Corbett and
Mr. John McWilliam.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Cartwright, John
Farr, Sir John
Freud, Clement
Gregory, Conal
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Haselhurst, Alan
Hind, Kenneth
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Maclennan, Robert
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Rathbone, Tim
Steel, Rt Hon David
Wallace, James
Wrigglesworth, Ian

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Meadowcroft and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Corbett: I beg to move amendment No. 24, in page 2, line 22, leave out subsection (4).

The Chairman: It will be convenient for the Committee to discuss at the same time the following amendments:

No. 25, in page 2, line 23, leave out paragraph *(a)*.

No. 67, in page 2, line 24, leave out 'seven' and insert 'ten'.

No. 31, in clause 3, page 5, line 16, leave out subsection (5).

Mr. Corbett: The purpose of amendments Nos. 24 and 31 is to remove the right of people who leave the United Kingdom as children from eventually qualifying for votes in elections to this Parliament.

It is a nonsense for people who, for example, are taken by their parents to Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the Gulf States, to any part of Europe or wherever else in the world and who grow up in those countries and absorb their traditions and cultures to claim that they have a legitimate interest in voting to elect a Member of Parliament for a constituency in Britain which they can scarcely remember.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) earlier pointed out that elections under our system are for Members of individual constituencies. The overall votes are not put into a heap, counted and then Members allocated against the total number of votes cast for a party. That is an important distinction which most, if not all, hon. Members hold precious.

There is a great difference between what is being proposed in the Bill and, for example, postal votes for holidaymakers. I wish to make it clear at the outset that we welcome the concept of postal votes for holidaymakers, remembering that they leave constituencies for a time and return to them because they live in them and are part of those communities.

I was born in Australia. I left that country long before I was able to qualify to be on an electoral register there. However, under matching proposals in the Australian legislature, because I was born in that country, I might be told that I could vote for the equivalent of an MP for Fremantle in the sunshine state of Western Australia. Unhappily, I must confess to having no memory of Fremantle. I feel that it would be impertinent of me either to have the right to vote or to wish to cast a vote for a constituency in that fair city.

It cannot be right that people who have been taken, most likely by their parents, perhaps half a world away should, at a later stage, have a proper claim to a vote on the basis of having a genuine constituency interest.

We shall later discuss amendments requiring those claiming votes, although they live overseas, to declare an intention to return to the United Kingdom. That is a straightforward request for those, for example, whose jobs take them abroad, whether or not they are on fixed contracts. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton explained, it is easy to demonstrate their position on the basis of residential qualification here.

That is not the case for those—we do not know the numbers—who, for whatever reason, decide to live permanently abroad. That does not apply only to those who retire abroad. There are others who prefer to live in sunnier climes or who have other reasons for living elsewhere. I do not criticise them in any way.

As the Opposition pointed out when we debated the last amendment, it is stretching credulity enormously—not to question the feelings of such people towards the place of their birth; I readily confess to having such feelings about Australia—to accept that, having lived out of the country for many years, the links are strong enough for them to have the right to vote for Members of this House in named constituencies.

As distinct from requiring people to demonstrate an intention to return—I hope that, when we debate that later, that requirement will commend itself to the Committee—giving the right to vote to younger people who may have been away from the United Kingdom for a long time and who may have no intention to return would, I submit, be out of step with what the Bill proposes in asking people to give a serious declaration of intent to return.

The view of my hon. Friends and me is that only those UK citizens who reside here but who are abroad temporarily and who fully intend to return should be entitled to vote in our parliamentary elections. I invite the Government to share that view.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) is showing formidable virtuosity this evening. He stood before us announcing the largest victory in a Division that the Labour party has had to announce in many a long year. Before we got over the shock of that, he was at the Dispatch Box moving an amendment in words that made such compulsive listening that an unseen hand dragged me to my feet straightaway to accept it. I do not know what the hon. Gentleman proposes to do next. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps he should leave while he is ahead in the game.

Mr. Kaufman: What about an Oxford degree?

Mr. Mellor: Whether his name should be submitted for an honorary degree at Oxford university I leave to his Front Bench colleagues to consider. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) goaded me into making that observation, and I shall, if necessary, plead that in my defence.

The Committee has approved arrangements by which adults who leave this country are entitled to vote in United Kingdom elections for a period of five years after they have last appeared on a register for a United Kingdom constituency, and they will vote in that constituency.

A genuine problem has always arisen about what to do with those children who leave the country with their parents but who within the five-year period attain voting age. It seemed logical to the Government that they, too, should qualify for the vote, just as they would if they had been living in Great Britain. However, severe practical difficulties arose about determining in which constituency they should vote. Should they qualify through their parents and be entitled to vote in the constituency in which their parents were registered, or should they qualify in relation to the constituency in which they had previously resided, which might be different from the constituency in which their parents had lived? Both of those alternatives contained practical drawbacks.

Having regard to the importance which the Opposition attach to this amendment and to the very reasonable basis that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary gave in the previous debate for reaching an accommodation over matters of constitutional signifiance like the Representation of the People Bill, the best thing that I can do on behalf of the Government is to recommend to my hon. Friends that they should accept the amendment.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): As was seen by the size of the majority in the last Division, the old alliance, which has probably operated covertly for a long time, has been brought out into the open. This amendment is welcomed by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) put forward the valid reason that a person who went away from the United Kingdom as a young child would remember very little about the constituency in which he would be entitled to vote. The Minister referred to the practical difficulties. For example, if somebody went to the British consulate in, say, Chicago and claimed that his parents had been resident in a particular constituency it would be impossible to find out whether that was true. Although it would never cross the mind of any hon. Member, it might cross the mind of some of those who wished to disrupt our electoral proceedings that people could be sent *en bloc* to register as voters in a constituency that they thought they had some chance of winning. There would be no practical way of curbing such an abuse.

For that reason, and other reasons that have been given, the amendment deserves our support.

Amendment agreed to.

8.45 pm

Mr. Barron: I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 2, line 33, at end add—

'(5) The provisions of this section shall not come into operation until such time as the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament an estimate, country by country, of the numbers eligible to apply for qualification as an overseas elector under this section.'.

No hon. Member has stated how many people will be eligible to vote when the franchise is widened by the acceptance of clause 1. I am amazed that during the Committee stage of a Bill that will introduce a major constitutional change in the electoral system of this country nobody has stated how it will work, how much it will cost and how many people will benefit from it. I should have thought that any reasonable, sensible Government would have regarded that as a priority when introducing a Bill of this kind.

[Mr. Barron]

There are differences of view about how many people will benefit from the extension of the franchise. On Second Reading the Home Secretary said that he believed about half a million people would benefit from the extension of the franchise. Earlier today we heard that 600,000 people would benefit from its extension. There are 250,000 members of the armed services serving abroad who are qualified to vote. That figure was given by the Home Office to the Select Committee on Home Affairs. The evidence was that 245,379 people were on the 1982 register. In its written evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs, the Home Office stated that 150,000 people living in Europe and 250,000 living elsewhere might be entitled to vote. That works out at an average of about 600 per constituency. The Home Office figures mean that about 400,000 people would benefit from the widening of the franchise. The more we look at the guesstimates relating to the widening of the franchise, the more intriguing the position becomes.

Further evidence was submitted to the Select Committee on Home Affairs by the Social Democratic party. In page 147 of its written evidence it said that probably several million people would benefit from the widening of the franchise. However, when the Social Democratic party gave verbal evidence to the same Committee, its representative, Mr. Briggs, referred in page 162 to about 600,000 people. Therefore, the several million had dropped to 600,000 by the time the SDP appeared before the Select Committee on Home Affairs. But even the addition of 600,000 people represents about 1·5 per cent. on a countrywide basis. In those circumstances, a marginal seat could be put at risk. Hon. Members know that during a hard fought campaign at a general election, even 1 per cent. can influence the outcome. In those circumstances, that figure could have an effect upon the outcome of the election.

Amendment No. 27 asks only for estimates to be made on a country by country basis before the Bill is passed. It is also relevant that the effect upon constituencies of such a widening of the franchise should be ascertained. Certain constituencies may have substantial numbers of voters of this kind. I refer to the recent report of the Boundary Commission that was implemented in 1983. We tried to create average constituencies containing electorates of 60,000 to 66,000. If there are to be 600,000 votes from abroad, or even more if certain people are to be believed, the figures must be ascertained. That should have been done in conjunction with the report of the Boundary Commission.

I am not against the extension of the franchise in certain cases, but I am certainly against its extension by means of the Bill. It does not do justice to the British constitution. It is hurried and it is misconceived because it does not give to hon. Members all the facts that they need before they proceed further with the Bill.

Mr. Mellor: I am not sure that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) is right to suggest that the proposal is vitiated by the fact that no one can with complete precision say how many people will benefit from it. After all, that is true of many of the changes in the franchise that have been proposed. It is certainly true of one that is not a matter of great controversy—holiday postal votes. Nobody knows quite how many people will be away on holiday. It will depend on the time of year. No one will know the extent to which the franchise is widened by that.

Mr. Kaufman *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman will say that they are already on the register. That is fair enough. But we know that a substantial number of British people live and work overseas, some of whom—those who have been overseas for up to five years—will qualify for the vote. Except in certain countries where there is a particularly good reason for British citizens to make themselves known to the British embassy for reasons of public safety and other considerations, it is not a requirement that people should disclose to the British authorities, either within the country or anywhere else, where they are living. So there is no accurate way in which one can say how many British people are living in any particular country, whether a European country or further afield.

However, we can give some estimates, and some have been given. The fact that those estimates are really guesstimates is not a fair criticism. It is just one of those facts which we must acknowledge is inevitable when, in a free society, we do not monitor where our citizens go, how long they stay there or where they live when they are there.

There would be an abuse if people could emerge and claim that they were entitled to vote when that claim was not sustainable. We shall put requirements into the regulations that will ensure that a proper declaration has to be made before a consular official who will satisfy himself that the person who makes the claim is properly entitled to do so. Having submitted the form via the consular official, it will then go to the electoral registration officer, who, before admitting somebody on to the register, has to be satisfied.

Not only do we not know how many people will be potentially enfranchised as a result of this, but we certainly do not know how many people will take up the offer. After all, unlike a vote for somebody who is resident in the United Kingdom, it will cost money. A sum of money will have to be paid in order to apply to be registered as an overseas voter. The only indicator that we have is the service vote where only 55 per cent. of the service men and their wives who are entitled to a service vote actually apply for it.

For anyone to stand at the Dispatch Box or anywhere else in the Chamber and claim to be able to give an accurate figure of how many people will be enfranchised is an impossibility. I do not apologise for the fact that no Government could accept the amendment, consistent with wanting to do what we believe and hope that everyone, however reluctantly, accepts is a not unreasonable aspiration for any Government, in an era where an increasing number of our citizens, for perfectly valid reasons, will live and work abroad for some period in their lives. Therefore, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not be too discomforted by the fact that I have not been able to give as good a reception to his amendment as that moved by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). I hope that he will not feel that he has to press the amendment to the vote.

Mr. Wallace: We cannot support the amendment. It would have been helpful if one could have had some idea

of the numbers concerned, but, even if we had had a global total, as far as I am aware there is no information available to any of our agenices abroad which could have told us how that would have affected the 650 constituencies that are represented in the House of Commons. The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) was concerned with the effect that it could have in the constituencies. Even if we had a total figure, that would not give us any greater idea about the effect in individual constituencies.

It is clear, as the hon. Gentleman said, that we have agreed to the extension of the franchise in principle in giving the limited right to vote to people who have been overseas for five years or less. If the Committee agrees to that in principle, it is not a matter of fundamental concern to us how many it will affect. If we believe that people should have the franchise, they should have it, be they 600, 6,000 or 600,000. There is nothing in the amendment which would help us.

The Bill can become an Act without us knowing the figure. Only this particular clause would be inoperative until we had that figure, and even then the figure would be only a matter of interest. The Secretary of State would not have to wait for a positive resolution of the House of Commons to operate the clause once we have the figures. It might be of more than academic interest, but, none the less, it would be a waste of time. I do not believe that the amendment merits the support of the Committee.

Mr. Barron: I accept that in some ways the amendment is badly worded, but I hope that the Committee realises that if the constitution is changed we should make sure that the effect of such a change does not create an imbalance in the electoral patterns of British constituencies.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk (Knowsley, North): As improved by Opposition amendments, the Bill will now allow British residents abroad to vote in British elections five years after they have left Britain provided that they make a declaration that they intend to return to the United Kingdom to take up permanent residence. The five-year limit, and the declaration, which will be moved as an amendment to clause 2, are clearly improvements in the Bill. But they still do not make it a desirable extension of the franchise. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, we are still opposed in principle to the extension of the franchise to British citizens living abroad.

Our reasons for that opposition are not just that the Bill would give the vote to those who have emigrated, which it would and which is wrong, or that it extends the franchise to those British citizens who have left the country for tax reasons, which it would, and which is equally wrong. Nor, indeed, are we opposing it merely because it will give the vote to those who are fugitives from justice. It will, of course, and their numbers are not necessarily insubstantial. Clearly, it is and should be offensive to all hon. Members that such people should have the vote. It is indefensible that they should have the power to influence the outcome of elections in Britain when they have no commitment to Britain and no responsibility for the consequences or effects of their decisions.

Nor are we opposed in principle to the extension of the franchise merely because there are anomalies. There are anomalies. Clearly it is wrong that a British citizen should have committed an offence by failing to fill in the application to register whereas a resident living abroad has an option whether to register for the vote. We believe that that is wrong, and we oppose the extension of the franchise in that area, because we do not believe that those citizens living abroad who are making no financial contribution towards the maintenance of Britain should have any part to play in determining what Government shall be elected. Nor are we opposed merely because there are no sanctions for any false declarations made by British citizens living abroad. Those are all valid and important reasons why one should critically question, if not oppose, any such proposal substantially to enlarge the numbers of those eligible to vote in British elections. However, the main reason we oppose the amendment is that it offends against the basic principles of our democracy.

Our constitution is based upon the notion of representative government in which single-Member individual constituencies elect single Members of Parliament and votes are cast by citizens, electors who live in the constituencies, and have a residential qualification in the constituencies. It is based upon the assumption that an elector carefully evaluates the candidate, his record and his views and has the opportunity, although he may not exercise it, to see, to meet, to question and to hear the candidate at public meetings. It is based upon the assumption that an elector, in exercising his right to vote and determining his choice of the competing candidates, will have regard to the issues in a locality in a local campaign and, indeed, in a national campaign.

9 pm

None of that can happen if the elector resides abroad. He cannot have a proper or continuing relationship with his Member of Parliament. Although some hon. Members earlier in the debate suggested that such people can find out what is happening in this country by reference to British newspapers which are circulating abroad or by occasionally tuning in to the BBC world service, those are in no sense adequate substitutes for a long, continuing and thorough understanding and knowledge of British politics at a national level. They cannot provide an effective means for British citizens living abroad, sometimes in the most remote parts of the world, to have ready access to what is happening in the locality, in the community and in the constituency in which they are nominally registered or to knowledge of the Member of Parliament whom they are supposed to be able to hold to account and for whom they will be able to cast a vote for or against at any subsequent election. That kind of relationship or intimacy is not possible, yet it is crucial to our democracy and to our relationship with constituents and electors who are residing abroad and may have been so resident for a considerable time.

Mr. Beith: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that those matters are essential, why does he believe that postal votes or proxy votes should be allowed to be exercised by persons resident abroad who have a property qualification in this country?

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: I am establishing the principle, which I think most hon. Members have always acknowledged and accepted, but which in certain cases

[Mr. Kilroy-Silk]

may not be able to be policed. We all acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman and his party make a great play of the number of multiple registrations that occur. We know that they occur. There may be a good case for doing away with them. We recognise that in practice it is difficult to stop that practice, still less to police it. In no way am I trying to suggest that the kind of individuals to whom the hon. Gentleman refers should possess that right. I am realistic enough to acknowledge that there is no means by which one can prevent it. All those British citizens—and we are talking now about 600,000—were they to purchase property in the country and, quite misleadingly, fill in their electoral registration forms to suggest that they are resident permanently at the relevant time presumably could get away with it. One would not want to approve or endorse that, but I see no way at present in which one could police it.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The hon. Gentleman was speaking as if the ownership of property in the constituency entitles the owner to be registered. Surely that is not the case. A registration which was claimed on grounds of ownership of property surely ought to be rejected by the registration officer. If I may say so, I think that underlay the intervention of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: The right hon. Member is quite right. This is based not on the ownership of property but on the register of residents at a particular time. That principle, which we believe is important, underlines our democracy, and therefore ought to be protected.

If it be the case that those British citizens resident abroad cannot have a continuing understanding and knowledge of what is happening in a particular constituency over the period of a Parliament, even through the best efforts of the airmail editions of *The Times* or of the world service 24-hour broadcast, they cannot keep up with a campaign in a local election or a national election in which the issues arise on a daily basis and the campaign is fast-moving and changes daily.

British citizens living abroad do not see the daily effect of the Government's policies. They do not feel the consequences of unemployment and the destruction of our major cities. They do not suffer the results of cuts in education, social services and health provision. They have not witnessed the destruction of our environment and the quality of our life. They do not participate in the daily dialogue and debate with their fellow citizens, which is so crucial in moulding and sustaining political attitudes and decisions on the way in which individuals will vote.

That sort of knowledge and intimacy is impossible to acquire while living abroad. It is clear that it could not be sustained if, as the hon. Members for Corby (Mr. Powell) and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) suggest, British citizens resident abroad were able to vote in perpetuity in British elections. They advanced an extraordinary, indefensible and absurd suggestion in taking the opposite view and the Committee had the good sense to discard it.

The arguments of principle against extending the franchise to British citizens resident abroad are powerful and compelling. The Government have not addressed themselves to the issue of principle. Instead, they have had a clear regard, as always, to their own narrow self-interest. Conservative Governments do nothing else. They have a clear, conspicuous and deliberate regard for their own self-interest. Apart from the arguments of principle, that in itself is a good and sufficient reason for my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the clause this evening.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): It is regrettable that we are being asked to support the amendment. I did not find it possible to support that which it seeks when the Committee divided earlier. The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) has talked about British citizens resident abroad not being able to keep fully up to date with United Kingdom affairs. No one would expect the BBC to have the ability to enable them to do so. The occupants of the Opposition Front Bench have treated the BBC as a tuppenny affair of no account whatsoever, which provides a service that is not listened to abroad.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk *rose*——

Sir John Farr: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. I have listened to him for quite a bit today and I shall not give way now. I shall be prepared to let him intervene in a moment.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: I have spoken only once in this debate.

Sir John Farr: And that was for too long.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene. I wanted to correct what he has said. I am not critical of the BBC's world service. It is a service that I hold in high esteem. I listen to it a great deal and no doubt I shall listen to it when I leave this place tonight. I was taking up the comments of other hon. Members, who seem to think that the service provided by the BBC by means of its world service is sufficient to allow British citizens living abroad to know exactly what is happening in the constituencies in which they have a vote. It is clear that it is not. It is not intended to provide that information and it cannot be a substitute for living in a British constituency.

Sir John Farr: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that clear. No one could suggest that an individual could base his opinions on British domestic politics, or on those of any other country, on the strength of a radio programme being broadcast from that country. However, the BBC's world service is an opinion-maker abroad. Its current affairs programmes are highly regarded and it is listened to avidly in every English-speaking country of the world, and in most non-English-speaking countries. I have taken the trouble, with a battery pocket radio, to listen to the BBC on the short wave in most countries of the world and the programmes have come over very well and clearly.

Ex-British residents who are still British citizens but who have probably lost the vote in the United Kingdom still have their national daily newspaper sent out from time to time from London or wherever. They have their own local newspapers in Africa and Asia. Most of the countries within those continents are basically English speaking. The media are delivered in English.

The most important item of English news of which people in other countries are far more abreast than we in London is the state of the English football league. The second most important item is the state of English domestic politics—which party is favoured for election, which party is doing well and which is doing badly. I do

not accept that people who go to live abroad—perhaps earning valuable foreign currency for Britain—are out of touch with all that matters in Britain after as short a period as seven years.

The position is even worse now because of the last series of Divisions. The seven-year period was bad enough, but it has been reduced to five years. That is a ridiculously short period. I agreed with what my hon. Friends the Members for Corby (Mr. Powell) and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) said about the privilege that should be automatically associated with a British passport holder — having the vote as long as he or she wishes to exercise it. My hon. Friends mentioned the fact that many of the people who went abroad earned valuable money for Britain and our balance of payments. My hon. Friends did not have time to mention one point, but I believe it is right for the Committee to bear this fact in mind. Many of those people who are living in African and Asian countries are agents for British invisible earnings. They are engaged largely in transmitting insurance to Lloyds and the London insurance market and in helping with the consignment and shipping of goods around the world and may not come to Britain for a number of years.

I know people who are intensely proud of being British and who, in a calendar year, can earn a great deal directly for our balance of payments but have not been on an electoral register for 10 or 15 years. I do not believe that it is right for the Committee to say, "We shall reduce that period from seven years to five years so that anyone who has forgotten the events of the recent past in Britain will be disenfranchised." I believe, nevertheless, that five years is better than the previous position when people overseas did not receive the vote.

I admire the memory of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. He may recall that, when corresponding with me in recent months about the proposed change in the legislation, he told me that seven years was the period during which a person would be entitled to vote in British elections after leaving the United Kingdom. In good faith I told my constituents who had gone abroad that the Government undertook to stipulate a seven-year period. I shall now have to explain—I do not know how to do so, because I did not vote with the Government last time—how a sudden shift of opinion after many years of deliberations can be justified in changing the period from seven years to five years.

In addition to having a good memory, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is a sensible and balanced Minister. I hope that he will say that this measure will be undertaken for a trial five-year period and that, after that trial, the Government will introduce another Bill to abolish the provision altogether.

Mr. Beith: I do not propose to add a great deal to what I said about the amendments, which also went to the heart of the issue of overseas voting. It is obvious that overseas voting has been a part of our electoral pattern for a long time for service voters and for others who work overseas but maintain their electoral qualifications in this country. They can do so, as was mentioned earlier, not merely by virtue of the ownership of property, to which I referred, but by the occupation of property or the claiming of residence. That is what it is all about. They can make that claim in respect of a parental home long after they have, for all normal purposes, ceased to reside there.

We have referred, and will refer again, to the wide way in which a residence is defined and interpreted in British electoral law. I make the point to underline the fact that many people who are already abroad exercise voting powers in the precise circumstances which the hon. Member for Knowsley, North thought unsuitable.

9.15 pm

There are arguments of principle against any departure from the notion that one must be resident in the country to exercise a vote in it. Those arguments have been set aside previously for similar reasons, but they exist, and the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) pressed them. They do not outweigh the reasonable claim that citizens of this country, often serving its interests abroad, have to exercise an influence upon the Government who greatly affect their lives, as they affect the lives of those resident in the country.

The justice of such a claim is recognised by most of the other democracies with which we deal. It is wrong to apply to those people some greater test of their ability to put a cross in the ballot paper than is applied to citizens here. Were such a test to be applied, many of them would pass it with flying colours and would demonstrate a greater awareness of and following of affairs in this country than is shown by many of our countrymen when they vote. That is not the issue.

We are not seeking to apply an education test. It almost takes us back to the days when people could not vote in many southern states of America unless they passed an entremely partial test of knowledge of the American constitution, which was often applied more rigorously to those with a black skin than to those with a white one. We do not apply such a test. There is no reason why we should raise such a point in this context as an argument against extending the franchise.

I do not believe that the Labour Front Bench is primarily motivated by an argument of principle. It has drawn the conclusion that two characteristics are possessed by many of those who live abroad and might wish to vote in this country. One of the suggestions that comes sometimes from the Front Bench, and sometimes from muttered interventions, is that such people are, by and large, disloyal and that by their decision not to live in this country they have forfeited their claim to any vote here. I dismiss that claim, but it is repeated. Earlier in the debate — for those who questioned it — there were cries of "Strasbourg votes" and other such terms of derision from hon. Members around me. I believe that there are those in the Labour party who choose to see residence abroad as a fundamental disloyalty to this country. That is nonsense.

The second characteristic attributed to people living abroad is the likelihood that they will not vote in any large proportion for the Labour party. I have no idea whether that is so. The Labour party has no idea either. Were they even to follow the proportions of people within the United Kingdom, they will not vote in large numbers for the Labour party. They merely reflect trends in the United Kingdom.

I fear that the Labour party's apprehension of how such votes will be cast has primarily motivated it tonight. That is not the basis upon which we should be arguing the matter. There are reasonable grounds for accepting the claim of people living abroad, who are often serving the

[Mr. Beith]

needs and interests of this country, to exercise voting rights here. I shall therefore support the inclusion of the clause in the Bill.

Mr. William Powell: This is one of the clauses which was capable of improvement in Committee. It has been altered, but in my judgment it has been worsened as a result of the Committee's decision. No improvement has been secured — exactly the reverse. Nevertheless, a principle has been established for the first time which I hope will be capable of enlargement in the future. It is that British citizens resident abroad should be enabled to vote at our elections.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) did neither himself nor the Labour party any service by the manner in which he chose to advance the case of the official Opposition, and I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) correctly analysed the motives behind that. It is absurd to dwell at such length on tax exiles, fugitives and emigrés. The great majority of people who would qualify under this provision come into no such category. They are working abroad, usually for the good of this country and to its very substantial advantage. The emphasis placed on fugitives and the like in the weeks and months during which the Bill has been under public discussion is patently absurd. Virtually all fugitives would be disqualified in any event because of their previous criminal convictions. It is inconceivable that people who have emigrated should choose to register, let alone to vote in this country, and the same applies to tax exiles. It is utterly unjust to place so much emphasis on entirely negative factors.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North relied on what he described as two fundamental princples of British democracy — representational government and the intimacy between elector and candidate, which he said was essential to the working of our democracy. Representational government is in no way affected either by the original Bill or by the amendment that has now been passed. In other equally democratic sytems the principle that we have now begun to accept is already part of the law. No one would seriously challenge the quality of representational government in the French National Assembly because French citizens are entitled to vote even if they are resident abroad. Equally, no United States citizen would dream of suggesting that the quality of representational democracy—each member representing an identifiable geographical constituency — is in any sense diminished because nationals resident abroad are entitled to vote in United States elections. It is equally wrong to suggest that the quality of our representational democracy will be diminished as a result of the small step that we have taken today. On the contrary, it will be improved and for that, at least, I welcome the acceptance of the principle, even though it has been severely qualified by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

As for the intimacy which the hon. Member for Knowsley, North regards as essential to our democracy, we would naturally like to have the most intimate possible democracy. The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) suggested that even in the most intensely contested constituency contact between candidate and electors scarcely rose to more than 1 per cent. during the course of an election campaign. I believe that it is rather more than that, but let no one deceive himself that it is possible for any candidate to become intimately involved with and known to every elector in the course of his campaign.

At the time of an election, any register will contain the names of thousands of electors who have moved to other constituencies, often a great distance away. Is it seriously suggested that it is fundamental to our democracy that such people should travel hundreds of miles to follow the kind of campaign that may have characterised ancient Greece but which has very little coincidence with current democratic practice in this country?

There are many imperfections in our system, and the existence of removed voters is one of the most severe. However, in laying so much emphasis on such matters, without appearing to realise how blemished and inaccurate his remarks were, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North was almost selling himself and his party short.

Not only today, but on other occasions, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) has concentrated a great deal of gunfire on whether the Government have played fair over the method of consultation. The right hon. Gentleman and I seem to have one thing in common. In the past week, only one of our national newspapers has not brought to the attention of its readers the stories and suggestions made in all the other national newspapers. It may be that the right hon. Gentleman, like myself, reads only that one newspaper. We were therefore unaware of what was appearing in other sections of the press. Experience may have taught the right hon. Gentleman to doubt the quality of other newspapers. However, surely no one can be in any doubt about the fact that there have been substantial consultations between the Government and the Opposition about the form that the debate should take.

I am very dissatisfied with the outcome. However, for the first time, we have enshrined a new principle in our law — a principle which will enable our constitution to evolve as it should, rather than to become static and ossified, surrounded by the carbuncles of history, which have no place in our evolving society. Because we have achieved that much, and because of the manner in which my right hon. and learned Friend presented his arguments in support of that principle, even though he went on to urge that it should be limited, I must, for all my disappointment, support the inclusion of the clause in the Bill.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The essence of the remarks of the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) is clear. He does not want any distinction to be made between those who live here and those who live abroad. He believes that, however long someone has lived abroad, he should continue to have the vote here. Like the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), the hon. Gentleman seriously distorted, in a malicious manner, the grounds of our opposition to the clause. They did not present our case fairly—but perhaps that was not to be expected.

The hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) said that the Bill is an improvement because at least it introduces the principle that people who do not live in this country should be able to vote. One could argue that the Bill is an improvement to the extent that the number of years has rightly been reduced from seven to five. However, that improvement does not deal with our basic objections to the clause.

Extending the right to vote to those not resident in this country is a major constitutional departure. Reference has been made to the Select Committee. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), like myself, is not an enthusiastic admirer of Select Committees. I voted against the establishment of the new Select Committees. However, I am, I suppose, to some extent an opportunist in that, once the Select Committees had been established by an overwhelming majority, I decided that I might as well serve on one. I am serving on one now. I am sure that my right hon. Friend would be interested in the subject of its inquiries, which is the working of the special branch.

Before I was a member of it, the Select Committee recommended, amongst other things, that the right to vote should be extended to those who live in EEC countries. It did not recommend that the right be extended as widely as the Government propose. What is so wrong is that people who are to be given the right to vote need not have any link with a constituency. It is not suggested that they should be paying income tax. It will indeed be representation without taxation. Nor is it suggested that people should own a property or be a tenant of a property in the constituency. There is absolutely no link. The case for introducing this new concept would be stronger if such qualifications were included.

In a highly marginal constituency——

Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones (Watford): Like the hon. Gentleman's.

9.30 pm

Mr. Winnick: No, I am glad to say; but like several Conservative Members' constituencies where the majority is perhaps only a few hundred votes or less it is likely that the decision about who will be the Member of Parliament will be made by those who live abroad. That is quite wrong. People who have no link with a constituency and who do not pay taxes should not be able to determine who represents a constituency. Some unkind things have just been said about the majority of the hon. Member for Corby.

Whatever might happen in other countries—the hon. Member for Corby has given some examples—there is an important link between residence and voting which should continue. Right hon. and hon. Members have referred to how the right to vote has been extended previously. The extension of the franchise to women has been mentioned. In all previous campaigns, especially with the extension of the franchise to women, there was tremendous pressure in the country. Indeed, we all know that some women suffered greatly in prisons as a result of campaigning for their right to vote. It is almost impossible to believe that that was only 70 years or so ago. The same was true for the campaign to remove property qualifications. I see no pressure to extend the right as it is now proposed.

Mr. Foot: There was at the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Winnick: That is quite likely. The right to vote is being extended purely for political gain. The Conservative party has concluded that more votes are to be gained in this way than in keeping the present position. If it had come to any other conclusion, we should not now be considering clause 1. It is unfortunate that the Conservatives are using their majority, as they have on other issues, to advance their own cause. For those reasons and others which I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have explained, I believe that there is every reason for voting against clause 1.

Dr. Marek: We live in a world of nation states and we vote to elect a Government so that we can be guided and have rules to enable us to live together. If certain people decide to leave one nation state to live in another, for whatever reason, there is no reason why they should be given a vote in the state that they have left.

We have a representative form of government. Such a form of government is never perfect. We can argue whether we should have proportional representation or a first-past-the-post system. There are different ways of trying to achieve the aim, which is that every person should be able to vote on and in full knowledge of every issue. Clearly that is impossible. We must approximate, and so we have representatives.

In deciding to whom we grant the franchise we must do the same. Should we grant it willy-nilly and to everyone who has been in the United Kingdom and leaves it? That end of the spectrum was suggested by the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). I vehemently oppose it. Should we decide not to grant the vote to anybody living abroad, even if a person has lived abroad for a couple of years in the service of the country, such as in the armed forces? Most hon. Members would agree that there should be provision for granting service men and women the vote. There is provision for other people such as members of the British Council and diplomats to vote, but there are injustices. People who work for the World Health Organisation do not get the vote if they leave the United Kingdom.

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): Why would the hon. Gentleman extend the vote to diplomats and the other people whom he classified but refrain from extending it to a person who works, for example, in the oil industry in the Gulf?

Dr. Marek: The hon. Gentleman misheard me. At present the vote is extended to diplomats, who must make a declaration every year, whereas service voters can make one declaration which will run from year to year. The vote is already given to those people.

However, the vote is not given to people who work abroad because of their employment or occupation. It is a grey area and we must draw a line where we think we can provide the best form of representation. I disagree with the clause. It is a better clause now because it gives people who have left the country only five years during which they can exercise their right to vote as opposed to seven years. But there is a blanket covering for anyone who leaves the country for five years to vote. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), in advocating an indefinite time, said that people abroad may return from time to time, but a person could return for a couple of weeks every year for 40 years. At least as of now they can do it for only five years. Nevertheless, that is not good enough.

We have three options. We can extend the vote by this open method, which is the Government's choice. We can do it by insisting that people who move abroad have the vote in the country in which they live. That is certainly possible. The Select Committee's report gives a list of

[Dr. Marek]

countries where the right of vote is given. That point has not yet been made tonight. In Antigua, Bermuda, Australia, Barbados, Canada — some hon. Members mentioned the United States, but not Canada — Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Mauritius, New Zealand, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Surinam, and Trinidad and Tobago we have the right to vote.

Mr. Stanbrook: All those countries are members of the British Commonwealth; they are states in which all citizens are British subjects. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a difference between Commonwealth states and foreign states?

Dr. Marek: I am talking about general principles, and the Government have chosen the first principle that I mentioned. The second way to tackle the problem is to allow people to vote in their country of residence. An EC committee considered that matter, but I do not know whether it has produced a report.

The third way to tackle the problem is to limit the franchise to some categories of people, and to say that we will give the vote to people who go abroad, provided that they are in the armed services, in the Diplomatic Service, employees of the World Health Organisation, employees of a British company, or those in the service of, and connected with, British companies. We would not give the vote to those who go abroad simply to become tax exiles or — this has not been mentioned in the debate — as fugitives from British justice.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Has not the Opposition Front Bench tried to achieve that by amendment No. 29, which might be accepted? If it is accepted, it will have the effect of excluding tax exiles from the franchise.

Dr. Marek: We have not yet reached that amendment, but I hope that it will be accepted by the House. It will go some way to solving the problem, but it will nevertheless be imperfect. I would prefer the vote to be given on a definite basis. Only those who go abroad for valid reasons should be allowed to vote here. Ideally, those who wish to vote in Britain should be liable to general taxation here. Why did not the Government think of that?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) said that the expatriate votes could make all the difference in a general election. Of the 16 memoranda included in the minutes of evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, No. 6 was submitted by the Conservative and Unionist Central Office, and No. 8 was submitted by the British Conservative Association in France. Conservative Members must realise who is interested in such matters. Memorandum No. 9 is a supplementary document from the British Conservative Association in France, and memorandum No. 11 was submitted by the British Conservative Association in Belgium. We should compare that with the one memorandum submitted by each of the other political parties.

However impartial or objective one wishes to be, one cannot completely dissociate oneself from the political consideration of whether the change will benefit one party or another. I would not believe an hon. Member who said that he was being dispassionate and objective and that anything he said should be taken as the gospel truth.

The Bill has been improved, but I still do not like it, and I shall vote against clause stand part.

Mr. Mellor: We have been over this course before, but I was grateful to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) for taking us on a tour of his speech in the House last December, which was a re-working of what he said in the debate on the White Paper last June.

The surprising thing about the proposal is not that it has been made, but that it has taken so long for it to come before the House. Britain is a trading nation—a Labour Prime Minister once said that exporting is fun—and we all know that some people spend an increasing amount of time working overseas for Britain. As I said on Second Reading, the increase in overseas work knows no class barriers. One need only look at the people travelling on an aircraft to the Gulf to know that it has nothing to do with class. Therefore, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, it is a sign of the lack of self-confidence of the Labour party that its members should be so troubled by the proposal.

9.45 pm

The Government attach importance to obtaining as much consensus as possible for the proposal. We must also consider the practicalities involved in enabling the Bill to reach the statute book in a sensible timescale. For that reason, I unashamedly say to the those of my hon. Friends who are unhappy about the restriction of five years that this is an appropriate bite out of the problem. It may not be as much as they would wish, but it represents all that is reasonably practicable at this time. I am confident that after a general election, in which these arrangements will work well, it will be possible for the House of Commons to return to the issue in the next Parliament. I for one would be all in favour of the House doing so. I believe that the clause is a worthy part of the Bill and I commend it to the Committee.

Question put, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 243, Noes 165.

Division No. 82] **[9.45 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert	Cope, John
Alexander, Richard	Cranborne, Viscount
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.	Crouch, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*	Dicks, Terry
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*	Dorrell, Stephen
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Emery, Sir Peter
Beith, A. J.	Fairbairn, Nicholas
Bendall, Vivian	Favell, Anthony
Best, Keith	Fletcher, Alexander
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Fookes, Miss Janet
Bottomley, Peter	Forman, Nigel
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Forth, Eric
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon	Fox, Marcus
Brooke, Hon Peter	Franks, Cecil
Browne, John	Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Bruce, Malcolm	Freeman, Roger
Bruinvels, Peter	Freud, Clement
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.	Gale, Roger
Butcher, John	Galley, Roy
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*	Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*	Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Carttiss, Michael	Garel-Jones, Tristan
Cartwright, John	Glyn, Dr Alan
Cash, William	Goodlad, Alastair
Chalker, Mrs Lynda	Gower, Sir Raymond
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*	Greenway, Harry
Clegg, Sir Walter	Gregory, Conal
Conway, Derek	Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Coombs, Simon	Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*

Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Lang and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Cowans, Harry
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Farr, Sir John
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
George, Bruce
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McCusker, Harold
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robin Corbett and
Mr. John McWilliam.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report Progress and ask leave to sit again.*

Committee report Progress.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Representation of the People Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.

Business of the House

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about a rearrangement of business on Thursday. There will now be a debate on the Opposition censure motion, and the proposed debate on the Royal Air Force will be postponed until a later date.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The House will recognise that this is the second business statement that we have had in two days. Whether we shall have any further business statements during the week perhaps events alone will decide. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for conceding on Tuesday evening that which he denied on Monday afternoon.

Mr. Biffen: Only the foolish optimism of the Opposition would determine the number of additional statements.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): has the rearrangement of Government business consequent upon the announcement in any way reduced the likelihood that an Opposition day will be available next week to discuss the miners' strike?

Mr. Biffen: The topic for that day has not yet been announced.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): In view of the importance of the change in business, is there any reasonable supposition that the Opposition will turn out for the debate in any worthwhile numbers?

Mr. Biffen: That question should not be directed at me. In any case, I advise my hon. Friend not to be provocative.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As the debate on the RAF has been unavoidably postponed, would it not be wise to have a Government statement on the revelations of Mr. Duncan Campbell in the *New Statesman*?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Questions on the business statement must be confined to what the Leader of the House has announced.

Mr. Dalyell: It refers to RAF spy planes using Punta Pirenas and Hawker Hunters being sold to Chile for questionable reasons, and the urgency of this is that there have been strong complaints from both Chile and Argentina in relation to the Beagle channel and the matter should be cleared up one way or another. We had hoped to clear it up during the RAF debate, but it looks as though the Pinochet Government have been aided greatly by a British Government who have said that they would have nothing to do with juntas. Let us have the truth on this.

Mr. Biffen: Such is the ingenuity of the hon. Gentleman that I am dumbfounded that he should not think that it could be contained within the terms of the Opposition censure motion.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Bearing in mind the urgent decisions that need to be taken in regard to RAF matters on the new trainer and the next fighter for the RAF, will my right hon. Friend look closely at the urgent need for an RAF debate and arrange it as soon as he possibly can?

Mr. Biffen: Most certainly.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Can the Leader of the House tell us to what extent the massive amount that has

been lost as a result of the miners' strike will have any bearing on the censure motion? Can he also give us an assurance that the iron lady with the plastic pound will be speaking?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that if the hon. Gentleman is able to catch your eye in the debate on Thursday he will be only too pleased to make then the point that he now trails.

Representation of the People Bill

Again considered in Committee.

Clause 2

REGISTRATION OF BRITISH CITIZENS OVERSEAS

Dr. Marek: I beg to move amendment No. 29, in page 3, line 22, at end insert—

'*(e)* declares that he intends to return to the United Kingdom for permanent residence'.

"I think it is clearly unjust that diplomats and Crown servants can have the right to vote but people who go abroad because of their occupation, service or employment with private companies or perhaps working for the World Health Organisation, do not have this right. We would like to see, if it is possible, the right to vote by proxy to be extended to those abroad because of their occupation, service or employment—citizens of the United Kingdom who have the intention to return."

As hon. Members will realise, I have been reading from the minutes of evidence given to the Select Committee for Home Affairs in 1982. The witness, Mr. Mitchell, who gave that evidence upon examination by the Select Committee is the organisation and legal officer of the Conservative party.

The Conservative party clearly believes that citizens of the United Kingdom should have the vote if they go abroad because of their occupation, service or employment and, indeed—and importantly for the amendment—have the intention to return. The amendment seeks to do precisely this. It is a way of ensuring that people claim a vote if they have the intention to come back to the United Kingdom at some time.

As I said earlier in Committee, I do not believe that clause 1, which we have now passed, should have been passed because it is an open-ended clause and allows anybody to claim the vote whether he is a tax exile, a fugitive or properly going abroad because of his employment or service to the country. The amendment seeks to tighten this up so that such people will have to go to the consulate and sign a declaration. That declaration would have to be kept by the consular officials and passed on to the electoral registration officer in the constituency in which the vote would be cast.

I refer the Committee to the memorandum submitted in evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives:

"It would seem necessary for there to be some sort of annual renewal of registration through British embassies or consulates abroad, who would have the responsibility of checking the facts stated".

In evidence, Mr. Jones, chief executive of Gillingham borough council, stated:

"I think it depends really, Chairman, on how far you think these facts need to be verified. Personally, I would think they should be verified with considerable consideration, and I would prefer the consulate or embassy."

While Mr. Jones may have been talking about slightly different matters, he was giving his opinion on whether people should be able to claim the vote because of their occupation or service. That applies to the amendment. The declaration must not be treated as something that anyone can sign in his back kitchen and send to the consulate or elsewhere. It should be a proper declaration that is given in at the consulate or some other appropriate place where its existence is duly noted.

I hope that the Government will be persuaded by this moderate amendment. It is not designed to create a

[Dr. Marek]

watertight procedure, but I feel that my right hon. and hon. Friends would be considerably relieved if the Government were to accept the spirit of the amendment, redraft it and insert it in its redrafted form into the Bill.

Mr. Mellor: I congratulate the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) on making his debut on the Opposition Front Bench. It was good to have the opportunity of hearing his oratory from rather closer quarters than it has been my privilege to enjoy before this evening.

It is no part of the Government's case that as a matter of principle the franchise should be extended to Britons living overseas who have no intention of returning to the United Kingdom. We take no exception to a declaration which would set out in appropriate words that the individual concerned intended at some stage to return. We need to find the appropriate way of putting that on to the statute book. It is no criticism of the amendment that it may not be the best way of achieving what we want. Would the hon. Gentleman be satisfied with the undertaking that the Government would bring forward an amendment at a later stage that would have the same effect as the amendment which he has introduced this evening if he were to seek leave to withdraw the amendment?

Mr. Douglas Hogg: If the phraseology of the subsection is to be redrafted, it is important that it is done in such a form that the purpose of the provision is achieved. It is rather an interesting subsection, which is designed to strike, I believe, at tax exiles. No tax exile —that is someone who wishes to arrange his capital affairs in such a way as to escape capital gains tax or capital transfer tax — would be able to sign the declaration. To do so would have the effect of causing the original domicile to be resumed. If someone wishes to achieve a foreign domicile they will not be able to sign the declaration. I agree with that because I do not see why tax exiles should have a vote in United Kingdom elections. When the declaration comes to be redrafted in accordance with the undertaking that has been given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, I hope that steps will be taken to ensure that no tax exile can properly sign it.

Mr. Bermingham: Perhaps it is appropriate, on the back of the amendment, to draw to the Government's attention amendment No. 28, which has not been called but which is in the same vein. I draw it to the Government's attention because the declaration needs to be signed in the United Kingdom so that it is enforceable in the United Kingdom. When someone signs the declaration to obtain the vote that is referred to in amendment No. 29, and if we are to have jurisdiction for the penalties that are subsequently to occur, jurisdiction must arise as a result of a decision of the Court of Appeal that the declaration has been signed here. The offence, if it turns out to be one, must be one that is committed here, and the courts here will have the jurisdiction to deal with the matter.

When the Government come to redraft in accordance with their undertaking, it will need to be written into the amendment in its amended form that the undertaking is executed in the United Kingdom. I accept unreservedly that it would be ludicrous to say that those who are abroad and who seek to take advantage of clause 1 will all have to come home to sign the declaration. That is why I suggested in amendment No. 28 that anyone who sought to apply for a continuation of his vote after 1 January 1986 had only to make a declaration in the United Kingdom. I did not attempt to impose upon those already living abroad and intending to return and take up the advantage offered by clause 1 the obligation of having to return to make the application. Although I stand by my overall position, I accept that those people should be able to make the declaration in the consulates in the country in which they are residents.

The point at the heart of this matter is that those who intend to sign the declaration to keep their vote should do so after the Bill comes into law.

10.15 pm

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): I should like to underline what my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) said and I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will consider his point. The intention behind the amendment is much to the liking of both sides of the Committee. I hope that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) will be prepared to take advantage of the offer made by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State.

Dr. Marek: I thank the Under-Secretary of State for his kind words. My appearance at the Dispatch Box was not too traumatic. I ask the hon. Gentleman to pay attention to what has been said about the amendment by hon. Members, including myself and the hon. Members for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) and for Grantham (Mr. Hogg). I believe that there is a strong measure of cross-party support for this measure. I should like the Committee to allow me to withdraw the amendment so that the Government can table a proper amendment on report. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: There has been much jubilation among Conservative Members at the acceptance of a major constitutional innovation in the form of clause 1 by a majority of rather less than half the Government's normal majority. The significance of that innovation was underlined by the Home Secretary in that umbrella speech of his, which was intended to foreshadow the agreements and concessions that might be made at later stages of the Bill's consideration. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that he was friendly to the widest application of the principle, and regarded what is now contained in clause 1 as only an instalment of the eventual grant of the franchise in the United Kingdom to British citizens, as such, not resident in the United Kingdom.

In the light of that statement, I draw to the Committee's attention that wicked little paragraph (3)*(b)* which states: "that the declarant is a British citizen".

It would have been impossible for the Home Secretary to have said what he said—indeed, it probably would have been impossible for clause 1 to have been introduced at all —had it not been for the British Nationality Act 1981, which created such a thing as British citizenship—a status that is all but exclusively identified with connection with the United Kingdom.

In past times, the qualification for the franchise in the United Kingdom was to be a British subject. Had that

condition still remained, it would have been impossible to assert the principle that a British subject, wherever resident in the world, should have the right to vote in the United Kingdom. The introduction of the narrower, national concept of "British citizen" made possible such a move and such a declaration from the Home Secretary.

Of course, we have the relics of that former dispensation in our present franchise law which, as the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) reminded the Committee at an earlier stage, extends the vote not only to British citizens but to Commonwealth citizens and to citizens of the Irish Republic who, ever since 1920, we have been endeavouring to persuade ourselves are still really British subjects, only they have not woken up to this fact and are a bit slow to recognise it. Those three categories are still included in the franchise within the United Kingdom; but be it noted that, contrary to some incautious statements which have been made about the effect of the Bill during these debates, it is not any elector in this country who can go abroad and for five years retain the right to vote at elections in the United Kingdom—it is only an elector who is a British citizen who can go abroad and retain that right.

Mr. Mellor: Quite right.

Mr. Powell: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary says, "Quite right". Amen, say I; but we have revealed the thorn within the rose or, perhaps from another point of view, the silver lining behind the cloud for those of us who did not want clause 1. This is the beginning of a train of thought which will lead us to the conclusion that if it is to be the proposition that the British citizen is, as such, entitled to the franchise, then we will say that that, of necessity, applies inside as well as outside the United Kingdom. We have laid the foundation tonight of an erection which was not perhaps intended by some of the supporters of the clause, though it may not have been entirely absent from the ruminations of the Government and their advisers.

We have laid the foundations for a reform of the law of the franchise in the United Kingdom whereby it will logically be restricted to British citizens, that being in all normal acceptance the meaning of "citizen"—a person who exclusively has the right of franchise, as well as the other appurtenances of citizenship, in his own country. So, be it noted, as they say, Sir Paul, as we part with clause 2, that that wicked little subsection 3*(b)* may point to the way to a reform in our franchise inside the United Kingdom which many have considered to be logical and which many have argued for over many years.

It is a way that things have of happening—that what one has most desired comes from an unwelcome quarter. There is a Virgilian tag to that effect with which I shall not trouble the House——

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Go on.

Mr. Powell: All right, it is the one which starts "qua minime reris": "from a quarter from which you least expect it, namely, from the Greeks, shall salvation come." I hope that the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) is willing to accept a spontaneous translation. It is a common experience that those of us who have sought the prevalence of an argument or a cause find the way to achieve it open from an unexpected and even disagreeable direction. I believe that may prove to be the case with sub-section 3*(b)* of the apparently innocent clause 2.

Mr. Stanbrook: The purport of subsection 3*(b)*

"that the declarant is a British citizen"

is intended, presumably, to ensure that the person who claims the right to vote in United Kingdom elections is in fact a British citizen. One presumes that he will be able to prove that he is, but there is no provision in the Bill that he should so prove, and the only sanction against someone claiming to be a British citizen and who is not is in clause 11, which is the penalty clause.

The essence of giving a vote to someone living abroad lies in the fact that there is no jurisdiction in British courts overseas, and therefore clause 11 is inoperative so long as the person involved remains overseas. Apparently, therefore, a person who declares that he is a British citizen cannot be challenged and his vote must be allowed even though the local British consul may have good reason to believe that the declaration is false. How on earth do the Government intend to get over that?

Mr. Bermingham: I hope that the Minister will answer that point, which I stressed earlier. If the declaration is not made in the United Kingdom before the person goes abroad, our courts will have no jurisdiction and the penalties will be unenforceable. I concede that for a person who goes abroad and stays abroad there is a semi-deterrent in the knowledge that if he makes a false declaration he can be prosecuted if he ever returns to the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, if the penalties are to bite we must ensure that our courts have jurisdiction.

Mr. Mellor: Extra-territoriality is created by paragraph 62 of schedule 3, so if the person returns within the jurisdiction he can be tried here as though the offence had been committed within the jurisdiction. If he does not return, that is a different matter, but that applies to a whole range of other offences.

No one is under any obligation to accept a declaration if he does not believe it to be true. This applies equally to a British consul and to the electoral registration officer. If the officer believes that the assertion made is not true, he has complete discretion to refuse to enter the person's name on the register. It will thus be a matter for both officers to do their duty as they see it.

On that basis, I commend clause 2 to the Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

EXTENSION OF FRANCHISE FOR EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Amendments made: No. 30, in page 5, line 8, leave out 'seven' and insert 'five'.

No. 31, in page 5, line 16, leave out subsection (5). —*[Mr. Kaufman.]*

Question proposed, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Bermingham: We intend to oppose clause 3, as amended. It seems ludicrous to extend the right to vote in European elections to people resident in non-European countries. It is absurd to argue that people resident in, say, south America have an interest in European elections. I make no secret of my own view of the usefulness, or lack of it, of the European Parliament, but, leaving aside one's personal views on the whole European question, if we are

[Mr. Bermingham]

to be part of Europe the European Parliament should be elected by people resident within the European area. For that reason, I ask the Committee to oppose the clause.

Question put, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 233, Noes 169.

Division No. 83] **[10.29 pm**

AYES

Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bendall, Vivian
Best, Keith
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Butcher, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Crouch, David
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Lloyd and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken

Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McCusker, Harold
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Robin Corbett.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

To report Progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Mr. Britan.]*

Committee report Progress; to sit again tomorrow.

M25 (Reigate-Leatherhead)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Lang.]*

10.42 pm

Mr. George Gardiner (Reigate): I wish to raise the matter of work on the Reigate-Leatherhead section of the M25, which, with the Leatherhead interchange and the section from Leatherhead to Wisley, constitutes a vital missing link in the orbital route round London, with long sections of completed motorway stretching either side of it. Within the unfinished stretch, work on the interchange is well advanced. Despite earlier difficulties, work is proceeding well between Leatherhead and Wisley. Work is furthest behind on the section between Reigate and Leatherhead.

The contract for the latter section was given to Bovis-Birse, which since a management buy-out has become Birse-Farr. The consulting engineers are W. S. Atkins and Partners of Epsom.

The completion of the section is of strategic importance for traffic movement in all of south-east England, and of acute environmental importance to Reigate, through the narrow streets of which the traffic thunders on its way between the eastbound M25 and the westbound A25, and to those who live along the A217 and A240 to the north, who suffer all the traffic that follows the signed route between the two open sections of the M25. Those who live by the A240, which is single carriageway south of Ewell, must suffer the passage of more vehicles each day than are carried by the six-lane M40. In Reigate and along the A217/240 this heavy traffic is increased during the summer as holiday traffic from the midlands and the west drives to and from the channel ports. My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) is as concerned for the welfare of his constituents as I am for mine.

It was therefore with great anticipation that we awaited the promised completion and opening of the Reigate-Leatherhead section in the spring of this year. Imagine the dismay when we learnt last summer that the contractor had been granted a six-month extension until 25 August this year. That meant that our overloaded roads and overburdened communities had to endure the vibration, noise, fumes and danger from all that traffic through another summer.

But worse was to come. No sooner were we through last summer and into autumn than Bovis-Birse announced that it was stopping all work on that section, pulling off all equipment and laying off men, for the six months which the construction industry defines as winter, from 21 October to 21 April. A six-month extension of contract time plus a six-month holiday from further work calls for an explanation.

No satisfactory explanation has been given. The first excuse advanced was the wet spring of 1983, although one would have thought that some allowance was made for inclement weather when drawing up the contracts. That wet spring was followed by two good summers. However, I have my hon. Friend's assurance, in a letter to me dated 27 September 1983, that the weather was not a factor taken into account in granting the extension. The next excuse offered by Bovis-Birse was that the Department of Transport changed the specification for concrete used on motorways just before its programme for laying concrete

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commenced. I would not criticise my hon. Friend for changing the specification to give greater durability to our motorways, and I do not question the fact that the necessary adjustment by the contractor would cost a little time—but as much as six months? The suggestion is not credible.

Why was the contract extension granted? At this point, I must make it clear that this was not a decision of my hon. Friend or her colleagues. Under the Institution of Civil Engineers Conditions of Contract, fifth edition, it is the engineer appointed to supervise the works and administer the contract who is responsible for deciding whether an extension of contract time is appropriate, and for how long. Therefore, the decision was taken by W. S. Atkins, and my hon. Friend was informed of it later. It is all very fishy.

It is hardly surprising that, when the cessation of work was announced soon after, it was suggested in my constituency that the extension of time owed more to cash flow problems at Bovis-Birse, and to the impending management buy-out, than to the weather or to concrete specifications, and even that a backhander might have been passed to the consulting engineers. I know enough of the repute of W. S. Atkins to discount that story, but the fact remains that no satisfactory explanation for an extension of as long as six months has ever been offered.

Then there is the mystery surrounding the contractor's decision to cease all work during the winter months. I gather that, under the terms of his contract, he can do so, although my hon. Friend assured me in her letter of 27 September that it was open to the contractor to carry out winter concreting if he wished to do so. Senior officials of the Transport and General Workers Union tell me that they have never encountered a case of a contractor pulling all men off an unfinished site in winter. It is noteworthy that Fairclough, the contractor on the Leatherhead-Wisley section, has kept some men on the site throughout. The concrete could easily have been laid on the Reigate-Leatherhead section in November; indeed, only half a kilometre of road remains to be done. Meanwhile, other staff could have continued lesser work in preparation for full resumption.

I do not doubt that Birse-Farr, as the contractor is now called, is within its contractual rights to cease all work for six months, just as it would incur no penalty if the road was not ready for handover before 25 August; and I accept that my hon. Friend has no power to order it to do otherwise. But Birse-Farr badly needs to win back some good will, and, although my hon. Friend has no power, she has influence. After all, the Government are the client, and my hon. Friend or whoever succeeds her will have further motorway contracts to place. If Birse-Farr is to secure any of those, it would be wise to turn in a better performance on this contract than it hitherto has; and the same goes for W. S. Atkins's supervision of it. I submit that if Birse-Farr gets men back on to this site well ahead of 21 April, if it starts concreting earlier weather permitting, and if it then works flat out, it will be possible to have the motorway open before the contract deadline of 21 August. I urge my hon. Friend to apply her utmost endeavours to that end.

10.49 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): Before I deal with the particular inquiry of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Gardiner) — and I thank him for bringing the issue before the House tonight—I should like to confirm that the M25 continues to be top priority in our road programme. I am pleased to say that we are well on course for achieving our target of opening the entire 122-mile orbital route by the end of 1986. Already we have 86 miles open to traffic and the remaining 36 miles are all under construction.

I well understand the anxiety of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate and of my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton). The Leatherhead-Reigate section of the motorway, with which my hon. Friends are particularly concerned, is of vital importance to the whole of that southern ring of the M25. I share the disappointment felt in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate that the road will not be open sooner than August of this year. But there are some clear engineering and contractual reasons for the situation that he has described so clearly.

It may be helpful if I start by explaining the contractual position. It is not one that comes before the House on more than the rare occasion. The contract for the Leatherhead-Reigate section was let in April 1983 to the Bovis-Birse joint venture, which was set up for that stretch of road. The intention was that the three contracts that would fill the gap between Wisley and Reigate should be ready to be opened together, or more or less together, in the spring of 1985.

The Department's contracts for this type of work follow the conditions of contract laid down by the Institution of Civil Engineers, as my hon. Friend said. These conditions were established some 20 years ago, and have worked without problem in the intervening years in nearly all cases. But there is an integral part of the conditions which may not be well understood. It is that an independent and impartial engineer is appointed to supervise the works and administer the contract. W. S. Atkins and Partners, the consulting engineers, were appointed for this purpose for the Leatherhead-Reigate contract. This is in line with our policy that the responsibility for the supervision of the Department's larger road contracts should be undertaken independently of Government and thus in the private sector. I know that my hon. Friend welcomes the amount of work that is done in the private sector away from the Government machine.

Clause 44 of the conditions lays down that an extension of time for the completion of the works should be granted to the contractor by the independent engineer if circumstances arise that the contractor was not aware of the time when he prepared his tender. Such circumstances could include exceptional adverse weather conditions, unforeseen ground conditions, changes in the design required by the engineer or the employer, or any other unforeseen circumstances. It is the engineer's responsiblity—and his alone—to decide whether an extension is appropriate and, if so, the period for which it may be granted after treating each case on its merits.

In this case, the engineer, W. S. Atkins and Partners, granted extensions of time because of an unforeseen problem with piling to one of the structures and because as my hon. Friend said, of an improvement in the Department's specification for concrete roads.

This later change was introduced nationally as part of our continuing programme to improve the quality and durability of our roads. It will have long-term benefits by reducing traffic delays associated with future maintenance, and I am sure that it will be fully justified for such an important road as the M25. The extensions of time would not ordinarily have led to an eight-month delay in completion had it not been for the fact that the original contract was priced on the basis of summer concreting.

This is not unusual, as contractors frequently cease concrete laying during the winter. The extensions, of necessity, carried the contract completion date beyond 21 October, which is the seasonal limit of summer concreting. This meant that the contractor was entitled to have sufficient extension to enable him to complete the work in the following summer season, which officially commences on 21 April. The new contract completion date, therefore, became 26 August 1985. My hon. Friend referred at one point to 25 August, but I understand that he agrees that in fact it is 26 August.

The contractor is, therefore, entitled to take until 26 August 1985 to complete his work. It is for him to decide his own work programme to meet that completion date. However, if this new date were not met, liquidated damages would be payable.

The firm—Bovis-Birse, now known as Birse-Farr—decided in November to cease all work for the winter and resume again in the spring. This is a decision that it is entitled to make under the contract, but I agree with my hon. Friend that it is most unreasonable.

My hon. Friend is understandably concerned that the consultant is not required to refer requests for extensions of time to me in situations such as this. The consultant works closely with my officials, and he is keeping them advised of events. But I must re-emphasise that, within the terms of the contract, the decisions are those of the consultant, and it is for him to satisfy himself that the factors were outside the contractor's control when the consultants granted the extensions.

My hon. Friend is aware from previous discussions that we have had that I have already ensured that my officials will remain in continued close contact with the consultant. Everything possible is being done to encourage the contractor, Birse-Farr, to press on as fast as possible with the work on this vitally important section of the M25 motorway.

I fully appreciate that local residents who are anxiously awaiting the completion of the M25 will have found it difficult to understand why the contractor has chosen to close the site completely. However, having received the extension of time, he was exercising his right to take a management decision as to how the work should be completed within the contract period.

The question has been asked why Bovis-Birse closed down in the winter, whereas the contractor on the nearby Wisley-Leatherhead section — Faircloughs — continued concreting well into December. I can only repeat that this is a matter for the management of the respective contractors to decide, bearing in mind that any work done during the winter months would not necessarily have a material effect on the completion of the works. In other words, there is work that may be done by a contractor who continues in the winter, but that will not necessarily speed up the end of the concrete paving that has to be laid in better weather.

As my hon. Friend now knows, we have no power to instruct the contractor to reopen the site. We might be able to induce him to do so by paying him what could be a substantial sum of money, but this would mean that budgets would be exceeded and, because of the difficulties associated with work in winter weather which I mentioned earlier, such additional payments as might be made would not necessarily represent value for money. Notwithstanding the priority that we give to the M25—I do not hesitate to re-emphasise that point — value for money must be achieved on every contract. I would not think it right to authorise additional expenditure on this contract which would inevitably be at the expense of other urgent road needs, particularly in view of the considerable uncertainties involved, and the use to which this money might be put.

Although 21 April is the start of the summer concreting season, there is no reason why the contractor should not restart work on site before that date and my officials, through the consulting engineer, will be encouraging Birse-Farr to do so.

My hon. Friend has made very clear his concern that the section of the motorway between Leatherhead and Reigate should be opened as soon as it is ready. The Leatherhead interchange is being completed ahead of contract and the Wisley to Leatherhead section will probably be ready prior to completion of the Leatherhead-Reigate section, so there should be no obstacle to opening the latter section immediately upon completion of work.

I know that my hon. Friend has not been concerned with the related timings of the adjacent contracts, but for the sake of the record and for those who may read the report of our debate he will understand me when I say that if there should be a substantial difference between the opening dates of the two adjacent sections — Wisley to Leatherhead and Leatherhead to Reigate — there would be discussions with the local authorities involved. The last thing in the world that my hon. Friend and I want is that traffic that has travelled quite reasonably on the motorway should suddenly turn on to roads that were not built to take that type of traffic. It is against that eventuality that I must provide.

I can assure my hon. Friend and the House that my Department is in no way complacent about the wider problem to which he has referred. As I said earlier, we attach very high priority to the completion of the M25, but we are concerned that the section between Wisley and Reigate should be completed as soon as possible. Existing traffic problems in Reigate, Ewell and other areas are badly affected by heavy goods vehicles and other orbital traffic. I well understand the disturbance, distress and inconvenience that this causes both to local residents and to the other road users. One of the reasons for building the M25 is to take traffic out of residential, shopping and commercial areas and we shall certainly do all in our power to see that the M25, in Surrey and the remainder of its length is completed as quickly as possible.

I hope that my hon. Friend will realise from what I have said that we shall not let up in our efforts to get the contractors back on site as early as possible so that this section of the M25 can be completed as soon as possible. Only upon its completion will my hon. Friend realise with me why there is a need not only to get the job done as fast as possible but as thoroughly as possible and up to the specifications that the Department lays down so that the road shall have a proper life without interruption. I assure

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my hon. Friend that we shall leave no stone unturned to make sure that the contractor has the M25 in his area open as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 30 January 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HIGHLAND REGION (KINLOCHBERVIE) ORDER CONFIRMATION

Mr. Secretary Younger presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Highland Region (Kinlochbervie); And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon Tuesday 5 February and to be printed. [Bill 66.]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Tourism (Grant-aid)

1. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied with the operation of section 4 grant-aid under the Development of Tourism Act 1969; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): The operation of the section 4 scheme is primarily a matter for the national tourist boards for England, Scotland and Wales, which have authority to approve individual offers of assistance up to £200,000. I believe that the scheme helps to stimulate investment in tourism projects which would not otherwise take place.

Mr. Hicks: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a strong case for making additional funds available for this purpose; funds which not only widen and improve the quality of tourist projects in this country but help to create employment? Is he aware that whereas the average cost of creating a new job in the tourist industry is £4,500, each unemployed person costs the nation £6,000 a year?

Mr. Butcher: There is no doubt that the tourism industry has made a magnificant contribution to job creation in the United Kingdom. In the hotel trade alone there was an increase of 14,000 jobs in the 12 months to September 1984. In that context, section 4 assistance has been cost effective. I cannot give my hon. Friend any reassurance on future spending under section 4, but he will be aware that our hon. Friend the Minister of State has said that he wants expenditure to continue over the next three years at approximately the 1983 rate.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister accept that, given the parity of the pound against the dollar, this is a particularly good time to try to attract tourists to Britain, in particular from the United States? Will he ensure that adequate finance is available — even more finance than the expenditure limits at present allow for the Development of Tourism Act 1969—to maximise that potential?

Mr. Butcher: There is no doubt that the current movements in exchange rates could provide a massive boost for the balance of payments through tourism. While the British Tourist Authority is doing its job very well indeed, we hope that it will take advantage, within its current funding levels, of the bonus that is being presented to it.

Mr. John Townend: Will my hon. Friend see whether changes need to be made so that seaside towns which are outside assisted areas and are not in receipt of tourist grants are able to make application for EEC grants?

Mr. Butcher: Section 4 is available, at the request of the tourist industry, on a national and sectoral basis, but it envisaged that the assisted area policy might result in some discrepancies which would not be wholly welcome to the industry. However, I note my hon. Friend's point on the European dimension and will convey it to my appropriate colleagues.

Local Enterprise Agencies

2. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many local enterprise agencies are in existence; and how many are in the process of being set up.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. David Trippier): There are 238 local enterprise agencies and a further 38 are in the process of being set up.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that a local enterprise agency is in the process of being set up in King's Lynn, where, regrettably, the unemployment level is above the regional average? Is he further aware that, when established, it will play a crucial role in helping small buinesses, and thus will help to reduce unemployment? What Government help is available to such local enterprise agencies?

Mr. Trippier: I am aware that an enterprise agency is in the process of being set up in west Norfolk. Having visited my hon. Friend's constituency on two occasions, I take this opportunity to pay him a warm tribute for the initiative that he has displayed in bringing forward this enterprise agency.

The main assistance that is available for the establishment of local enterprise agencies is from the private sector. The principal assistance available from the Government is the tax relief on the contributions made by the private sector, provided that those enterprise agencies are established. In addition, pump priming funds are available at regional offices of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Loyden: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in enterprise zones the development——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a different question. The question is about enterprise agencies.

Mr. Loyden: I am referring to these zones in the context of small businesses. Is the Under-Secretary of State aware that the retail outlets that have been developed in enterprise zones are destroying the small businesses that lie outside those areas? Is it not a fact——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is still referring to a different subject.

Shoes

3. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in persuading foreign countries to reduce their import tariffs on United Kingdom-manufactured shoes to levels the United Kingdom imposes through the common external tariff.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): Footwear, like other British exports, has benefited from reductions in duty granted by trading partners in successive GATT negotiations. But many tariffs remain far too high—and not only on shoes.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. As he knows, footwear manufacturing is important in my constituency of Kettering. We face high and often unfair tariffs. Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to urge the European Commission, on the accession of Spain, to increase the common external tariff, as we are allowed to do under GATT, to the weighted average between the European Community as presently constituted and Spain, and to use that bargaining weapon with those other countries which so far have refused to reduce their tariffs?

Mr. Channon: I note what my hon. Friend says. I have been much impressed by the representations that he has made to me on a number of occasions on behalf of the footwear industry. The answer to my hon. Friend's specific point is that this would depend upon negotiations between the Community and the other contracting parties to GATT. I cannot say that any great increase in tariffs is in prospect.

Mr. Kirkwood: If the Minister is concerned about the prospects for the shoe manufacturing industry, will he, in the coming weeks, spend less time considering the important question of tariff quotas and spend more time making representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is considering imposing VAT on children's shoes?

Mr. Channon: I think the hon. Gentleman knows that that is a matter for my right hon. Friend, and not for me.

Mr. Marlow: As my right hon. Friend is well aware that the footwear industry is deeply concerned about the fact that everyone seems to be able to get into our markets, but we do not seem to be able to have the opportunity to get into other people's markets, will he tell the industry that there is nothing that he can do about the matter because he is quite powerless, and all power resides in Brussels with the European Community? The industry will then direct its complaints and attention to where something can be done about the problem.

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend has slightly exaggerated the position. The British Government are perfectly capable of making representations to the Community and pressing the Community to take effective action. There are many areas where the footwear industry faces difficult exporting problems, but there are certain places—for example, South Korea—where progress is being made. We shall continue to press for progress to be made.

Mr. Williams: Is it not nonsense for the Minister to pretend that VAT is a matter for the Chancellor and not for him? After all, does not the Minister's Department represent the manufacturers? Will not the manufacturers be severely harmed if VAT is introduced? Does not the Minister's Department allegedly and purportedly represent the consumers? Will not the consumers be severely hurt if VAT is introduced?

Mr. Channon: Surely even the hon. Gentleman does not expect me to anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget.

Small Businesses (Assistance)

4. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to educate professional advisers about the help available from his Department to their small business clients.

Mr. Trippier: We are curently sponsoring seminars for professional advisers on the importance of business planning. I am confident that these will prove as popular and successful as our earlier series on Government grants and advisory services and on small firms finance.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I thank my hon. Friend and welcome his reply. Can he reassure the House that during the endeavour there will not be too great a shift of finite resources away from direct help to small businesses?

Mr. Trippier: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. I am anxious to educate, as far as we are able, the professional advisers who act as intermediaries and advise the important people—the small business men.

Mr. MacKenzie: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the best help that he can give to small firms is to ensure that they obtain orders? If our large companies, whether they are in the public or the private sector, are going bust—and many of them are—then, by definition, the number of orders placed with small firms will be reduced. The best assistance that the hon. Gentleman can give these small firms is to ensure that there is an upsurge of demand by the large companies for the products of small companies.

Mr. Trippier: That certainly has an obvious effect. However, the right hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that the Government's record on helping small firms is of the highest order. I published some figures not so long ago which showed that there had been a net increase in the number of small firms of some 47,000 in a year—slightly more than double the figure for the year before. That shows clearly that we are on the right track.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Will my hon. Friend join me in applauding the work of the small firms centres, and in particular the Nottingham one, which covers the Leicestershire area and the city of Leicester? Will he ensure that those advising and helping — to a large extent from Leicester—are properly updated about all the assistance available for small firms, which represent the future of our country and which will provide real jobs?

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful for the compliments that my hon. Friend has paid to the small firms centres, especially the one in Nottingham. I am certain that the service provided by the inquiry officer and the small firms counsellors in that region is very much appreciated in my hon. Friend's area and in his constituency.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is the Minister keen for his Department to assist producer co-operatives? Do his

officials work closely with local authorities, many of which have done good work in encouraging co-operatives in their areas?

Mr Trippier: We have shown that we are anxious to encourage the growth of co-operatives. The Co-operative Development Agency and Industrial Development Act was passed by Parliament in 1984, and we are keen that the co-operative sector should expand. However, we must recognise that there are little more than 1,000 co-operatives in the country at the moment—we should like to see more—compared with an overall figure of 1·3 million small firms.

Mr. James Lamond: Is the Minister aware that the Government's loan guarantee scheme for small businesses is not working as well as it might? The scheme could be very valuable if everyone who could benefit from it was aware of its existence. Does the Minister know that in the area which he and I represent even some of the banks deny knowledge of the scheme?

Mr. Trippier: That situation has not been brought to my attention. If it is correct, it is extremely worrying. I do not think that the Department has any difficulty in increasing awareness of the scheme. Our difficulty, and my personal embarrassment, has been that the loss rate has been far higher than we expected. I have therefore changed the terms and conditions of the scheme, thereby improving the appraisal and monitoring procedure.

Mr. John Smith: Is not the biggest problem faced by small firms the severe decline in medium-sized and large businesses? Surely the biggest help that the Government could give the small firms would be to find a strategy for the survival and prosperity of manufacturing in this country? Is it not true that the most severe decline has taken place since the present Government took office and that a reversal of that decline is more important than all the schemes in the world?

Mr. Trippier: The right hon. Gentleman's statement reflects the views held by his party when last in government. They took no cognisance of the fact that a greater concentration on small firms — as has been effected by the present Government—would increase employment potential in the larger firms. I find it difficult to imagine that the larger firms would increase their demand on the labour market as much as smaller firms, which have not only wealth-creating potential, but employment potential. It is a matter of balance.

EC (Manufactures)

5. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total surplus or deficit in trade in manufactures with the European Economic Community in 1984; and what was the comparable surplus or deficit in 1974.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Norman Tebbit): The deficit in trade in manufactures with other members of the Community was £7¾ billion in 1984, offset by a surplus in trade in oil of £7·4 billion. In 1974, the deficit in manufacturing was £½ billion.

Mr. Taylor: We still have a surplus in our manufacturing trade with the rest of the world. What are the main reasons for the devastating and appalling deficit in trade with the Common Market, which must be having an appalling effect on unemployment in this country?

Mr. Tebbit: What is important in these matters is not the particular balance in relation to one country or group of countries, or one manufacturing or trading activity as opposed to another, but the overall balance. In 1984, overall, we were in surplus, whereas in 1974, overall, we were in deficit. The position has improved in the last decade.

Our customers come here to buy because we offer the best value for the things that they buy from us. In exactly the same way, our consumers go where they think they can find the best value.

Mr. Crowther: Will the Secretary of State urge on the Leader of the House the need for a debate, in Government time, on the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, which has demonstrated dramatically the seriousness of the problem? Despite what the right hon. Gentleman said about the need to balance one thing against another, does he agree that manufacturing is at the heart of wealth creation in Britain? What does he suggest that we live on when the oil runs out?

Mr. Tebbit: Of course manufacturing is an important part of wealth creation, but it is not the only part. If we lived in a slightly more rational world, coal extraction would be a wealth creating activity, instead of a wealth destroying one as it is today. The hon. Gentleman's question about a debate is an appropriate one to put to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House during business questions.

Mr. Michael Marshall: What is the latest indication that my right hon. Friend has received from the Confederation of British Industry about membership of the EEC? Does he agree that the CBI's previous assessment showed that 90 per cent. of its members thought that withdrawal from the Community would be a disaster for their business prospects?

Mr. Tebbit: Like the great majority of the British people, the CBI favours our continued membership of the Community. The problem for some right hon. and hon. Labour Members is that they opposed membership, lost the battle and have not yet been able to reconcile themselves to our membership.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Does the Secretary of State agree that the most striking feature of our current trade figures is that our non-oil visible trade deficit has increased from £2·5 billion in 1982 to £11·4 billion last year, while our oil surplus has steadily increased? Does he agree that that explains why the pound has been under pressure; that it is because we are overdependent on the oil part of our economy?

Mr. Tebbit: If the hon. Gentleman is right—I am not saying that I necessarily agree with him — the reasonable consequence of what he says is that we should try to stick the oil back in the ground and pretend that we never found it.

Mr. Dorrell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that EC countries still represent the largest and richest market for manufacturers in the world? How can it possibly be in our interests to cut ourselves off from that market? Does my

right hon. Friend agree that the answer lies in making our manufactures sufficiently competitive for European consumers to choose to buy them?

Mr. Tebbit: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said earlier this week, it would be prudent for those who are engaged in wage negotiations to consider the type of wage negotiations that are going on in Germany and to contrast them with some of the absurd demands that are being made in Britain.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Do the figures which the right hon. Gentleman has just given include steel manufacturing? If so, are we not in danger of becoming over-generous compared with some of our European partners?

Mr. Tebbit: I always try not to be over-generous with our European partners. My business is to try to be as generous as possible with Britain. I understand that the figures include steel, but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, our steel industry was almost destroyed by the ravages of the Beswick review and other idiotic affairs of that type.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the demand for overall industrial protection, which is implicit in many of the supplementary questions that have been fired at him, are utterly inconsistent with Britain's need to earn its living in a competitive world?

Mr. Tebbit: My hon. Friend is right. It is theoretically possible for us to put up barriers and to prevent our people from buying goods in the most advantageous markets, but we cannot force the rest of the world to buy our goods against its will.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Japanese have managed to penetrate the European market, despite all the problems? Does he further agree that the lesson for British workers and management is that, if the Japanese can penetrate the market, the answer lies in their own hands?

Mr. Tebbit: Yes, but I only wish that it were a little easier for all European manufactures to penetrate the Japanese market. That seems to be rather difficult, and the reason does not always lie in the quality or price of the goods.

Mr. Gould: The Prime Minister professes to be puzzled by the fall in the pound's value. Do not the calamitous figures which the Secretary of State gave at least offer part of the answer? How can the Government continue to talk convincingly about economic recovery when this deficit, which is worth 1 million jobs in British industry, is allowed to continue and to grow? Can the Secretary of State tell the House whether the issue is being considered by the special working party which he set up to examine our disastrous decline in manufacturing trade? Will he assure us that, despite his public show of indifference, he, at least, is taking the matter seriously?

Mr. Tebbit: If it were a question of our balance of trade and balance of payments, sterling would, in general, have been lower under Labour Governments than it has been under Conservative Governments.

Child Buggy Pushchairs

6. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the organisations which he has consulted about his proposed new draft regulations concerning the safety of child buggy pushchairs.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Alex Fletcher): The consultation documents on the proposed new safety regulations for pushchairs are available in the Library. They include a full list of those consulted.

Mr. Chapman: Recognising the deficiencies in the existing regulations, will my hon. Friend say when he hopes to introduce the new regulations? Considering the serious, albeit few, accidents that there have been with the collapsible type child buggy pushchair, can he reiterate that that form of perambulator comes within the scope of the existing regulations?

Mr. Fletcher: On the second point, I can confirm that the existing regulations apply to buggies, and they will be covered also in the new ones. On the first point, the regulations will come into effect later this year.

Mr. Williams: Will the Parliamentary Under-Secretary bear in mind that when the regulations were introduced in September 1978, after the death of children, they were described as the first step? Why are we still waiting for the second step six and a half years later? Has he read *Which?* magazine, which carried out a survey in 1982 and found that five of the 20 pushchairs that it checked were unsafe, that half of the owners of the buggy type of pushchair, and a quarter of the owners of the traditional type of pushchair, reported that they had had accidents, and that in one in 20 of those accidents a child had been injured?

Mr. Fletcher: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's points. We are making new regulations to BSI standards, which will be put into practice as soon as possible.

West Midlands Initiative

7. **Mr. John M. Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in his Department's west midlands initiative.

Mr. Butcher: The primary object of the Department's west midlands initiative was to increase the application of new technologies and new production techniques in the industries of the region, and that was achieved. Much of the region has now been granted intermediate area status, and hence the emphasis of the Department's work there has shifted to regional assistance.

Mr. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply, but will he tell the House what hard results he has to show for his efforts for innovation, new products and new processes in companies in the west midlands?

Mr. Butcher: I am delighted to report to my hon. Friend some of the excellent results achieved during that period. More than 1,200 companies received grants to introduce new techniques and machinery into their existing manufacturing processes, support under section 8 and under support for innovation totalled £70 million, and levered a total spend of £200 million in a cost-effective market-driven manner.

Mr. Park: How does the Minister reconcile his reply to his hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) with the fact that money available for technology has been reduced, as he knows? The two do not add up.

Mr. Butcher: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. If he is referring to the support for innovation programme, he will know that it was significantly increased for the current financial year. The moratorium, to which I think he is referring, was invoked because awareness of the programme arrived like an express train and the application rate consequently increased. During the first few months of this year we therefore spent what had hitherto been a total year's allocation.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that his original reply is most encouraging? Will he make further efforts and do everything that he can to encourage and help the car components industry, which in its way is even more important than the car industry?

Mr. Butcher: The car components industry was one of the major recipients of expenditure under section 8 and, indeed, under support for innovation. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in commending the excellent work that is going on, for example, at Warwick university with BL Systems and two other key companies, which are trying to spread best practice in innovative manufacture of components throughout the British motor industry.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Is the Minister aware that for most industries in the west midlands his so-called initiative was either stillborn or died of paralysis? Is he also aware that since the Government came to power we have lost one third of industrial manufacturing capacity in the west midlands and one third of jobs in manufacturing totalling 225,000? Is he further aware that in the west midlands the phasing out of capital allowances, the massive hike in interest rates and the moratorium on regional aid amounts to nothing more than a further prolonged period of disaster for that region?

Mr. Butcher: The Labour research department has fouled up again. The hon. Gentleman should know that section 7 assistance, the type of assistance that applies in the west midlands, is still being used in that region. There is no moratorium on that.

The hon. Gentleman should also know from discussions on the subject that the prejudice of Government against the west midlands emanated directly from Labour Government activity, not least on industrial development certificates. They encouraged industry to leave that region wholesale. We have ended that and have produced much more equality of treatment for each of the assisted areas.

Small Firms (Cash Flow)

8. **Mrs. Peacock** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to provide assistance to smaller firms to help them to cope with the problems caused by late payments of bills by large firms.

Mr. Trippier: I share the concern about the serious difficulties which that practice can cause for small firms. I have recently invited organisations representing industry to join me in examining possible initiatives.

Mrs. Peacock: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Will he consider withholding DTI grants from those firms which do not settle their accounts, or delay settling their accounts, with smaller firms?

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend advocates a course of action that has been suggested to me on a number of occasions. My immediate reaction to the suggestion is that that approach would be a recipe for bureaucratic complexity.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Minister recognise that, as well as large firms, among those most guilty of this practice are local government organisations, many of them Conservative-controlled? Will he also recognise that in a period such as the present, with ruinously high interest rates, the late payment of bills can mean the death of small firms? If legislation is not appropriate in this matter, will he give consideration to the Government backing a code of practice, which can then be operative in the field?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman obviously recognises the problem that I identified in my answer to the substantive question. It is important that we should stop short of legislation, as he seems to be suggesting, because a problem may arise where small firms may not be paying the bills of other small firms on time and where small firms may not be paying the bills of large firms on time. I should prefer to see some code of practice initiated by industry rather than by the Government.

Mr. Dickens: I congratulate my hon. Friend on all the measures that he has introduced to help small businesses in Britain, for which they are deeply grateful, but is he aware that many of the small companies in Britain are having inflicted upon them the large companies, who are dining out on the overdrafts of those small companies, and that many of those large companies are enjoying massive Government contracts? Is it at all possible that one or two of those companies could be exposed as late payers to help the small businesses?

Mr. Trippier: I doubt whether there would have been anything wrong if my hon. Friend had chosen to expose one or two of those companies in his question to me. If there is evidence that a number of large companies are delaying the payment of bills, I shall be grateful to receive it so that we can look at it more carefully.

Mr. O'Brien: I have noted the reply to the question from the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock). Will the Minister also have regard to the problems facing small industry and the help and protection that it needs because of water charges? Will he have a word with his colleagues——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about the late payment of bills.

Mr. O'Brien: This is a problem, because the water authorities demand payment immediately and the increase in water charges is causing a problem for small firms. Will the Minister have a word with his colleagues to try to get some easement for small firms?

Mr. Trippier: Certainly I am prepared to discuss the matter with my colleagues in the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Williams: Will the Minister recognise that, disastrous enough in itself as the 4 per cent. increase in interest rates has been for small firms, that increase worsens the problems outlined in the initial question? Will he further recognise that not only does it make it massively more expensive for small firms to finance the cash gap

caused by this practice by large firms, but the higher rate of interest encourages large firms to delay payments even more?

Mr. Trippier: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday at Question Time, it is a disappointment to see interest rates at this level. We all hope that the present level of interest rates is only temporary. As my right hon. Friend said yesterday, the effect could be worse if inflation were to rip as it did under the Labour Administration. I must take the opportunity to point out to the right hon. Gentleman that I welcome his new interest in small firms. We were appalled when in a debate on small firms on 18 January the official Opposition——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that that is also a bit wide of the subject of late payment of bills.

Small Firms Service

10. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has for improving publicity for the small firms service.

Mr. Trippier: I am keen to ensure that small business men are fully aware of the advice and information available from the small firms service. We are at present advertising in the national and regional press to promote greater use of the service.

Mr. Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Why is it thought necessary to run a Government information service through the small firms service when private initiatives are being taken in this regard?

Mr. Trippier: The small firms service provides a national facility, which offers consistent quality. It does not seek to compete with other initiatives, which are very welcome. It is a complementary service to local initiatives. Those services offered at local level are very much appreciated.

Mr. Cyril Smith: Will the Minister attempt to ensure not only that the small firms service is known throughout the community but that small firms are assisted to become known throughout the world? The deputation that is to go to China does not, so far as I am aware, contain any representatives of small firms. That is a great disappointment to small firms in my part of the world. What steps has his Department taken to ensure that small firms are represented on such delegations?

Mr. Trippier: Small firms are normally well represented on delegations abroad and the British Overseas Trade Board is anxious to encourage that. I shall certainly consider seriously the particular point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. Robert Atkins: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that he has done for the small firms service. Does he not agree that there is room for involving people apart from those who would otherwise be retired in giving advice to potential small business men on developing businesses, in that the older people tend to be slightly out of touch with current developments concerning small business advice?

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am anxious to encourage people who are working in industry, some who are semi-retired and some who are retired, to come forward. Many of them will have a significant contribution to make. It is important to underline that in the local enterprise agency movement mushrooming throughout the country we have a source of business counselling dealing with problems at the sharp end, which is invaluable.

Mr. Haynes: Does the Minister recall that in the 1979 election campaign the Conservative party said that it intended to help small businesses because that was where jobs would come from? Since then, year by year, more and more small firms have fallen by the wayside. Does he appreciate that if nothing is done about that problem there will be no small businesses left to publicise?

Mr. Trippier: If the hon. Gentleman would open his ears rather than his mouth, a whole new world might be opened up to him. As I pointed out in reply to an earlier question, a net increase in small firms in this country has led to greater employment. I am glad that he referred to the commitment to small firms in our 1979 manifesto. We have consistently continued that commitment, but it was notably absent from the Labour party manifesto in 1979 and also in 1983.

Contributions to Political Parties

11. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to place contributions by companies to political parties or for other political purposes on the same legal footing as contributions by trade unions to political parties or for other political purposes.

Mr. Tebbit: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Secretary of State explain why trade unions need to have a political fund and are now required to have a ballot, but companies do not need a political fund before contributing to political parties? Does he recognise that the way in which the Government have used their majority in this Parliament can only be described as a form of political corruption?

Mr. Tebbit: I do not recognise that at all. The hon. Gentleman fails to recognise that companies and trade unions are governed by completely different statutes and are set up for completely different purposes. He would be the last person to want standards of company law applied to trade unions. If they were so applied, I can think of at least one prominent trade unionist today who would probably have been prosecuted for the way in which he has debased the union for which he works, destroyed its power, corrupted its members and wasted its money.

Mr. Ward: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the annual general meeting of a company allows shareholders to express their opinions each year? Does he further agree that it would be a good thing if trade union members had the same right to express an opinion in that way each year?

Mr. Tebbit: Yes, I do. Again, however, my hon. Friend must not assume that unions and companies should be run in the same way or governed by the same kind of statute. One must also keep a sense of proportion in these matters. In 1981, for example, in respect of their political funds trade unions spent £4·8 million or 12·8 per cent. of the amount that they spent on benefits to their members. When companies donate money to political parties it is more like 0·02 per cent. of profit or turnover. [HON.

MEMBERS: "What is the total?"] According to *The Economist*, the total is about £2·5 million. Moreover, the figure that I gave for trade unions excludes spending such as the £1 million campaign to "Kill the Bill"—a Bill which is now in good health as an Act of Parliament and helping to democratise trade unions. My figure also excluded £1 million spending by NALGO on another fruitless exercise against the interests of its members.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: If the Secretary of State is ever tempted to go down that road, will he stop the nonsense of having ballots on the existence of political funds and instead introduce ballots for the party to which the funds should be donated? Is he aware that that would prevent the current attempt by the Labour party to camouflage the fact that 80 per cent. of the political funds of the trade union movement go straight into Labour party coffers?

Mr. Tebbit: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, but I wish there was more consistency in these matters. Perhaps he will tell us at some time whether the president of the SDP, Mrs. Shirley Williams, asked for ballots of members of APEX when it was giving money to the Labour party, and whether the SDP has sought and obtained donations from companies without requiring the companies to ask their shareholders.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Accepting the Secretary of State's point about the need for a sense of proportion on the matter and the fact that the laws for trade unions and companies are different, would it not be a good idea to consider this from the point of view of the House? If it is right to control political expenditure by trade unions, surely it is equally right to control it by companies. If he considered it that way, could we not have an interesting argument and dialogue and come to a conclusion that accepts both sides and is not based on party dogma?

Mr. Tebbit: It is always a sign of a pretty rocky case in the House when an hon. Member says, "Let us decide this without reference to party dogma". One knows that the hon. Member is trying to slip a quick one in somewhere.

There are no controls on the amount that trade unions may spend on politics. Much of the money that they spent on what the man in the street would see as a political campaign, such as "Kill the Bill" was not regarded as political spending. Equally, when a company's board of directors decides that money should be spent in the interests of the shareholders, it is surely reasonable that they should be able to do so, and that is done against the background of the Companies Acts and the requirement for a meeting of shareholders.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is nothing wrong in any company giving a political donation? If Opposition Members care to read any annual report, they will realise that all declarations in excess of £500 are already declared.

Mr. Tebbit: My hon. Friend is right. Once again one has to look at these things in the round. I am indebted to the *New Statesman* of 30 November 1984, in which I read that part of the Labour party's jobs and industry campaign for this year includes a strong recommendation that the Labour party should approach companies for political donations. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) should speak to his own party about these matters.

Mr. John Smith: Despite all the attempts by the Secretary of State to cloud the issue, is it not crystal clear to any fair-minded person that what the Government want to see is special controls on the political funds operated by trade unions but none whatsoever on the companies and corporate forces that support the Conservative party? Is that not blatantly and grossly unfair from any standpoint?

Mr. Tebbit: No. There are controls in each case, but because of the different natures of the organisations they are different controls. The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that the 1908 Act, which first arranged the compact, as one might call it——

Mr. Smith: 1913.

Mr. Tebbit: I think that the 1908 Act was the first. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may well be right on the date. The Act in question provided that the union had to have a ballot of its members to authorise the setting-up of a fund. Whether those ballots were held just after 1908 or 1913, there cannot be many of that electorate who are still left around and it is about time there was another ballot.

Anglo-Soviet Trade

12. **Mr. Cockeram** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what prospects for increased Anglo-Soviet trade resulted from the recent visit of Mr. Gorbachev.

Mr. Channon: When I met Mr. Gorbachev last month we agreed that trade between our two countries should be developed on a long-term basis. Mr. Gorbachev said that he hoped for an increase in trade of 40 to 50 per cent. in the short term and we discussed a number of opportunities that would help us to achieve this objective. These are now being actively pursued by the companies concerned.

Mr. Cockeram: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that Russian promises to ease restrictions on mutual trade are borne out in practice, and further ensure that when Russian cruise ships, which offer lower grade cruises than Britian's luxury cruise ships, use British ports they receive fair and equal treatment?

Mr. Channon: I shall be delighted to look at the point raised by my hon. Friend.

Bankruptcies

14. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many firms went bankrupt in 1984; and what is the total number of bankruptcies since 1979.

Mr. Fletcher: Provisional 1984 figures for Great Britain are 8,509 bankruptcies and 14,210 company liquidations. In the six years 1979 to 1984 there were 34,862 bankruptcies and 61,785 company liquidations. The bankruptcy figures include deeds of arrangement, and cover all individuals and partnerships.

Mr. Brown: Does the Minister agree that the figures are a terrible indictment of his Government? How many more firms will go bust as the pound declines and interest rates reach record level,s? Will he tell us the truth for a change?

Mr. Fletcher: I shall tell the hon. Member another truth—the number of new company starts is also at a

record level with almost 100,000 new starts in 1984 alone. In other major industrial countries the number of bankruptcies and insolvencies in the last few years has been very high. Perhaps the next time that the hon. Gentleman visits the Red Army in Afghanistan he will stop off at one or two countries and find out for himself.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim: Is my hon. Friend aware that many bankruptcies are caused by poor management, but that occasionally companies run into difficulties because of unfair trade barriers set up by other countries? Is my hon. Friend aware that Siemens sell telex machines and telecommunications equipment on the British market and that other companies, such as Olivetti, have telex equipment on sale and approved in this market but that British telex and telcommunications manufacturers are not allowed to sell in Italy, Germany, Japan, France and most other countries?

Mr. Fletcher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. If he can provide details I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will look into that.

Mr. James Hamilton: Will the Minister be realistic and rectify what is happening in my constituency, where virtually every week, without fail, bankruptcies occur? Is the Minister aware that the construction company for which I worked, which is now over 100 years old, will close its doors on 1 February? Is he also aware that, because of Government policy, that company has gone out of commission? Does the Minister remember the 1979 Conservative manifesto in which promises were made to smaller companies and to industrialists in general? Finally is he aware that companies are now sadly disillusioned with the Government? Pray God that they will vote Labour at the next general election.

Mr. Fletcher: I am interested in the fact that the hon. Gentleman seeks aid from yet another place. The point is that manufacturing investment in companies in the market today amounted to £6 billion in the year to September 1984. That was up 16 per cent. on the year before. Retail sales were up 4·5 per cent. in real terms in 1984 compared with 1983. There is no shortage of demand in the market. The challenge is for British companies to meet that demand.

Mr. Spencer: Does my hon. Friend agree that a number of firms in the city of Leicester went bankrupt because they were crucified by a monstrous rate bill imposed by the city council?

Mr. Fletcher: I am sure that that is correct. It applies to many companies, especially small companies, throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gould: Is the Minister aware that because the deposit on a debtor's petition and the minimum debt to support a creditor's petition were increased by 100 per cent. and 120 per cent. respectively in October last year, the figures which he has just given the House do not fully reflect the full severity of this immense and record surge in business failures? Is the Minister further aware that if the figures are disaggregated they cast a yet more unflattering light on Government policy because they show that, following the imposition of VAT on home improvements, business failures among glazing firms have doubled and that even in high technolgy — computer manufacturers and distributors — so much touted as a success by the Government, the failures have doubled?

Mr. Fletcher: Even taking into account the increase in the debtor's petition, the monthly figures show a levelling off in the number of bankruptcies.

Regional Aid

16. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many recent representations he has received on his decision to alter the criteria governing regional aid.

Mr. Butcher: About 120 written submissions on the changes in regional industrial policy have been received since my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry announced them on 28 November. Ministers in the Department have also had a number of discussions with right hon. and hon. Members and others about local and general industrial development questions against the background of the new policy.

Mr. Fisher: Will the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State concede that the five or six criteria in the new policy for regional aid are adequate to respond neither to the underlying unemployment trends, such as job vacancies or youth or long-term unemployment, nor to the inherent industrial problems of an area such as mine in north Staffordshire? Will he recognise that his plans leave an area such as north Staffordshire in a worse position, sandwiched as it is between two areas to which he has given aid? Will he therefore reconsider his plans?

Mr. Butcher: I fully understand the reasons for the hon. Gentleman's question, particularly in the light of the pending early redundancies. However, I hope he will agree with me that there was no other way for the Government to proceed but upon objective criteria, impartially applied, and paying due cognisance to the core factor, which was the absolute level of unemployment and the level of long-term unemployment. On that basis, and on the travel-to-work-area basis, unfortunately — or perhaps one should say fortunately — Stoke was not sufficiently disadvantaged to qualify.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will my hon. Friend accept that the west midlands welcomes the modest change in regional aid in our area, but could he help us about what the effect will be upon BL, a company which is owned in the majority by the taxpayer? Although in the past BL needed aid to save it from bankruptcy, it has now become a successful company. Are the Government, as the major shareholder, willing to invest further in its success so as to secure the jobs that are most desperately needed by the motor industry and the west midlands.

Mr. Butcher: My hon. Friend referred to the new changes as modest, but I am bound to say that industrialists in the Birmingham area do not see it in that light. I would cite as evidence the fact that 2,000 companies have already made inquiries about the workings of the system, of which 10 are from the inner city area of Birmingham, with which I know my hon. Friend has some preoccupation. As for BL, we look at its applications for various forms of assistance on their merits, but at the moment there is no application, either formal or informal, before us. We are also anxious to continue the support that we give to the BL component suppliers, which BL regards as a very important part of the industry.

Mr. Wilson: On top of the Government's recent discriminatory refusal to give to Scottish old-age

pensioners the heating allowances that they are dishing out in the south of England and in the midlands, does the hon. Gentleman not understand that in Scotland we feel that we are also being discriminated against on industrial aid——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I find it difficult to relate the hon. Member's question to regional aid.

Mr. Wilson: I did, Mr. Speaker, refer to industrial aid. What proposals do the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend have for restoring to the Scottish economy the £100 million that they have embezzled from it?

Mr. Butcher: I find that a most incredible assertion. Scotland has received significant aid,, from this Administration and from many other Administrations during the last two or three decades. Not only has Scotland received significant aid, but the Scots were not discriminated against during the last evaluation of assisted area status. Scotland has been subjected to exactly the same criteria as the rest of the country.

Small Firms Service

17. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries the small firms service answered during 1984.

Mr. Trippier: During 1984 the small firms service dealt with 279,201 inquiries in Great Britain.

Mr. Smith: Is this not a most encouraging figure? Does it not demonstrate quite clearly the resurgence of interest in the starting up of new businesses? Is my hon. Friend satisfied with the quality of the advice that is being given as well as with the quantity?

Mr. Trippier: I agree with my hon. Friend that the figure is encouraging. For counselling cases it seems to improve year on year. I am very proud of the small firms service. Nevertheless, it should be reviewed. I am concentrating upon a review of that service right now.

GATT

18. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether Her Majesty's Government favour a new round of negotiations on the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

Mr. Channon: Yes, provided the preparatory discussions show good prospects of success.

Mr. Carlisle: When are these talks likely to take place? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the United Kingdom depends very heavily upon trade and that we must aim further to reduce barriers? Therefore, when these talks take place will my right hon. Friend insist that those countries to which we experience difficulty in exporting freely, such as Spain and Japan, significantly reduce their trade barriers?

Mr. Channon: It would be a prime aim during the talks and in other fora to ensure a genuine opening-up of the Japanese market. With Spain coming into the European Community, there will be free trade between Spain and the rest of the Community in a comparatively short time. No one can yet tell whether there will be a round of talks on the GATT, but I think that there will preliminary talks this year and every likelihood of substantive talks towards the end of the year.

Cheese (Exports)

19. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total volume of cheese exported from the United Kingdom in 1984.

Mr. Channon: Thirty-two thousand tonnes of cheese and curd were exported in 1984.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware that producers in my constituency have been advised that they should expect a cut in the exports of cheese to markets such as Japan, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and the Caribbean? Are the Government taking any steps to impose such an artificial restriction? If so, what is the reason for that?

Mr. Channon: Some of those points are probably matters for my right hon. Friends the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Wales. I know of no plans deliberately to limit exports. We export a great deal of cheese, not only to the countries mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, but to Algeria. A great deal of Cheddar cheese is exported all over the world.

Foreign Affairs Council

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): With permission, Mr. Speaker I should like to make a statement about the Foreign Affairs Council that met in Brussels on 28 and 29 January 1985. I represented the United Kingdom. Ministerial conferences with Spain and Portugal were held within the margins of the Council.

Ministers discussed outstanding points in the negotiations with both Spain and Portugal on agriculture, fisheries and social affairs. We remain determined to conclude the negotiations to allow the date of 1 January 1986 for Spanish and Portuguese accession to be met.

The Council discussed the financing of the 1985 budget and the text of the new own-resources decision. More detailed work will now be done. The Council will return to this subject in February.

The Council considered the new Canadian restrictions on Community beef exports. I urged others to work for a satisfactory negotiated outcome.

Ministers of the Ten, in political co-operation, issued a short statement regretting the failure of the New York high-level meeting on Cyprus and calling for the resumption of negotiations. Copies of the statement have been deposited in the Library of the House.

At an intergovernmental conference in the margins of the Council, Foreign Ministers appointed the Vice-Presidents of the new Commission.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I thank the Foreign Secretary for making his statement so generously. It is important that the House has the chance to seek information on progress or, equally important, lack of progress made in these crucial meetings—all the more so since it seems that the failure of the Council means that the Community is yet again steering complacently towards paralysis.

Is it not true that the failure to make progress at the Foreign Affairs Council seriously endangers any chance of resolving the chronic and almost perpetual calendar of EEC financial crises? No progress was made on a new budget to replace the one rejected by the European Parliament; no progress is being made to resolve demands on the integrated Mediterranean programmes, which threatens a Greek veto on Spanish and Portuguese accession; no progress was made on the accession negotiations themselves, which must be completed urgently if they are to be ratified in 10 countries on time; as a consequence, no progress can be made on increasing own resources, which will be necessary to pay the Prime Minister's much trumpeted rebate.

Is not this sad and sorry mess proof positive of the emptiness of the fine words at Fontainebleau? Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House whether the new budget Commissioner, Henning Christopherson, did warn Foreign Ministers yesterday that agriculture expenditure will exceed income by over £1 billion—nearly 2 billion ecus? If so, precisely where will Britain's rebate now come from? Secondly, will the Foreign Secretary consider reducing our monthly payments to the EEC by one twelfth of our expected rebate, in the light of the accounting nightmare that is yet to come? Thirdly, when does the Foreign Secretary expect ratification of Spanish and Portuguese accession to be before this Parliament?

Will the Foreign Secretary give the elusive guarantee that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office failed to give during last week's debate, that no more special payments will be demanded of this House this year to fund the endemic inability of the Community to control farm spending?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I must begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) on his accession to the position of principal spokesman on European Community affairs on the Opposition Front Bench. I encourage him to avoid the somewhat histrionic attempt at dramatisation which characterised his intervention this afternoon.

There was a routine meeting yesterday at which discussion took place on all the matters that I have identified. The suggestion that we are steering complacently towards paralysis, and all other fanciful language of that sort, is beside the point and remote from the truth. We discussed the matters that I have identified. We do not accept the warning of the new vice-president in charge of the budget of an overrun of the estimated expenditure on agriculture. We were not given any justification for the figures yesterday, and we shall want to challenge them and examine them most closely. It is worth reminding the hon. Gentleman that in 1984 the original Commission figure of 2·3 billion ecu was in the end reduced to 1 billion ecu.

It is universally acknowledged that provision must be made by the conclusion of discussions for the United Kingdom abatement to be made on the revenue side in accordance with the Fontainebleau conclusions.

As I said in my statement, we expect the accession and enlargement negotiations to be completed to enable ratification of enlargement to be presented and to take place on 1 January 1986.

As for any other matters being brought before the House, the object of the exercise is to secure a conclusion that will cover the overrun already established in the 1985 budget and to secure implementation of the Fontainebleau summit agreement on our own resources.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, no matter how desirable he may consider the political aims of enlargement, there is nothing particularly magical about January 1986 and that it is much more important to get the negotiations correct than to conclude them early and on the wrong terms? The overriding importance is to get the negotiations right in terms of United Kingdom interests and those of existing Community members rather than to let in two new members on the wrong terms.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with the importance of the objectives that my hon. Friend has described. It is important also to seek to achieve them in accordance with the foreshadowed timetable. We shall seek to achieve both.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Although the Foreign Secretary has spoken of a routine meeting, are we being led to believe that, with the unprecedented instability of oil prices and exchange markets, the Council did not discuss, at least on the margin, the problems that this presents to the Community of 10? What was the right hon. and learned Gentleman's attitude in any such discussion, especially as we are now producing 2·5 million

barrels a day while Saudi Arabian production is down to 3·5 million barrels? The United Kingdom is therefore a significant factor in oil prices. Was the question of British membership of the exchange rate part of the EMS discussed, and, if not, why not?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Neither of those questions was raised. It was a meeting neither of the Energy Council nor of the Finance Ministers' Council. We were addressing ourselves to the agenda before us.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Surely my right hon. and learned Friend is seized of the importance of not entering into a new and heavy financial commitment until he knows that the EEC is in a position to meet its existing financial commitments as well as the additional ones. Must this not control any putative date of enlarging the EEC if it cannot meet its existing financial commitments with its existing resources? Until that conundrum is resolved, how can we contemplate increasing the liabilities of the EEC?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is precisely why all these issues are being addressed together. We are covering the 1985 budget overrun, the completion of the enlargement negotiations and the establishment of the own resources position. These issues were discussed yesterday.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Did the Foreign Affairs Council discuss, or does it intend discussing, the question of having some celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the victory over Nazism and the liberation of Europe from Nazi tyranny? Is it intended to make a protest to the Austrian authorities over the way in which a senior Austrian Minister went out of his way personally to welcome back a notorious Nazi mass murderer who had just been released by the Italian authorities?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand why the hon. Gentleman has some interest in that topic, but it was not one to which the Community addressed itself yesterday. Nor would it have been appropriate to have done so, it being a matter arising within the Government of a state which is not a member of the Community. The question of the commemoration of the conclusion of hostilities in Europe is being considered substantially as a matter for national Governments.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): In view of the proper concern that is being expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the financial cost of the entry of Spain and Portugal to the Community, is it not more than ever essential to emphasise the paramount political importance of ensuring that those two countries, recently returned to democratic Government, are firmly anchored in the Western community?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Did the Foreign Affairs Council consider the important problem of famine in the sub-Sahara? If so, was it recalled that in September there was a promise that 250,000 tonnes of grain would be delivered, as against the reality of 13,000 tonnes delivered, despite the fact that the grain mountains are still growing?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That was not discussed yesterday — [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] — because the Community's conclusions about the supply of grain to meet the needs identified by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) were agreed at the Dublin summit, on a commitment to supply 1·2 million tonnes of grain, and the substantial food aid commitments made by the Community in November are being delivered now.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwickshire and Leamington): My right hon. and learned Friend mentioned the vexed question of Cyprus. Will he encourage his European colleagues to put some moral pressure on the Greek Cypriots to negotiate more meaningfully with the Turkish Cypriots to try to reach a reasonable conclusion?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: In the course of the discussions yesterday, and in the course of the discussions I had last week with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, we made clear our expectation and hope that both sides would continue to negotiate with the utmost seriousness in the context of the initiative taken by the Secretary-General.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Was there a report before the Council of those states which had ratified the intergovernmental agreement which raised a loan for the EEC's 1984 budget? In the opinion of the Council, what article of the Treaty of Rome authorises the EEC to spend over its own resources, for 1984 or in any subsequent year when it needs to do so?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There was no discussion of that subject in the Foreign Affairs Council yesterday. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the intergovernmental agreement has been before this House in relation to the position that arose last year.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I welcome the prospect of Spain and Portugal becoming full members of the Community. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree, however, that the administrative costs of the EEC are increasing at a colossal rate? Is he aware that the expenditure by the intervention board for agricultural produce last year was more than £1,300 million? Does he and his colleagues have any plans to change the system, for better or for worse?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is important that every effort is made to reduce and control those costs, and that will, no doubt, be a question to which the new Commission will be addressing itself.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many hon. Members believe that these meetings are extremely valuable and take great pleasure in the knowledge that the accession talks are going well? How long will the transition arrangements last for the fishing agreement in respect of Spain?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks about the value of these meetings. It is important to understand that, although they do not give rise to high drama, they are important. The discussion yesterday enabled substantial advantages to be made in securing agreement on all these questions.

As for the fisheries regime for Spain, the main issues are still under negotiation, and that concerns the length of the transition arrangement and its possible extension, in the event of no agreement being reached in the original period.

Mr. Norman Atkinson (Tottenham): On the breakdown of the talks on Cyprus, how on earth can the Foreign Secretary or Mr. Pérez de Cuellar expect progress

[Mr. Norman Atkinson]

to be made if Mr. Denktash, the Turkish Cypriot representative, under instructions from General Evren of the Turkish Government, was not allowed to discuss the following issues: first, the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Cyprus; secondly, the free movement of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots; and, thirdly, the unification of a single currency? In those circumstances, will the Foreign Secretary make further representations to the Turkish Government to ensure that next time they meet there is an open agenda on the table allowing full discussion of those items?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly entitled to offer the House his view of the present state of the negotiations. His view contrasts with that offered by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith). Both sides need to be urged to make every effort to bridge the gap between them. Before the last round of talks, the Secretary-General made an assessment that the gap between them had never been so narrow. I know that the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Atkinson) attaches importance to closing the gap. I assure him that we shall continue to give every support and encouragement to the parties concerned, the other countries interested and the Secretary-General. I should not like to express a judgment about the two views that have been offered on both sides of the House.

Mr. Anthony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will my right hon. and learned Friend explain to a puzzled public why when we joined the Community we had to pay through the nose for the privilege, whereas when the Spanish and Portuguese seek to join the Community the Community has to pay through the nose for the privilege?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: At the time we joined the Community we were subject to a substantial transitional period which was designed to meet our particular circumstances. There will be negotiations about the transitional arrangements for the two new countries applying for membership. The negotiations must take account of the relative poverty of those countries.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): When the Foreign Secretary last reported what happened at a Foreign Affairs Council he claimed that arrangements had been made to ensure that, when Spain and Portugal joined the Common Market, an olive oil lake would not be created. The right hon. and learned Gentleman also gave assurances at that time that action would be taken to reduce the beef and butter mountains and the wine lake. Although I have recently enjoyed cheap butter from the EEC, I point out that the butter mountain has not been reduced significantly and the wine lake is still growing. How confident can we be that an olive oil lake will not be created when Spain and Portugal join the Common Market? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman assure the House that if there is an olive oil lake it will not be mixed in with the wine lake?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman is entirely correct to draw attention to the importance of maintaining strict discipline in the control of agricultural policy. For that reason, we are insisting upon a tight price regime for decisions in accordance with the financial guidelines that have been adopted and for the effective application of guaranteed thresholds to the commodities already covered by them. It is important that that regime should apply to olive oil as to other products.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Although many of us welcome the accession date and hope that this time it will be adhered to, will the Foreign Secretary explain the budgetary arrangements for Portugal, which is one of the poorest countries? The Treaty of Rome mentions the need to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman assure us that Portugal will not be a net contributor and that the accession arrangements affecting the budget are satisfactory?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Lady is correct in drawing attention to that matter as being important to Portugal. In that context I drew attention yesterday to the need for the Commission to bring forward proposals to deal with the own resources chapter of the enlargement negotiations.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that my political friends in Portugal were very disappointed when the 1984 date for entry was not achieved and that, after 50 years of brutal dictatorship, they are anxious to join the Common Market and will be extremely distressed if the January 1986 date is not achieved? I welcome the Foreign Secretary's determination, but what are the specific issues involved and which countries are likely to cause a hold-up at this stage?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Questions of some difficulty still remain, especially in relation to fisheries and some parts of the agriculture dossier. Establishing a fair balance of interests within the Community and with the applicant countries is bound to take some time, but I recognise the importance of what the hon. Gentleman says about Portugal's view of accession to the community.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): At a time of great and mounting crisis within the Community, the Foreign Secretary has given a picture of two days of total inaction. Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) has said, we consider it a disgrace that there was no discussion about aid to Ethiopia. The reality is quite different from the picture drawn by the Foreign Secretary. A written reply that I have received revealed that only 13,000 tonnes of grain have arrived in sub-Saharan Africa, whereas 1·2 million tonnes had been promised and there are now 12 million tonnes in store.

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman admit that time is running out for a decision on the accession of Spain and Portugal and the consequent decision about increasing VAT and own resources, both of which have to be ratified independently by the 10 sovereign Parliaments, and the delay to which jeopardises our abatement? What contingency plans does the right hon. and learned Gentleman have for dealing with that?

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman admit that the Government's policy on Europe now appears to be as big a shambles as their economic policy?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I caution the hon. Gentleman against over-excitement about the alleged mounting crisis that he perceives. The Community is addressing itself to the business of completing the necessary instruments to cover the overrun on the budget this year, to provide for

the own resources decision that is necessary to fulfil Fontainebleau and to complete the enlargement negotiations.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must not allow time to run out. We are pressing ahead with the urgency that I consider necessary. The hon. Gentleman must not believe that, because I do not report to the House each month a series of either conflicts or dramatic conclusions, no progress is being made. Progress was made on the matters discussed yesterday, and that is a good thing.

Early-Day Motions

3.54 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that this morning you were personally involved in refusing an early-day motion that I wished to table. The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) has today tabled an early-day motion condemning the University of Oxford for not giving an award to the Prime Minister. My early-day motion would have pointed out that Droylesden Littlemoss boys' county secondary modern school has not recognised its own favourite and most distinguished son, my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts).

Is it a sign of the class nature of the present Parliament that it is in order to table an early-day motion about the University of Oxford, but not in order to table an early-day motion about a secondary modern school? If you have turned down my request, Mr. Speaker, would you reconsider that decision? Many Labour Members who attended secondary modern schools find it offensive that those schools are not recognised in the same way as the University of Oxford.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was deeply honoured when my colleagues came to me and suggested that my secondary modern school should be honouring me as it is suggested that the Prime Minister should be honoured by Oxford and Cambridge. It is suggested that the failure to honour me was a slight and it now appears that, as the early-day motion has been refused, there is an insult to my school as well. It gave me a good education—far better than the type of class education that is given at Oxford and Cambridge.

I am worried because the Clerk told me that the early-day motion would not be allowed because it was designed to annoy. I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that any early-day motion that suggests that there is something wonderful about honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge when there are no honours from Droylesden Littlemoss boys' county secondary modern school, which educated me, is not designed to annoy anyone except me, because that school gave me a very good education. I therefore hope that you will allow the early-day motion.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. While you are ruling on the point of order raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) and for Bootle (Mr. Roberts), will you say whether it is in order to table a motion congratulating Oxford university on showing such good sense and making a decision that will be welcomed by most people?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member's point is a hypothetical question at the moment.

As for the first point of order, if the hon. Members for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) and for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) study "Erskine May", as I am sure they do, they will find that on page 382 it states clearly that an early-day motion of this type has been turned down by my predecessors because it is

"tendered in a spirit of mockery".

Mr. Boyes *rose*——

Mr. Allan Roberts *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have ruled, and in accordance with precedent. There is nothing more to be said.

Mr. Boyes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a new point of order?

Mr. Boyes: Yes. I now have to clear my own name. I study "Erskine May" every night before I go to sleep. There was no intention of directing mockery towards the Prime Minister but rather a desire to recognise the role of secondary modern schools. Would it be possible to have an audience of you, Mr. Speaker, to see whether there is any way around "Erskine May"?

Mr. Speaker: It would be a pleasure.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether, in the discussions, we could take account of how many Clerks and Officers of the House went to Oxford and Cambridge.

Mr. Speaker: I should be very happy if the hon. Member for Bootle joined the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington.

Pensioners' Right to Fuel and Communications

3.57 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to abolish standing charges for gas, electricity and water and to abolish rental charges for telephones and television licences for pensioners.

Several Bills on this subject have been introduced previously, but we are now in the midst of a severe winter during which many pensioners are not eating properly, are going to bed early and are suffering badly from hypothermia because they cannot afford to pay heating bills and therefore keep themselves warm and in health.

I present the Bill with a sense of urgency and hope that the House will take serious note of it. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have been asked during election campaigns whether they support the principle of standing charges being applied to pensioners and have answered that they do not.

The House should be aware that pensioners are treated badly. I should be happy if the Government presented proposals for a serious and real increase in the old-age pension. The real problem for pensioners is poverty. Although my Bill would help to alleviate that poverty, the real problem is the low level of the state pension. Many pensioners organisations are fed up with the patronising attitude of political leaders and newspapers at festive times, especially as they are forgotten for the rest of the year. I hope that the Bill will be widely supported.

I propose the abolition of standing charges for gas and electricity for pensioners, and that there should not be an immediate increase in the unit cost of gas and electricity. The cost of abolition, which was estimated at £300 million in a recent parliamentary answer to me from the Department of Energy, should be borne by the Government only, so that the real cost of gas and electricity will be lower for pensioners than for other people.

At present a rebate scheme on standing charges is in operation. If a standing charge is less than half the total bill for gas or electricity, it is reduced accordingly. Surely that shows acceptance of the principle that the standing charge is wrong because it is a tax on those who consume least. An example of how the rebate principle does not help pensioners is the fact that more than half the people who benefit from it are not old-age pensioners, nor necessarily small consumers, but owners of second homes who leave the heating on to prevent their second homes from freezing up in winter. As the Government accepts the principle of the rebate scheme, they must accept the principle that standing charges are fundamentally wrong.

In 1976, in a report on the issue of standing charges, the Department of Energy said:

"We are satisfied that there is a sound case in economic principle for a tariff structure under which standing charges are maintained separate from the unit consumption charge."

I do not understand what the Department means by that, but I know that there is no social case for it. It is a penalty on the poorest people to continue making standing charges on them.

After I tabled a similar Bill in July 1984, I received a great deal of correspondence from pensioners' groups throughout the country and from some fuel boards which were interested in the thinking behind the proposals. They

said that we had exaggerated the position, but I am not sure that we have. Since last July the standing charge on gas credit consumers has been £9·90. Information available as of that date shows that the average standing charge for an average household has been 0·54 per cent. of its total income, and that for a single pensioner it has been 2·24 per cent. In other words, it costs pensioners 4·5 times as much as anyone else. At that time the pension was £34·05, which meant that pensioners were paying 76p a week in gas standing charges alone. A reduction of 76p a week from the gas bill would help many pensioners. The same applies to electricity and other bills. The water standing charge, which should also be abolished, operates on the same principle.

I include in the Bill the abolition of the television licence fee for pensioners. A television is a basic and necessary form of communication for many people, especially single elderly people. We live in a highly mobile society. In my constituency and many others, many elderly people have no young relatives living near them. Often the young relatives have gone to live in the new town areas. That adds to pensioners' sense of isolation. A television licence fee of £46 is a monstrous charge on pensioners for their basic form of communication. It is not a luxury. The abolition of that fee for pensioners is a small price to pay to help them.

The same applies to telephone rentals for the elderly. Telephones are a basic necessity for many elderly people. The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 recognises that principle. Some chronically sick, elderly people can get telephones, but only with great difficulty. Under the Government's rate-capping proposals many local authorities will no longer be able to meet that need. Although many people are not chronically sick within the exact terms of the Act, they desperately need and rely on a telephone. They tend to be small users, and use it when they are in trouble to call friends, neighbours or the emergency services, or to receive calls from relatives who live far away. Often the rental for the phone is the major part of the Bill, and in some cases it is virtually the entire bill.

With this Bill I am asking the House to take note of the tremendous poverty among elderly people. If the Government are prepared, as they apparently are, to spend £5·2 billion of public money to break the miners' strike, why do they not spend the same sum on making real improvements to the living standards of our poorest elderly people? The Government should seek to do that, rather than take £1 from the heating allowance of elderly people as they did in November.

They are many dreadful stories about pensioners who have been extremely badly treated by the fuel boards, and who have been threatened with disconnection or been disconnected because they could not pay their bills. The Citizens Advice Bureaux in London produced a report entitled, "Cold Comfort For The Poor." One of the examples that it gives is as follows:

"Pensioner (73 years) receiving retirement pension and occupational pension. In debt to both LEB and NTG. Gas bill of £96 on which the CAB is trying to negotiate fuel direct, which is finally refused since the client is ineligible for supplementary benefit due to income. By this time the debt is £208. Client offers £10 per week, NTG demand £96 (the amount brought forward) before they will accept weekly amount. Client cannot afford this. LEB bill of £66—negotiated with Board to pay off £3 per week. Gas disconnected."

Imagine what that pensioner is going through without gas for cooking or heating during these cold winter nights. That is the kind of poverty that we face.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about whether special help is available for pensioners. There is not. A large number of charities do their best to help, but a pensioner is not eligible for special help unless he is eligible for supplementary benefit, as is the case with everyone else. Pensioners need warmer rooms than the rest of us, and warm food. They are in their homes for longer than the rest of us and tend not to go out, especially during the winter. Therefore, their fuel bills are of major concern to them, as is the payment of their telephone bills and the television licence fee.

I hope that my Bill will help those people. While disconnections of gas and electricity supplies continue this winter, and while old people are frightened to turn on the gas fire, I wish to draw the attention of the House to the fact that 84 per cent. of disconnections——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has now spoken for 10 minutes.

Mr. Corbyn: I shall be brief, Mr. Speaker. Eighty-four per cent. of people about to be disconnected draw state benefits, 80 per cent. receive less than £70 a week, and 60 per cent. have debts in addition to fuel debts. The matter is serious and urgent. The Bill will help elderly people to achieve decency in retirement. The House should recognise that need immediately and support the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Ms. Jo Richardson, Mr. Tony Benn, Mr. Chris Smith, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. David Winnick, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Robert N. Wareing, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Frank Dobson, Mr. Ron Davies and Mr. Tom Clarke.

PENSIONERS' RIGHT TO FUEL AND COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn accordingly presented a Bill to bring in a Bill to abolish standing charges for gas, electricity and water and to abolish rental charges for telephones and television licences for pensioners: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 67.]

Airports Inquiries 1981-1983 (Inspector's Report)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Major.]*

Mr. Speaker: Before we start on this important debate, may I tell the House that so far I have had applications by letter from no fewer than 44 right hon. and hon. Members. I propose to adopt the 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 o'clock and 8.50 pm, but I hope that in view of the large number of hon. Members who wish to take part in the debate all speeches will be reasonably brief, please.

4.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): In opening this debate we are honouring the commitment that we gave during the Second Reading of the Civil Aviation Bill that the House would have an opportunity to express its views on airports policy in the light of the inspector's report on the Stansted and Heathrow terminal 5 public inquiries before final decisions were reached.

I shall say a few words on the history of the matter and then on the procedures that we intend to follow.

Airports policy has exercised the minds of all Administrations, of whatever political persuasion, over a number of years. I shall not go back further into history than 1975-76, when the foundations of current airports policy were laid.

Following the decision to abandon the Maplin project, the then Labour Government published, in November 1975, part 1 of the "Airport Strategy for Great Britain", as a basis for further consultation. This set out a strategy for accommodating air traffic demand in the London area for the 1980s and identified several options to handle further growth in traffic in the longer term. Those included a fifth terminal at Heathrow, a second terminal at Gatwick, expansion of Stansted to a capacity of 16 million passengers per annum and further development at Luton.

In June 1976 the Government published the second part of that strategy, which dealt with the regional airports. This considered the way in which regional airports might be developed in the future and the possibilities of diverting traffic away from London to the regions. After extensive consultations on the basis of those documents, the then Labour Government announced their decisions in the airports policy White Paper in 1978.

Let me paraphrase the conclusions that were reached in that White Paper. It said that there was no case, in transport terms, for diverting traffic which had origins and destinations in the south-east to regional airports, and no case for the damage to the air transport industry which a policy of forced diversion would cause; that although some switch in traffic to the regions would occur naturally, this would not avoid the need for additional capacity in the south-east after 1990; that up to 1990, the growth in demand in the south-east should be accommodated by the provision of a fourth terminal at Heathrow, a second terminal at Gatwick, and the development of capacity at Luton and Stansted up to 5 million and 4 million passengers a year respectively; and that the Government would consider how demand might best be met beyond 1990. The possible solutions might be a major expansion at Stansted, the development of an existing military airfield as a civil airport, or the construction of a new airport.

Following the White Paper, the then Secretary of State for Trade announced, in August 1978, the establishment of an Advisory Committee on Airports Policy and a Study Group on South-East Airports, in which the main interests concerned were represented. Their immediate task was to give detailed consideration to the options for accommodating air transport demand in the London area in the longer term.

When the Government took office in 1979, those two committees were part way through their work and we therefore awaited their reports before making any decisions on airports policy. The reports were published in December 1979 and their conclusions, which were broadly the same as those expressed in the 1978 White Paper, were accepted—that the development of regional airports could not obviate the need to meet demand in the south-east and that in the light of the forecasts then available further airports capacity would be needed in the south-east before 1990.

In line with this assessment, the then Secretary of State for Trade, Sir John Nott, as he later became, while giving the Government's support to the fullest possible use of regional airports, announced that the British Airports Authority would be invited to bring forward proposals for the development of Stansted to meet the expected growth in demand in the south-east; and that because this raised issues of considerable national and local importance, the proposals and the wider social and environmental implications would be thoroughly examined by means of a public inquiry. In accordance with this undertaking, the airports inquiries were opened in 1981 and ran through until well into 1983.

By any standards, the inspector's report is a colossal piece of work. In 1980 the then Secretary of State for Trade, Sir John Nott, said:

> "We intend the public inquiry to be wide-ranging and to give objectors an opportunity not only to expand on their objections to the Stansted proposal but also to question the need for a major airport expansion anywhere and to put forward alternative sites." —[*Official Report,* 21 February 1980; Vol. 979, c. 701.]

No one could doubt that that remit has been fulfilled. The inquiries lasted for 258 days, brought forth around 4,000 written representations, and took oral evidence from some 250 witnesses. It is appropriate at this point for me to record my thanks and those of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the inspector, Mr. Graham Eyre, Q.C. and his two assessors, for the conscientious and efficient way in which they tackled and discharged their formidable task.

However, before Ministers now is the equally formidable—some would say more formidable—task of reaching decisions on the 20 formal recommendations made by the inspector. I am sure that I need not summarise the terms of the inspector's recommendations. I am sure also that the House, like my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and myself, will have read every word carefully over the Christmas recess.

The issues before us are complex. Hon. Members have read the inspector's report and the reasons which led to those recommendations. Therefore, I hope that this debate will provide the opportunity for hon. Members to express their views on all these issues.

On the procedural side, the debate is taking place on the Adjournment. I should say why, and also amplify what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said on Thursday about the future parliamentary handling of this matter.

Normally, the inspector's report is published at the same time as the decision is issued. Although this is not the first time that there has been a debate in the House on a planning application before that application was determined, the holding of a debate in these particular circumstances presents certain difficulties.

Parliament has laid down in the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 a system for determining planning applications by the local planning authorities, and, in the event of an appeal or a calling-in of the application, by the Secretary of State. Members of the public have an opportunity to make objections, or other representations, to the local planning authority or to the Secretary of State, as the case may be. If the case comes before the Secretary of State, a public inquiry may be held.

There is no provision in the planning Acts for Parliament to play any role in determining planning appeals or called-in applications. The duty of making a decision in such cases has been placed, by Parliament, by the Act, on the Secretary of State, and he must, in discharging his duty, base his decision on the evidence before him, taking account of Government policy.

By holding a debate on a substantive motion and voting on it, the House could be held to be seriously prejudicing the proper exercise of our quasi-judicial function of determining the applications. While my right hon. Friend and I have the applications before us for decision we are unable to express any views on the issues covered in the inspector's report. To do so could prejudice our consideration of it. I know that the House understands and accepts that.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: In view of the extreme delicacy of my position in relation to not prejudicing that position, it would be better if I were not to respond to interventions. I know my hon. Friend will agree that on every other occasion I have always, I hope, been courteous to hon. Members who wish to intervene.

That would also mean that Ministers may not be able to vote—so as not to prejudice the decisions that my right hon. Friend and I will have to take—depriving about one sixth of the members of this House of the right to express their opinions.

Secondly, we have to consider what would be the effect of a vote on a substantive motion. Let us suppose that the House voted to reject the inspector's recommendations. If Ministers decided then to accept the recommendations, they would be disregarding the will of the House. But if they rejected the recommendations simply because that was the will of the House, rather than on the merits of the case, they would lay themselves open to challenge in the High Court. The parties affected, which could be numerous, could justly complain that the decisions were based on considerations extraneous to the inspector's report and that the whole painstaking process of public inquiry would be devalued.

I think the House will agree that the problem should be resolved as soon as possible, and that, consistent with proper consideration, is the Government's intention. Whatever hon. Members may think about the matters before us, I doubt whether they want to subject the whole process to a further period of delay and uncertainty. There has been uncertainty about a third London airport for over 20 years. This uncertainty has borne not only on the people of Stansted, but on those living near Heathrow, Gatwick, and other sites which have been proposed in south-east England and beyond. There has been uncertainty also for the aviation industry and those employed in it. To prolong this uncertainty will not make the problem go away. It would merely mean that we would have to return to it at a later date.

That is why this debate is taking place on an Adjournment motion. Indeed, there is no other way to proceed if hon. Members are to express their views and if Ministers are to discharge their responsibilities—unless, of course, the House simply wants no decisions to be taken and the whole matter left in limbo for a further indefinite period. This is not to say that I am not acutely aware of the enormous political interest which this subject has aroused—how could I think otherwise? But I suggest that the only way in which that great interest can be properly combined with the requirements of planning legislation is for the House to debate the issue, for Ministers to listen intently, and for no substantive votes to take place—to avoid prejudicing the decisions.

What I can confirm, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said on Thursday last, is that after the decisions have been taken and announced the House will be given a further opportunity to debate and, if it wishes, to vote on the Government's airports policy. What I have in mind is that the Government will publish proposals on airports policy when the decisions are taken and announced, as the inspector urged us to do. These will cover a wider canvas than the narrower one of these particular planning applications.

I should like to make it perfectly clear that we approach this debate without having reached any conclusions as to what the final decisions might be. We will listen carefully to everything that hon. Members have to say.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: I am sorry; I shall not give way. I did say that I feared it would be unwise for me to engage in debate on these complicated matters.

Before I leave the Floor to hon. Members, I should like to make one further point. Almost every airport policy decision in the last 40 years has been controversial. Wherever there is an airport, or the potential for an airport in this crowded island, there are people who object to its development, understandably so, and their views are of the utmost importance. But the aviation industry plays a vital role in transporting people and supports a large number of jobs of all sorts. Any responsible Government must take account of the interests of all these people. Airlines and airports exist only to serve the needs of the travelling public. Air travel is no longer for the privileged few; it is our objective to bring it within the reach of more and more people. Every Government have had to face these dilemmas and attempt to reconcile these conflicting interests. It is not an easy task. I can only say that my hon. Friend and I will do our best to get the right answer.

4.23 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is it not truly remarkable that we are debating on a motion

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

for the Adjournment of the House probably one of the most important decisions in relation to airports policy to be taken for the next 10 years? The Secretary of State tells us that this is because he is in rather a delicate position. During this week his delicate position seems to have taken on more and more of a close resemblance to the perils of Pauline. He seems to stagger from crisis to crisis, for most of which he is entirely responsible.

It is not true that similar debates on airport policy or on planning applications have been handled in this manner. One way the right hon. Gentleman could have dealt with any legal difficulty would have been to have given a decision and then allowed the House to have a full debate, because he would still have had the right under existing powers to call new expert evidence if he believed that something worthy and important has been brought to his attention. He could have taken account of all the views of the different sections of the House of Commons.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the hon. Lady admit that because it has been done in this way we shall get two bites at the cherry? If the Government had done as she has suggested—made a decision and then allowed a debate—we would have had only one bite at the cherry.

Mrs. Dunwoody: What has happened is much clearer. The Secretary of State started out trying to take a major decision by the back door. He brought in a Civil Aviation Bill, which was slung out by his colleagues. When that did not work, he decided that today we would have a debate on a Whip. When it became painfully clear that even his well-disciplined troops would not fall for that load of nonsense, he gradually reduced the Whip until suddenly, rather like the Cheshire cat, not only has the Whip disappeared but the payroll vote has disappeared as well. The payroll vote, which can normally be relied upon to troop through the Lobby, has been told that the Secretary of State is now in such disarray that the only thing he can possibly do to cover his own discomfiture is to suggest that we should have a vote on the Adjournment of the House.

We are all well aware that the Stansted report has far-reaching implications for the whole of our airports policy. We have had a week of leaks, a sort of, "Will they, won't they?" We are now told that we have had to proceed in this manner because there might be legal complications. The Secretary of State should have thought of that before he sought to push through the ceiling on Heathrow and take decisions that would pre-empt the decision that the inspector asked for in a carefully researched report. Today, we are being asked to decide on one area and to make policy in effect in a vacuum.

The report made clear that the inspector was anxious to give an overall picture of airports policy, but he could not. He made great efforts to run the widest possible survey before reaching a conclusion, but the nature of that system produced two main flaws. First, the inspector could not consider issues that were not brought to him for consideration. He actually mentioned the expansion of Gatwick, but there was no deep examination of the implications. The logic of the Government's desire for two equal and competing airlines is that they should operate from equal airports. Under those circumstances, Gatwick would have a second runway. That would mean destroying the village of Charlwood. The Government tell us frequently that we should face up to taking hard decisions. Why are we not being asked to push ahead in that manner? Could it be that all the voters in Charlwood are Conservatives?

That leads to the second flaw. Airport policy is being considered but there has been no debate on airline policy. The computer models have included such assumptions but that is not the same as a discussion of the problems in depth.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): The Government have not seen fit to proceed with a second runway at Gatwick because they have an agreement with West Sussex county council forbidding them to do so.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am well aware of that. The Secretary of State seems to think that he can take a salami approach to airports policy — putting a ceiling on Heathrow, ignoring the views of people living in that area, and simply pursuing his own interest in relation to one specific airport in the south-east.

There has been no discussion of the public expenditure implications or of the needs of regional airports, and precious little explanation of why the Minister is pushing ahead in this way. We all know why the debate is on the Adjournment. It is because the Government could not have faced the result if there had been a motion that could be amended and voted on in the proper way.

We need to consider what type of airline structure we want in this country. Should domestic companies such as British Midland be encouraged to limit themselves to being feeder services for B-Cal and British Airways or should they start their own international flights? Should there be one major flag carrier airline or two? Those questions lead not just to major decisions about airports but to major implications for licensing policy. It is crucial to decide which companies should use Stansted, if we want Stansted at all, and the type of service to be provided. Is tourism to take the lead from business travel or are we to have three major airports in the south-east warring for existing business, which will involve considerable interlining problems and serious implications for regional airports?

Since the last war, international business and international airline growth have been closely related. Do the Government expect that trend to change? If so, a more decentralised system of airports, extending regional airports and using them specifically as hub airlines not only makes sense but would produce positive dividends. The Government are using this inquiry to decide airline policy in general without proper consideration of all the airports. There is no consideration of Gatwick or the effect on Scottish airports and on major airports such as Manchester, which could develop, not just as a massive and useful international service, but act as a hub in relation to other regional airlines.

There was no comment from the Secretary of State about the investment implications. We should be considering the implications of Stansted for British airports finance. The British Airports Authority figure for capital needs this year is set at £150 million. In April, that will fall to £117 million. It will then be £139 million for 1986-87 and 1987-88. The external finance limit is also to fall in 1985-86. Those reductions are to take place at a time when Stansted is presumably to be built at a cost of more than £400 million. More than 75 per cent. of all investment

will be at Gatwick, Heathrow and Stansted. What will be the effect of that on Scottish airports? Prestwick is under threat and a report is imminent with major implications for Scotland. It seems inevitable that landing charges will have to be raised in other southern airports to cover the investment involved, although many airlines are complaining that landing charges are far too high already.

We should also consider the investment implications for British Rail. We have no clear idea of the cost of a British Rail link with Stansted, although those who worked on the northern airline scheme, especially in relation to the Natural Environment Research Council, claim that £166 million would be needed to build the link. At a time when investment has fallen from £522 million to £270 million in 1983-84 at constant prices, British Rail will have to find extra money not currently allowed for. If the Government are serious about this, they should tell us the effect on British Rail investment, on provincial services and on important factors such as section 20 grants. Commuter services in the provinces will be under enormous threat because the Government have not taken account of the investment that British Rail will have to find.

Thirdly, and most important, the Government and especially the Secretary of State have created an atmosphere of distrust. Why has there been such virulence in the north about the suggestion that Stansted should go ahead? It is because people in the north have no faith in the Government being prepared to consider the public expenditure implications on such an enormous injection of capital into the south-east or the loss of jobs and inability to attract new industries to the regions that the development of Manchester airport could have prevented. The Government have deliberately made it clear that in their view the regions take not first, second or third place but fourth place in relation to developments in the south-east.

On 17 January 1985 the Government stopped all regional aid. That moratorium will have a direct and deleterious effect on everything that is important to the regions. Next year aid will be cut by £300 million, with a further cut of £300 million in each succeeding year. That aid is concentrated in the north and in regions outside the south-east.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths: As one who rather admires Manchester airport and uses it a great deal, I am glad that British Airways is to extend its flights from that airport, but why are the landing charges there so much higher than those at other airports in this country?

Mrs. Dunwoody: As I have said, the BAA has no provision for the investment that Stansted will require. If the hon. Gentleman is worried about the charges at Manchester now, the result of the Stansted plan will be far worse. In common with many other regional airports, Manchester is capable of developments that would allow it to take a great deal more traffic, both international and domestic. Economies of scale would then make it easier for airlines using that airport to benefit from lower costs than are now possible.

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): The BAA boasts about the prices charged for franchise, enabling it to keep its charges artificially low because of the large number of people going through. If the regions had the same privilege of numbers, they could lower their charges.

Mrs. Dunwoody: That is exactly the point. Those who oppose the development of regional airports, and especially Manchester, are using the argument not in relation to economies of scale but because they want even more investment in the south-east.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Is not the hon. Lady completely ignoring the fact that the pressure for developing airports round London arises from the fact that many passengers want to use airports round London? To develop Manchester airport in response to this demand in the south-east is rather like building an extra railway line into Manchester because there is over-demand for the railway into Euston.

Will the hon. Lady answer the point made by the trade union representive, Brian Crocker:

"We are most disappointed that it now appears to be Opposition Party policy to oppose any further development of Stansted and Heathrow Airports. We feel this is both impractical and unworkable."

Mrs. Dunwoody: If the hon. Gentleman will give me two minutes to continue my speech, I shall come to those points later.

The kind of attack that the Government have mounted, particularly on regional aid, is one reason why there is such deep distrust in the north of the suggestion that the development at Stansted should go ahead. The distrust of those in the north of the Government's claim that investment in Stansted will in no way be deleterious makes it impossible for them to believe in the sincerity of the Secretary of State. To combine these two plans at the same time is a failure of leadership, which reveals the Government's desperate economic problems.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): The hon. Lady has spoken several times as though she speaks for the north of England. May I tell the hon. Lady that she does not speak for the north of England? Teesside chamber of commerce wrote to me this morning to make sure that I put my voice behind Stansted, which would be in the best interests of the north-east of England.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I hope that those views are widely known, not only to the people in the north-east, who are very close to the excellent airport system that already exists round Newcastle, but to those who will be anxious to see a development of their own regional airport traffic and who will not take kindly to that kind of remark from a Member of Parliament who represents the area.

Two types of airline will have special worries about Stansted. Will Stansted be a repository for charter and domestic airlines? I ask this advisedly. The Secretary of State, when he brought in the Civil Aviation Bill, showed that the Government's interest was in selling landing slots. Allocation to the highest bidder means that British Airways will win, as will large foreign international airlines. The small airlines might find themselves pushed out into Stansted. It is possible that they will be unable to compete with the BA domestic feeder services or the international flights from Heathrow. Equally, the charter flights—and we believe that there is a good case for the development of tourist traffic in the north of England—might find that, with the availability of Stansted, British Caledonian will fight to have them thrown out of Gatwick. This will allow British Caledonian to expand and deal with some of the problems that it already has because of the restrictions to which previous Governments have agreed.

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

It is, therefore, in line with the Government's abortive competition policy. Why is it that the Government have not made clear to the House their intentions for these two particular types of airlines?

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I was asked to keep my speech short. It has not been easy to do so.

Mr. Franks: Will the hon. Lady take the point that many Conservative Members, including Conservative Members representing the north-west, would be prepared to take common cause with her if, instead of trying to make points against the Government, she kept her argument to the issues involved?

Mrs. Dunwoody: Let the hon. Gentleman understand that the Secretary of State has responsibility for creating an airlines and airports policy. He has signally failed to do so. He has taken it to the extent of introducing a major planning report on a motion to adjourn the House because he does not want to have the matter considered in any great detail.

It is important also to understand that the implications of Stansted involve real problems for the people living round Heathrow airport. No contribution has been made by any Conservative Member about the effect about pushing up the number of aircraft movements at Heathrow. I believe that we should be asking why, if there is to be any expansion at Stansted, the Government are insisting on such a large expansion all at once. It is obvious that in economic terms it would be possible to build a £5 million passenger terminal without any difficulty. It would be economic and would greatly reduce the guesswork that has so far been done to justify the expansion.

For example, the Stansted plan involves building a taxiway but widening it from the standard 23 m to 45 m along 2,700 m of the 3,900 m length. In other words, Stansted would gain the potential for expansion into a two-runway airport. While that is not likely in the near future, it makes it plain that the atmosphere of distrust that has greeted the plan can be justified by these facts on which the decisions are being taken. It is possible that Stansted could be expanded rapidly without a great deal of difficulty.

The Labour party does not welcome the idea that there should be a fifth terminal at Heathrow. We believe that that would take 15 years to build. It is clear that it will take at least six to eight years to move the Perry Oaks sludge works and that would therefore not solve the existing problem at Heathrow.

Heathrow is the busiest airport in the world and the residents in the area already know that to their cost. Because of the history of airport plans by various Governments and the vagueness of the forecasting—and there is considerable doubt about the processes that were used for forecasting in the report since this is not an accurate science—the residents will not feel particularly safe if the sludge works are moved but terminal 5 is not given the go-ahead. They will rightly fear that there will be yet another change at some point in the future. They will want a much clearer statement from the Secretary of State that he is aware of the environmental danger to the people living round Heathrow airport.

Once again the Heathrow expansion is beset by all the same problems that we have seen in relation to the Secretary of State's airport plan. Is the expansion to ensure that domestic airlines can stay at Heathrow or is it to let BA take over the domestic airline market as well? It is claimed in the report that only another 51,000 people will be seriously affected by terminal 5. That brings the 1995 total to 274,000 people while the Civil Aviation Authority has already said that 943,000 people were affected in 1980. The damage that is being done to save Heathrow from a problem that it will have to solve before terminal five could be built is considerable.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Can the hon. Lady clarify her remarks for the benefit of people who work at the airport—or who might wish to do so—and who are involved in civil air transport there? Is her party not committed to the fifth terminal at Heathrow for environmental and other reasons? If that is the case, she is diametrically opposed to one of the important recommendations of Mr. Eyre, QC.

Mrs. Dunwoody: It is not Labour party policy to support the building of a fifth terminal at Heathrow. We believe that people who live round that airport have rights. I am well aware that people who work in airports have the right to have their jobs protected. Expansion at Heathrow would create extra jobs. Similar expansion at Manchester would create an equal number of jobs and the opportunity for many businesses to come into the areas close to the airport. It would also allow Manchester to act as a hub airport for many other regions. I should like to know whether Conservatives are prepared to take into account the effect of job creation when considering whether we should go ahead with expanding Manchester airport.

Working in a vacuum is always bad. The Government should make all their airports plans clear in the light of an overall air industry strategy. In turning their face on forecasting methods they are incapable of providing accurate statistical information. We should understand that many of the assumptions are about as accurate as trying to manoeuvre a poker hand.

It is essential to have a proper plan from the Secretary of State that will take account not only of the effects on regional airports but of the effects on Scottish airports, Heathrow and individual airlines.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) has done nothing but harp upon Manchester airport. Clearly she has not read the Eyre report. If she had she would have noticed that specific reference is made to Manchester. Mr. Eyre says that the idea that Manchester airport is being discriminated against has reached the stage of being a phobia. He therefore investigated with particular care and came to the conclusion that there is no evidence for that contention. Has the hon. Lady any further evidence than that which Mr. Eyre considered to justify her statements today?

Mrs. Dunwoody: There is no clear evidence that the inspector was right in saying that the assumption on which the northern consortium had built its plans were incorrect. If the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) believes that we are talking with any certainty about numbers I refer him to the section of the report on forecasts. The inspector says that by 1995 demand in the London airports could be

61 million passengers per annum, or even 89·3 million. The inspector looked carefully at the implications but he had to admit that when forecasting the size of aircraft, the noise, the number of passengers generated and where they would come from, there was considerable room for different interpretations. We do understand, however, that there is no room for doubt about what the investment will do if it all goes into the south-east of England and it is very plain that the effects of such massive investment will be very considerable on other regions.

This afternoon the Secretary of State has got himself into considerable political difficulty. He has not been prepared to come forward with a clear explanation of how he views the future of airport policy. He has not even been prepared to consider that, within a short time, another inspector's report about Prestwick and the Scottish airports will be published. He has endeavoured to stymie his colleagues, who do not wish to see any development at Stansted but who are not prepared to concern themselves about the implications for Heathrow, the regions or those airports that are important outside the London area.

The Government have gone out of their way to take decisions behind closed doors which have major implications for the future. Tonight's vote will show the heavy price that has to be paid for their dislike and fear of open government. If Government Members are really serious they will not support a Secretary of State who wishes to close all the options, with little concern for the airlines or the airports policy.

4.54 pm

Sir Humphrey Atkins (Spelthorne): Over the years I have often been in disagreement with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). Today is no exception. I particularly disagree with her on two matters.

The hon. Lady criticised the Government for having the debate today. It is strange that the Opposition should criticise the Government for having a debate in advance of a decision. Oppositions almost always say that there is no point in having a debate after a decision has been made because the Government do not listen but merely use their majority to push their decision through the House. Here we are, on a rare and welcome occasion, being given the opportunity to tell the Secretary of State exactly what we think and to give our views to him so that he can take them into account—I know that he will—yet the hon. Lady objects. That is strange.

The hon. Lady said that she had not heard much about the case in connection with Heathrow. Perhaps she has not heard it, but that does not mean that the case has not been made. If she missed it, she can hear it again now because I propose to talk about it. Although the case has been made, it is not as widely known as it should be.

Heathrow is in a ridiculous place. Nobody in his senses designing a capital city from scratch in a country governed by predominantly westerly airstreams would place the major airport 15 miles due west of the city centre. It means that every plane landing or taking off flies over the city centre. Any hon. Member who has had the pleasure of taking a cup of tea on the Terrace in the summer will be well accustomed to the sight of a stream of aeroplanes turning on to the flight path, apparently immediately over St. Thomas's hospital. They then travel the 15 miles to Heathrow, causing trouble and disturbance.

Thousands and thousands of aeroplanes fly over the middle of London, but — touch wood — no serious accident has occurred. That speaks highly for the pilots, engineers and flight controllers. I can remember only one accident, about 12 years ago when an aircraft fell out of the sky on to my constituency after taking off from Heathrow. Everyone on the plane was killed but by the mercy of Heaven no one on the ground was killed. The aircraft fell exactly 220 yards from Staines high street. We should be thankful that we have had no major accident. Long may that continue.

However, Heathrow is where it is. It has been developed out of all recognition over the past 40 years and it is still being developed. Terminal 4 is still under construction and is expected to come into operation later this year. That will increase Heathrow's present capacity of 29 million passengers a year by another 8 million. Yet Mr. Graham Eyre, in the report, recommends further development at Heathrow to cater for another 15 million people. He admits that it will take a long time for any such development and do nothing to solve the problem of providing enough capacity in the next few years.

It is important that the case against further development at Heathrow should be made today because Mr. Eyre says that if the fifth terminal is to come into operation in 1997 or later the go-ahead must be given now because of the enormously long lead time.

I am not sure whether the House is fully aware of the great weight of opinion around Heathrow against any further development. Surrey county council — my constituency is in Surrey — led a consortium of local authorities to put the case to Mr. Graham Eyre against any further development at Heathrow. The consortium consisted of the county councils of Surrey, Buckinghamshire and Hampshire, the London boroughs of Hounslow, Kingston-upon-Thames and Richmond and the borough and district councils of Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, Runnymede, South Bucks, Surrey Heath, and Spelthorne which I have the honour to represent. This involves a large number of people. There are about 1 million people in Surrey, about 600,000 in Buckinghamshire and 1·5 million in Hampshire. Therefore, we are referring to the elected representatives of more than 3 million people. That leaves out of account the London boroughs to which I have referred.

At a meeting that I attended last week to discuss this debate, we were told by the vice-chairman of the planning committee of Berkshire county council that the Berkshire county council is also totally against the development of a fifth terminal at Heathrow. Unfortunately, I do not know how many people live in Berkshire, but undoubtedly many people live in that county. I should also mention, though I hardly dare, that the chairman of the planning committee of the Greater London council was at that meeting and said that his council is totally opposed to any further development at Heathrow.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): As the constituency of my right hon. Friend abuts mine, would he comment on that part of the report which refers to the noise impact and the urban growth impact of a fifth terminal at Heathrow on his area and also on my part of Surrey? No doubt my right hon. Friend's constituents, like many of mine, are concerned about the increase in noise, if there were to be such an increase, and the pressure upon urban development.

Sir Humphrey Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for his invitation. I shall not rehearse all the arguments that were

[Sir Humphrey Atkins]

presented by the consortium to Mr. Eyre because anybody who wishes to find out what they are can read them. However, I shall refer to noise and to the effect upon the roads. I do not propose to dwell upon the subject of noise, for it is only two months since the Second Reading debate on the Civil Aviation Bill and I made the case on noise as well as I could then. Therefore, it would not be profitable to repeat it now. However, in chapter 42, paragraph 10.1, Mr. Eyre states:

"Air noise is a modern curse from which the unfortunate inhabitants of the Heathrow area have been required to suffer over a long period. There will be substantial improvements in the noise climate in the next few years"—

I should like to argue that point with Mr. Eyre—

"but conditions will still be worse than at any other location in the United Kingdom."

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Humphrey Atkins: No; I am in the middle of this point and I shall not give way.

It is alleged that as time passes—this is part of the reason why Mr. Eyre believes that there may be an improvement—there will be less noise because there will be fewer aeroplanes. I have yet to meet anybody who seriously believes that 23 million extra people can be carried in and out of Heathrow each year without an increase in the number of aircraft. There is talk of super jumbos carrying 600 or 700 passengers to replace the present generation of jumbos. Indeed, terminal 4, which has not yet been completed, is designed to accommodate aeroplanes of that kind. It is worthy of note, however, that not only are no such aeroplanes flying but that, so I am advised, no such aeroplanes are even in production.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I represent constituents who have suffered from serious and severe noise pollution for many years. The result has been that many of them have suffered physical and nervous breakdowns; and it is well known that those who live in Ealing and in the surrounding areas that have already been mentioned by my right hon. Friend cannot hold conversations inside their flats or houses during the winter, let alone during the summer. Therefore, noise, as my right hon. Friend has pointed out, is a major factor.

Sir Humphrey Atkins: I accept everything that my hon. Friend has said. However, I shall turn from the subject of noise, because we have already heard a good deal about it, to roads—another important part of the case made by the consortium. The difficulties surrounding getting into and out of London to the west are well known. When the construction of terminal 4 was being considered about seven years ago, Mr. Justice Glidewell, who wrote the report, said:

"Heathrow is London's largest generator of road traffic and the A4/M4 corridor is the Airport's most important route into and out of central London—it has been overloaded for many years."

Mr. Justice Glidewell continued:

"Unrestrained road traffic growth in the past has progressively increased this overloading to such a degree that"

today it has

"reached levels that must be regarded as intolerable."

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Would my right hon. Friend allow me to comment upon this part of his argument?

Sir Humphrey Atkins: No, otherwise I shall be on my feet all afternoon, and nobody wants that.

In his most recent report Mr. Graham Eyre was more dismissive. He said:

"conditions on the highway network in the Heathrow area and in particular along the M4/A4 corridor are unacceptable."

In chapter 38, paragraph 11.9, he said that a working party ought to be set up to investigate what could be done about this difficulty. That seems to be quite a good idea until one realises that it has already been done. The Department of Transport's evidence to Mr. Eyre's inquiry was as follows:

"The overall picture towards the end of this century will therefore be one of a highway network under stress with drivers operating under considerable strain (and) . . . conditions are likely to get worse on the M4 itself."

The Department went on to say:

"The Department have no proposals for any further roads in the area and indeed see no scope in providing any additional capacity in the A4/M4 corridor into Central London."

Therefore, one is bound to agree with the statement made last week by the transport committee's chairman of Surrey county council:

"yet the A4/M4 corridor cannot cope with only three terminals at Heathrow. With a Fourth and Fifth terminal and over 1 million passengers a week, traffic congestion would be intolerable. Not only would the M4 come to a standstill; the M25 would be heavily over-loaded as well."

Mr. Adley: May I ask my right hon. Friend whether he believes the Government have studied the plans by British Rail for tunnels both for its Western region main line at Iver and for its Southern region line at Feltham? Does my right hon. Friend agree that if one looks constructively at this matter and tries to reduce the road congestion to which my right hon. Friend properly referred, major investment by the state in the rail infrastructure to ease the congestion at Heathrow must be a vital part of these considerations?

Sir Humphrey Atkins: Indeed, it would have to be. If this development went ahead, any rail link would need to take a very much higher proportion of passengers than the current underground link because the underground link represents only about 10 per cent. of passenger traffic and is virtually insignificant.

Over a number of years, the Government have consistently stated publicly that terminal 5 will not be built. Sir John Nott, as Secretary of State for Trade, said:

"these considerations have led us to the view that a fifth terminal should not be provided." — [*Official Report*, 17 December 1979; Vol. 976, c. 36.]

In another place, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade, Lord Trefgarne, said:

"We have come to the conclusion that a fifth terminal at Heathrow . . . would take perhaps 11 to 13 years to build . . . and would not provide a long term solution." — [*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 February 1980; Vol. 405, c. 327.]

Sir John Nott also said:

"I have made clear the Government's position. We do not favour a fifth terminal".—[*Official Report*, 21 February 1980; Vol. 979, c. 694.]

My right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said in 1980—it may come as a surprise to hon. Members to know that he was then only a lowly Parliamentary Under-Secretary:

"The Government's view remains as set out in the statement made on 17 December 1979 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, that a fifth terminal should not be provided." —[*Official Report*, 3 November 1980; Vol. 991, c. *411*.]

That was confirmed by my right hon. Friend in a letter of 13 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), and the letter was subsequently issued by the Department as a press release.

The present Leader of the House, who was Secretary of State for Trade in 1981, reaffirmed in a written answer on 13 May 1981, at column 273, the Government's view that a fifth terminal should not be provided. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Sir R. Eyre), the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade, said:

"The Government have stated their view on a number of occasions that a fifth terminal at Heathrow should not be provided."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1981; Vol. 9, c. *193*.]

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym), the then Leader of the House, said: "the Government have on a number of occasions said that a fifth terminal at Heathrow should not be provided. That remains our policy."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1981; Vol. 9, c. 544.]

Finally, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote a letter on 19 October 1981 to my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst). Of course, I have not seen that letter, but it was quoted in the House by Mr. Iain Sproat, who was then the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade. He said that the Prime Minister had written:

"The Government's airports policy was announced by John Nott in the House of Commons on 17 December 1979 and has been repeated since."

Small wonder then that hundreds of thousands of people believed in and took comfort from those assurances. Even less wonder that those of us who represent them felt able to say to anyone who expressed anxiety to us, "Do not worry. The fifth terminal will not be built. We have the Government's assurance on that." I have been saying that all those years and I said it during the last general election campaign. I have no doubt that some of my hon. Friends also did so.

Therefore, it will come as no surprise to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to discover that if my assurances prove to have been false, there will be no way that he can count on my support—only my opposition. However, I do not believe that it will come to that. The Secretary of State is an honourable man; we all know that. He said as recently as 21 November in reply to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn)—admittedly on aircraft movements rather than the fifth terminal:

"I agree with my hon. Friend that when a Government give a firm and unequivocal pledge of that sort it behoves them to seek to implement it".—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1984, Vol. 68, c. 301.]

Therefore, I hope that I can rely on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to do exactly that.

It is only proper that any hon. Member who contributes to the debate should spell out, as far as possible, the line that the Government ought to pursue. I shall try to do that briefly. All our discussions and Mr. Graham Eyre's report are based on the assumption that, because an increasing number of people want to land in aeroplanes as near to the centre of London as they can, it is our business to make arrangements for them to do so. I suppose that it could be said to be the law of supply and demand, which, in general, is a very good thing. However, a balance has to be struck between the operation of that law and the well-being of the people it affects. There is nothing new in that; it is the basis of all our planning law.

For example, if a large number of people said that they worked in the centre of London and wanted to live in the city centre, so they wanted permission to build houses in Hyde park, any planning authority would immediately say that such a proposal would be so damaging to the environment of those living nearby that it could not be approved. I believe that the Government should say that to airline passengers: "So many more of you coming into Heathrow would so damage the quality of life of those living near the airport that you should land somewhere else."

The question of a fifth terminal at Heathrow is not an immediate problem, unlike the future of Stansted or developments at Manchester. No extra passengers would be able to use the fifth terminal until almost the next century. However, the Government would be wrong to give the go-ahead to a new terminal in defiance of everything that has been said over all these years.

5.16 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I am very glad to be able to participate in so crucially important a debate, which may even prove to be an historic one.

I have two interests to declare. The first is that Manchester international airport, a most successful public enterprise in which, like all Mancunians, I take a legitimate pride, is in my constituency. It employs more people than any other enterprise there, and I am naturally anxious that it should go on expanding to provide more jobs in an area of unacceptably high unemployment.

My other interest in the debate is that I chair the all-party group of hon. and right hon. Members that liaises with the North of England Regional Consortium — NOERC. It was in that capacity that I sponsored early-day motion 146 on "Stansted and the Regions" which, with 233 signatories from all parties, has won more and wider parliamentary backing than any other motion awaiting debate in this House.

As the House will appreciate, I receive no financial reward from NOERC which, as most right hon. and hon. Members will know, speaks for 19 major local authorities in the north and represents millions of people, of all political persuasions and of none, in its opposition to the ill-conceived and unnecessary plan to develop Stansted as London's third airport.

The unemployment rate in the north is 17·1 per cent. In the south-east it is 9·2 per cent. The area immediately around Stansted has hardly any unemployment at all. The northern regions, with 27 per cent. of Britain's population, have 33 per cent. of its unemployment. The south-east, with 31 per cent. of the population, has 24 per cent. of the unemployment. Unemployment is a tragedy anywhere, but it hits much harder in the north, where losing a job means spending at least two and a half times longer on the dole before getting another chance to earn one's living.

In many parts of the north today we have male unemployment rates in excess of 50 per cent. In the city of Manchester there are now many localities where over two thirds of the under-25s are out of work. That is a shocking statistic from a city of which it was said, by one of the best economic historians to have written in the English language, that whoever spoke of industrialisation spoke of Manchester. It is a city today whose name has become synonymous with deindustrialisation. Moreover, even the figure of 66 per cent. unemployment among our young people in Manchester would be much higher but for

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the masking effect of the youth training scheme on youth unemployment. In this International Year of Youth, the prospect for most of our youngsters is from school to scrapheap.

Even to suggest a £1 billion-plus investment at Stansted not merely derides but mocks the ever-lengthening dole queues of the north. It excites not just total opposition but outright anger among my constituents. We cannot spend the same money twice, and it would be a crime against the north to plan expenditure on that scale in the south-east. Yet it would seem that the inquiry inspector's view of the relationship of Stansted to the north, as to where such vast investment should go, is that while it does not want it, we cannot have it. That is not just voodoo economics, but logic worthy of Fred Karno.

Until only a short time ago it was the Government's intention to take their decision on Stansted without reference to this House. That was their stance in one parliamentary answer after another, and they have made an important concession. In response to pressure they agreed to a parliamentary debate and I am both relieved and grateful that Ministers have now, if reluctantly, conceded Parliament's essential role in debating and deciding issues of this importance. The Government as yet have not declared a view on the inquiry inspector's recommendation on Stansted. By refusing to table an amendable motion for this debate, they have attempted to make it impossible for the House to declare a definitive view. What the 233 signatories of my motion wanted today was an opportunity to vote, not against the Government, but against the inspector's recommendation to develop Stansted to a capacity of 15 million passengers per annum. The only way in which we can now demonstrate our concern, in all parts of the House, is to divide the House tonight and to make it clear that we are doing so as the only means of signalling our opposition to the huge development of Stansted now proposed. This may well be the last parliamentary opportunity to debate Stansted before the Government take their decision, and I hope that enough right hon. and hon. Members on the Conservative Benches, by their votes tonight, will leave the Government and the country in no doubt what that decision must be.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): The right hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he is against spending a lot of money on developing Stansted, with the object of resources going to the north-west or the north instead. Will he make it equally clear, with equal emphasis, that he supports the view of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) that a fifth terminal should not be built at Heathrow, for exactly the same reason?

Mr. Morris: I shall be making reference to Heathrow as I proceed. Meanwhile I much admire the hon. Gentleman for the tenacity with which he fights his constituency case, just as I admire the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) for the admirable way in which he has campaigned for his constituency.

To proceed, I trust that the Secretary of State will himself agree that this House has much to thank the North of England Regional Consortium for. It is the only body prepared to look in depth at the regional airport option as an alternative to developing Stansted. The consortium has exposed the implications, both for public expenditure and tourism, of the British Airports Authority's plans. It has drawn national attention to the widening chasm, in social and economic terms alike, between the south-east and other regions. Even more important, NOERC has shown how a positive policy for encouraging the development and growth of regional airports can assist in regenerating ailing regional economies.

Those with the stamina to have read the inspector's report must have been reminded, by its length and content, of some of the old transportation studies undertaken in the conurbations in the 1960s. Technicians were sent away with a brief to produce a shopping list of highway, rail and pedestrian schemes to meet the transportation needs of their areas for the indefinite future. They normally came up with a huge list of schemes. Costs were never questioned until the time came to look at how they could be implemented. Nor were future trends considered which ultimately rendered the proposed strategy largely unnecessary. The studies were models of academic achievement but had little or no relevance to the practical world. As a leader in *The Times*, of 11 December 1984, said perceptively of the inquiry inspector's findings:

> "It would be a cruelly consistent end to a long story of muddle if Stansted were developed as a stop-gap for a gap which never happened."

The North of England Regional Consortium is an unprecedented coming together of major local authorities as far north as Northumberland and as far south as Derbyshire. It commands political support from all parties throughout the north of England. It is supported by authorities and agencies in Scotland, including the Scottish Tourist Board, by authorities in Wales and the midlands, by chambers of commerce up and down the country and by trade unions at both a regional and national level. Over 500 individual firms either made representations to the inquiry inspector or to the Government and Members of Parliament in support of the consortium's case. I cannot think of any other single body which has ever attracted such widespread and positive support in a matter affecting airports.

There is no need in purely air transport terms for a further major development in the south-east of England to meet that region's air transport needs until the mid-1990s at the earliest.

The consortium has also shown that a very high number of regional air travellers are now forced to use airports in the south-east and that, if some of them could be reallocated to services from our regional airports, then expansion could proceed in the regions rather than the south-east. This would bring substantial economic and employment benefits to the regions and, as I have made clear, such benefits are urgently needed to reduce the widening disparities in both employment opportunities and social and economic conditions as between the south-east and the rest of the country.

Of all the alternatives to Stansted canvassed at the public inquiry none has been subject to more misinterpretation than that put forward by the consortium.

Let me give a few examples. The BAA has stated that we are against any increase in the capacity of the London system for all time. Yet we did not oppose the development of Gatwick terminal 2 nor Heathrow terminal 4. We understand and made it pikestaff plain at the inquiry that, beyond the time framework fixed for considering the case for a third London airport—the mid-1990s—there may well be growth in airport need which would justify further expansion of airport facilities in the south-east. But

we also made it clear that the distorting effects of massively developing Stansted now, as opposed to some essential development in London later, could not be justified. The extent of any development will depend upon how long regional passengers have to continue using London's airports.

The BAA also said—it is now echoed by the CAA—that the consortium's alternative to Stansted would help foreign airports. That is a scare. It is a facile attempt to throw dust in the eyes of the uninformed. What it seeks to ensure is that passengers who originate in the regions, or who have destinations in the regions and are forced now to use London, will have to go on using London.

But why cannot our regional airports be allowed to accommodate regional passengers? Schiphol and Frankfurt are profiting already from the over-centralised air transport system in this country. What is more, failure to expand regional air services will benefit foreign airports even more.

As the House knows, the BAA and Government Departments rely on CAA surveys which classify passengers on the basis of where their journeys began on the day of the survey. The cumulative effect is that regional passengers who travel to London, or touring passengers who are forced to use London's airports despite the fact that they spend little or no time there, are actually counted as south-east passengers. In fact, they are passengers from Birmingham, Cardiff, the east midlands, Humberside, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and from everywhere else in Britain. To regard them as south-east passengers adds insult to the inconvenience they suffer.

Mr. Adley *rose*——

Mr. Morris: I am anxious to proceed as quickly as possible, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes to make a brief point.

Mr. Adley: I am sure that many people will agree entirely with what the right hon. Gentleman has been saying, and I know from my business experience that it is true. Does he agree that the BAA is really disqualified from giving a rational opinion? It does not own any airports between Scotland and south-east England. The BAA simply wants to boost its area of responsibility, and it cannot be said to be a dispassionate witness.

Mr. Morris: The hon. Gentleman well reflects the strength of feeling that exists on both sides of the House about the orgy of propaganda to which we have been subjected over the years by the BAA.

As I was saying, to regard people from other parts of the country as south-east passengers adds insult to the inconvenience that they suffer. Yet an essential part of the case for Stansted is built on the delusion that they are from the south-east.

NOERC has recently examined data from a highly impartial source which shows that, if the places of residence for United Kingdom residents and the places where foreign visitors spend the greatest number of nights is taken into account, the proportion of airport passengers using London's airports who originate from the south-east —or are tourists going to the south-east—is reduced from 80 per cent., which is the figure BAA constantly uses, to only 71 per cent. This reduction means that the regional share has been underestimated by nearly 50 per cent. This is but one of the fundamental errors which flaws the inquiry inspector's strategy.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North) *rose*——

Mr. Morris: I should like to give way but, in deference to the Chair, I feel that I should proceed.

The inspector's forecasts for the 1990s could have to be reduced by up to 6 million passengers due to the single discrepancy to which I have referred. In any event, we, among others, see his forecasts as far too high because of the unduly optimistic economic assumptions he makes. In this respect, they resemble, both in their optimism and probable inaccuracy, every previous forecast of demand which has been made.

The Secretary of State is welcome to examine our research, an opportunity which I earnestly urge him to take before he determines the inspector's report. To calm his nerves, perhaps I should disclose that the impartial source from which it derives is his own Department of Transport.

Other myths have been put about by the BAA. Sir Norman Payne's description of Stansted as an

"oasis of opportunity in a desert of decline"

is now notorious. In response, I will simply say that, compared with the inner city areas of Manchester, Liverpool and our other great cities in the north, with their male unemployment rates in many localities of over 50 per cent., the Herts-Essex area is nirvana.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North) *rose*——

Mr. Morris: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I must get on.

The BAA's far-fetched story that the NOERC solution represents a real threat to Britain's earning potential may be clever propaganda, but portrays no understanding of current realities. It is a remarkable fact that there are now more direct regional services to Amsterdam than there are regional services to London. All we seek to do is ensure that more passengers use their local airports instead of foreign airports and, by so doing, generate a benefit for the nation as a whole.

Mr. Gale: Allegations have been made against the BAA, an organisation for which I hold no brief whatever. I understand that the BAA wishes, as I do, to see the regional airports developed, and I appreciate the concern which the right hon. Gentleman and others express. However, will the right hon. Gentleman say — I understand that he received this information in answer to a parliamentary question—how many available routes there are already to Manchester that have not been taken up?

Mr. Morris: I do not intend to be drawn into an argument about the BAA. I have indicated my view and will proceed with my argument, which I hope will help to inform the hon. Gentleman in full detail of the northern case.

There would be no net loss to the nation if some of the millions of inward tourists—and 62 per cent. of all nights spent in the UK by overseas visitors are spent outside London — arrived in Scotland, Wales, Manchester, Birmingham or other centres, instead of 94 per cent. of them having to pass through the south-east and creating unnecessary congestion at and around London's airports.

Mr. Graham Eyre's dismissive attitude to those whose opinions differ from his own clearly stems from the fact

[Mr. Morris]

that the questions he asked of himself were fundamentally different from those posed by others, notably by the North of England Regional Consortium. He has sought to forecast need and recommends the provision of capacity so far into the future that he is accused of taking evidence from Gypsy Rose Lee. Yet I suspect that Gypsy Rose herself would have been speechless at his powers of prophecy, as she could have told him that there is no practical means of forecasting demand beyond the mid-1990s. To follow the inspector's line would have meant the implementation of what he calls "four-runway" monsters at Maplin, Cublington or, indeed, Stansted, over 10 years ago.

Of course, it is not for a planning inquiry to decide major issues of airports policy. That is ultimately a task for this House, and we must introduce some practical realism into the debate about Stansted in our deliberations today. It would plainly be ridiculous, at this juncture, to commit expenditure well into the 21st century.

Enormous sums of money are involved and it is clearly only prudent to make the best use of scarce existing resources by planning within a reasonable timescale. It is also plainly right that we must first achieve the aims of the 1978 White Paper on airports policy—a policy which successive Governments have strongly endorsed—and in particular the role it envisaged for our regional airports.

Since so many of my constituents work at Manchester international airport, perhaps I may be allowed to make a few comments about Manchester in the hope that Members with an interest in other regional airports will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and speak of the effect of this debate on their constituencies.

Manchester international serves a catchment area of 20 million people, about 40 per cent. of the UK's population. As Britain's third airport, it was designated a category "A" international gateway in 1978. As the House well knows, it has maintained and built upon this status and, in 1984, was the UK's fastest growing airport. We had an increase in the number of passengers to more than 6 million.

The airport has a crucial employment role, not just in south Manchester, but for the north-west as a whole. It provides direct employment for 5,500 people, including the employees of airlines and support services. A further 15,000 people are employed indirectly throughout the region.

Manchester's continued success is crucial to the region's future, in the same way as growth at Newcastle, Leeds-Bradford, Birmingham, Cardiff, the East Midlands and other regional airports is important to the future prosperity of their regions. All of those airports have experienced steady growth in the deregulated inclusive tour and charter sectors. The position is not, however, so rosy in the scheduled sector. In Manchester's case, with the exception of the Qantas service to Australia, and the planned services to New York and Hong Kong, there are as yet no intercontinental scheduled services. This must be bad for industry and commerce in the north-west. The Civil Aviation Authority's own 1983 survey of passenger traffic provides evidence that direct services could be viably operated from Manchester to many other intercontinental destinations including Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Toronto, Johannesburg, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and Singapore. Such services would bring substantial benefits to northern consumers and business men by improving trade links and generating much needed jobs.

Yet foreign airlines have been stopped from opening up intercontinental routes into Manchester. I know that some of my parliamentary colleagues will want to discuss this very disturbing result of the current licensing system, and I shall not go further on that point except to say that it is totally scandalous that Singapore Airlines has been refused permission to fly into Manchester.

Stansted poses a massive threat to the further development of all our regional airports. For it to operate viably, as Mr. Graham Eyre himself acknowledged, there would have to be licensing policies that effectively forced airlines to fly there. This is, of course, a policy that is likely to meet with considerable resistance from the airlines. Stansted is currently marketed as a low-cost airport with exceptionally low landing fees in order to attract business. It is operating at a loss and, in effect, is subsidised by the other British Airports Authority's airports at Heathrow and Gatwick. The regional airports, such as Manchester, which have to be individually profitable, cannot compete on equal terms. Even now they are the victims of totally unfair competition. I point out to the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), in particular, that this explains much of the animus shown by right hon. and hon. Members representing the regions when they discuss the outpourings of the British Airports Authority.

The regional airports must be developed to satisfy regionally generated demand for air services. This cannot possibly be achieved if a heavily subsidised Stansted airport is allowed massively to expand. By positively encouraging the regional airports, we can benefit not only the regions outside the south-east; capacity would also be released at both Heathrow and Gatwick. The opportunity is now clearly available to us to make better use of the nation's resources. It is an opportunity that must not be missed.

I urge every hon. Member who shares my view to join me in the Division Lobby tonight.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. More than 50 hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye in this debate. I am afraid that some of them will be disappointed unless speeches are briefer.

5.42 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I shall do my best to heed that warning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you will understand that my constituency is at the centre of these matters because Stansted airport is wholly within its boundaries.

I thank the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), not only for the support he has given generally to a cause in which he and I believe, but for the measured and moderate way in which he has put his case. It would be churlish if I did not acknowledge the debt we owe to Mr. Graham Eyre for the monumental work he has undertaken. Although we shall dive into his studies and find bits that we like and bits we do not like, we cannot detract from the application he has shown. It is a remarkable achievement.

I realise that this debate could be a dreary recital of well-stated positions, which does not inform Ministers or

help them in their efforts to listen to the views of hon. Members and make up their minds, or help those hon. Members who are still trying to discover the best truth to emerge from all this. Naturally, my hon. Friends will understand that I must defend my constituency position, but I hope that I shall make as constructive a speech as I can.

I acknowledge immediately that there is more than one opinion in my constituency. Some people would accept development of Stansted in varying degrees, but it could be said that there is almost overwhelming agreement in my constituency about limited expansion at Stansted, provided a reasonable limit can be set. I hope that the House will not be misled by the document that has been circulated—not to me but to others—by the British Airports Authority giving the results of a MORI poll, showing that the proportion in favour of some expansion is nearly 3:1. The authority had to extend its net some 30 miles from my constituency to obtain such a result. I acknowledge, however, that there is support for expansion at Stansted, even from some of the most vociferous opponents of the full-scale development that they fear threatens them.

I hope that I do not sound too pompous by offering a quotation from Edmund Burke which I hope will animate our discussions. In 1775 he said:

> "Parliament is not a *congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests*; which interest each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a *deliberative* assembly of *one* nation, with *one* interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole."

In the end, the House must operate in that spirit, and I certainly do not intend to speak now or influence colleagues later in a manner that departs unduly from that spirit.

The fairness argument comes up time and again. There is a deep sense of injustice in my constituency about the singular tale of Stansted over the years. My constituents are concerned that this matter has come up repeatedly. I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins)—I am sure that he speaks for exactly the same basic causes as I do when he talks of his constituents' feelings and those of others—that we are all in the same boat because our constituents rely on the various promises that have been given over the years. To say that some promises are more recent than others does not destroy the validity of the point that people have relied on Governments in the past and have not been able to place much trust in them as a result of what has happened. If we cannot allow the past to bind the future, the only advice I can give to the Government is that the slate must be wiped clean. The Government must make their decisions in the light of the position as they see it now and on the best information available.

Mr. Eyre said that he felt that the proposition put before him regarding Stansted was very different from the other propositions. I suggest that the proposition at the heart of this matter is whether north-west Essex is a suitable place for a major airport, with the number of passengers rising to 25 million per annum. It is immaterial whether it has one, two, three or four runways. The basic question is whether it is the right place.

I shall deal with the fundamentalist argument. There seems to be a widely received truth that air transportation is good, and we cannot have too much of it. I want to enter a cautionary word so that we do not lose all sense of proportion and give to Government now and in the future a licence to unroll a carpet of concrete wherever the insatiable appetite for air transport takes them. Colin Buchanan, in his pamphlet published this week, gives us some sound advice—"keep a sense of proportion". I do not want to tread too far down that path. I recognise that people—my constituents among them—will want to travel, and I do not believe that they should be unduly denied the opportunity. We should value the important contribution that tourism can make. I am not one of those who will argue that the British civil air transport industry must be hampered in order to benefit foreign aviation industries. I accept those aims, but not at any price. I recognise that Mr. Eyre believed that the expansion should not occur at any price. It is a matter of judgment and balance as to what one thinks are the reasonable confines for expansion.

My hon. Friends will recognise that no speech of mine on this subject would be complete without a kindly reference to the "Big Brother" of the airport business—the British Airports Authority. The British Airports Authority is far less than its name implies but has far more influence than its territorial extent merits. That point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley). In the development of airports policy, I cannot help feeling that there has been far too close a relationship between officials of Government Departments and the BAA. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Mr. Eyre analyses very sharply how the wheels have been allowed to grind to make Stansted, time and again, appear the only option. With the BAA constituted as it is, no truly national policy can emerge.

The BAA boasts—the boast was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale)—that it has a great interest in the success of the regional airports. In making that boast, the BAA has all the credibility of the wolf inviting the third little pig to come to the fair. Throughout the whole business, it has shown a ruthless and sometimes unsavoury determination to get its own way.

I cite once again the MORI poll circulated by the BAA in a press release. It is headed:

> "Most Stansted Residents Support Airport Expansion".

Stansted Mountfitchet is a village with a population of 6,000 or 7,000. The poll was taken within a 30-mile radius of that village. That is typical of the deception practised by the BAA throughout the campaign. I hope that no hon. Member will be deceived by it.

Mr. Hayes: Has not the BAA gone so far as to buy 1,100 acres of land in the Stansted area at vastly inflated prices?

Mr. Haselhurst: I confirm what my hon. Friend says. That fact, too, has given rise to suspicion that the Government's decision will be prejudiced, even though we have been given assurances in the past that such factors will not affect the issue.

I believe that the inspector was less than fair to the regional argument. I have a decent northern pedigree, not only as a born Yorkshireman but as someone who had the honour to represent a parliamentary seat in the Greater Manchester area a few years ago. I do not believe that people should be forced to use regional airports. Mr. Eyre effectively exploded that view. However, it is reasonable to satisfy the regional demand that naturally arises in the

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regions. The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe produced some good figures on that point, and I know from experience that too many people have to travel to the south-east to fly to their destination.

The population argument is compelling. We are invited to believe that 17 million people in the south-east will fuel the expansion of aviation for ever. However, there are 37 million people in the north as a whole. There must be a great tendency towards growth in the regions, and it should be satisfied there.

We must adopt a more positive stance on future tourism from other countries, and ensure that the benefits of tourism in terms of jobs are spread more evenly throughout the country. That, too, would help airports policy. Mr. Eyre said:

"If tourism brings overall benefits and if its demands are to be met, then more effort will be needed to exploit the potential of other areas of the UK."

He also said that he had little doubt that more could be done in that respect. A well-directed tourist policy could considerably ease our problems in the south-east. The regional argument has been under-played so far. I hope that the Government will recognise that more can be done than paying lip service to our regional airports.

There is also the question of urbanisation. The inspector recognised that it is very much a question of judgment. It is hard to predict how many people will want to move into an area because of a degree of expansion at the airport. I take the commonsense point of view that if 25,000 jobs are to be created by the expansion of Stansted to a capacity of 15 million passengers per annum, and if there are only 2,300 unemployed people in the constituency of Saffron Walden, it is likely that there will be a great deal of migration.

Mr. Eyre seems to believe that the capacity could be increased to 15 million, or perhaps 25 million, with only small effects on the environment of the area, but that if capacity is increased to 25 million and one catastrophe will follow. I suspect that it would be a matter of degree, and that catastrophe would manifest itself much earlier than Mr. Eyre was prepared to conclude.

Mr. Eyre produced forecasts and timetables. The House has every ground for being wary of forecasts on which we are invited to make decisions. We should consider past efforts. For 1985, the Roskill commission said that we would need to be handling 84 million passengers per annum in the London area airports. The CAA forecast of 1973 was also for 84 million. The Maplin review suggested 58 million to 76 million. The 1978 White Paper on airports policy suggested 51 million to 64 million. In 1979 the advisory committee forecast 55 million to 61 million. The 1981 Gatwick inquiry forecast 55 million to 61 million. What is the reality? It is about 45 million during this year.

I remember the chairman of the BAA assuring us within the Palace of Westminster that unless his policies were adopted the London airports system would be saturated by 1987. We now know that the Stansted terminal on which he had set his heart will not be ready until 1991, and that the saturation point will have not been reached by then. It is interesting that there has been a slippage of years that almost matches the passage of time since the inquiry began. I believe that Mr. Eyre's figure of 89 million by the year 2000 should be treated with great reserve.

Forgetting, for a moment, the complex factors involved in any such projection, let us ask ourselves whether it is credible to imagine that numbers in London will double by the year 2000. That is what we are expected to believe. The inspector showed clear preference for the development of Heathrow. He said in chapter 39 that:

"the application site forms part of an area which is more suitable for airport development than any other location in the south east and the whole of the United Kingdom."

He turns to Stansted because of the timetable. On the question of the availability of a terminal 5, there is evidence from the Thames water authority that the inspector's estimate of 1996 at the earliest could be improved upon and that it is by no means certain that the Perry Oaks sludge works would have to be physically replaced anywhere.

The idea is that Stansted will take up the shortfall. I do not believe that, in order to take up the shortfall and carry us through to the year 2000 and beyond, we need to give the BAA the green light to build a Texas-scale facility at Stansted. Stansted would be prepared to play its part as a regional airport and to ensure that the disaster of saturation, were it to threaten within that time, would not occur.

I am obliged to say things about Heathrow that will not find unanimous support amongst my colleagues. I cannot help that. To some extent, I fear that I cannot avoid a head-on collision with some of my colleagues. I understand the interests that they represent. I know that the complaints made by the people living near Heathrow are generically the same as those of the people living around Stansted. I accept that more people live around Heathrow. It is still a moot environmental point whether it is better to utilise an existing facility than to start a wholly new one.

Mr. Eyre concluded that the fifth terminal would have no discernible effect on the noise climate, and the Government did not attempt to challenge that point.

Mr. Jessel: Nonsense.

Mr. Haselhurst: The essential difference between the two cases is that, in any case, Heathrow will remain the major airport within the London system. The question is whether it is to be a decent and worthwhile airport. It may be asked whether Stansted is not also there already. Stansted occupies 900 acres. To make it the operational airport that it wants, the BAA is looking for almost twice as many acres on top—just for starters. That is the scale of what it is trying to do in north-west Essex.

Perhaps I should deal with the Schiphol argument, as it will no doubt rear its head again today. I do not want traffic going off to Schiphol but if interlining is the key, the choice must be Heathrow. I cannot envisage people taking a bus ride round the M25 believing that that is more convenient than going to Schiphol. If they went to Schiphol because London were, by chance, full, why should they not go to Manchester? Why should we not set out to ensure that we have another gateway airport which can do a good job for the British aviation industry?

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Is my hon. Friend aware that there is already massive interlining from the northern region to Schiphol, Frankfurt and Charles de Gaulle because there are so few direct schedule services from Manchester because of the lack of expansion in direct services overseas that we have been allowed?

Mr. Haselhurst: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has helped to underline my case. Bearing in mind the

inspector's recommendations for what could be done to improve Heathrow and surrounding areas, it makes more sense to spend money on improving access, organisation and the environment at Heathrow before spending large sums of money in the Essex countryside.

The report offers too grand a design for too long a term. Mr. Eyre claims that his plan will cope with need into the early decades of the next century. That goes beyond what we can reasonably be expected to decide. History suggests that planning capability too far ahead is fraught with considerable dangers. Are there not technological developments that could render the basis of our decisions irrelevant? I noticed in the press at the weekend that there is a possibility of a train based on magnetic levitation which could reduce the journey time from Edinburgh to London to one hour and the journey from Birmingham to London to 20 minutes. If, in the next 40 years, such a project becomes reality, it will have a revolutionary effect on aircraft movements in Britain.

We cannot know the future in another sense — a matter on which I reacted strongly to Mr. Eyre's report. He said that Stansted should go ahead on the basis of his recommendation only if the Government give an unequivocal declaration of intent that there will never be a second runway. There was hollow laughter in my constituency about unequivocal declarations of intent. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne will share in that laughter because we have all had our unequivocal declarations. Why would Mr. Eyre have been sitting on his inquiry if the declarations of the past had had any validity?

We must try to find a sensible plan. I commend a plan with components that include a fifth terminal at Heathrow, a commitment to the regions, the possibility of Luton making more of a contribution than has hitherto been considered and a role for Stansted. I am not saying that Stansted should bear no part of the expansion in meeting the need of the south-east, but I believe that Stansted within its existing boundaries can do all that is required of it. If it is put on its feet and, perhaps, separated from the BAA, local people will feel that they have more control. That would also enable the Government to say that they are going for genuinely incremental growth to bridge any shortfall that might arise. That is what John Nott said when he began the operation in 1979.

The Government should satisfy need according to national priorities with regard to environment and expenditure. They should make Heathrow the best airport in the world for its users and neighbours and recognise the widely held view that north-west Essex is not the best possible place for an airport-led industrial growth centre on the scale that Mr. Eyre proposes. In choosing a package of this general description — I do not want to be too particular about details — the Government might find that they would give some agony to everyone but that the benefits and disbenefits could be distributed according to a sensible order of national priorities.

6.4 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): The hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) has made a strong and brave speech, in which he sets out the case against the full development of Stansted. I agree with a great deal of what he said.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) made some pertinent remarks about airline policy. I agree with her that decisions on airport policy are interlinked with what we are about to do about our airlines. We have not debated that issue, but should have done. What will be the future of the independents? Will we encourage British Caledonian to grow? What will be the future of British Midland Airways and others?

If Stansted is to succeed as Mr. Eyre wants it to succeed, one of our independent airlines will have to establish a substantial base there. I do not see that happening at the moment. At the beginning of his summary, Mr. Eyre refers to strong public cynicism and the fact that there will never be consensus on airports policy. That is only too obviously confirmed by our mail and by the speches that have been made so far. No doubt there are many more similar speeches to be made. Mr. Eyre is right to say that there is a need for decisive action. With our national finances in disarray, we cannot afford to waste this opportunity of new investment in a vital wealth-creating sector of the economy.

I staked out my party's stance on Second Reading of the ill-fated Civil Aviation Bill. I have no regrets about how I cast my vote then or subsequently in Committee, because it was manifest nonsense to put that measure on the statute book before considering the implications of the report fully. Liberals have always favoured much greater emphasis on the development of regional airports, but neither the Government nor their predecessors have given as much encouragement as they should to such development. I regret having to criticise Mr. Eyre, because this is a fine report, but he treats the contribution that regional airports can make with insufficient thought.

With the privatisation of BAA still in the wings, and the abolition of the metropolitan county councils, the future ownership of fine airports such as Manchester, Birmingham and Prestwick is still not known. Moreover, applications for licences to use Manchester from Asian airlines such as Singapore Airlines have recently been refused. I am convinced that Manchester, possibly Birmingham, perhaps even Prestwick and one or two others can make a far more positive contribution to civil aviation policy than they are allowed to make at present.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Birmingham airport is in my constituency. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that constituents who live 100 yd away from the taxiway would be extremely disadvantaged and most unhappy about the extra noise that would result from any major increase in traffic? Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that traffic should be redirected from London to Birmingham?

Mr. Ross: I find that a strange intervention, as I have recently been to Birmingham. The airport has recently spent £60 million on development and lengthened the runway. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that it does not want to encourage more use of the airport, that seems to be a terrible waste of money. Birmingham airport has the great advantage of rail links and a bus interchange and the National Exhibition Centre on its doorstep. If it is not policy to encourage people to fly in from the continent and America to use those facilities, I am surprised.

I welcome British Airways' renewed interest in Manchester, because when it was merged with BEA it let Manchester down. It is now proposing to reintroduce transatlantic flights this spring and intends to fly to the far east next year. That is much to be welcomed, but Manchester will need many more national and

[Mr. Ross]

international links if it is to develop as a hub and spoke airport. Such development is essential to its future well-being.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) spoke with great knowledge about Manchester airport. I shall not pursue his arguments, as I am nothing like as well qualified as he is to speak about Manchester. However, I hope that some of British Airways' promised financial help to the independents will encourage at least one of them to base itself at Manchester. We have only to go to Atlanta in the United States to see what United Airlines and Eastern Airways have done for that airport. An airline must invest heavily in Manchester if a hub and spoke system, which is desperately needed, is to be created. That would take some weight off London.

British Airways will naturally always want to base its principal operations at Heathrow. If Prestwick and Birmingham can attract more international and local flights, they should be actively encouraged to do so. Prestwick could easily be connected to British Rail. That might be its saviour. I am sorry that the gentleman who wishes to run cheap flights across the Atlantic has not yet received his licence. I cannot criticise the reason for that, which I gather is that the financial arrangements are not yet satisfactory. Nevertheless, if a People Express-type operation could use Prestwick, it could save that fine airport. It is essential that Manchester should have a direct link to the west coast main line as soon as possible. That should be an early commitment on behalf of the Government. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe will agree with that.

When dealing with Heathrow, the report clearly shows that there will be an increase above the 275,000 ATMs, if present trends continue. That is not an excessive limitation. The figure could rise to 300,000. The report further states that the figure will decrease again with the introduction of larger aircraft. In the consultation document which the Government issued last year it was repeated that the 275,000 limit, which the Government accepted six years ago, would be reviewed in the light of progress and the introduction of quieter aircraft. Those developments are now upon us and there does not seem to be a total commitment on the Government's part not to go above the 275,000 limit.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): Will the hon. Gentleman say whether he is opposed to the 275,000 limit? If so, is he not opposing the Government's wish to control aircraft noise by that limitation?

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman has already issued a press release in his constituency blaming me for the defeat of the Civil Aviation Bill. I am not opposed to going slightly above the 275,000 limit. I shall come to the reason why shortly. We have not done enough about noise and traffic congestion. That must be rectified if Heathrow is to retain its dominance, which it will and must do.

Restrictions on ATMs at Heathrow, as the hon. Gentleman knows, hit the very people whom we wish to encourage, that is, the independent airlines, which were going to be forced out of Heathrow. That is the reason why we must go slightly above that figure. All the evidence shows that that is not unacceptable.

Extra finance for insulation aids is essential. The Secretary of State should take the opportunity to see what the Japanese have done at Osaka and Norita. They have spent vast sums on dealing with environmental problems. People who live near those airports are far more satisfied than are citizens in the United Kingdom who live near airports because so much more has been done for them.

Mr. Eyre says that the Noise Advisory Council should be resuscitated, and that is a good idea. It is also extremely important that new connections are built as rapidly as possible both for public transport and to the motorways. I agree with the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) that British Rail must be brought to the airfield as quickly as possible. He mentioned a link line between the southern and western regions. That would open up the whole country to public transport and to the public using Heathrow. That would greatly relieve traffic jams. We could even link the airfield to the Channel tunnel.

There should be a total ban on night movements except in emergencies. The Secretary of State should take that recommendation on board—it appears in chapter 58. Mr. Eyre makes a host of recommendations about noise, which the Government should accept. Money must be spent to lessen the misery of people living near airports. That can be done.

As Mr. Eyre said, the sewage works at Perry Oaks should have been moved long ago. That action should be taken now, whether or not it is decided to develop T5. The Thames water authority should be instructed to find an alternative site, if it needs one. Heathrow needs room to breathe and that action would keep our options open while we see how accurate the current forecasts are on traffic movements. As the hon. Member for Saffron Walden said, they have been fairly inaccurate in the past.

In 1979 I said that a limit of 15 million ATMs might be acceptable for Stansted. I have since changed my mind. Since then there has been substantial investment in many regional airports especially in Manchester and Birmingham. I also believe that the cost in terms of loss of amenities and high-class agricultural land is too great. Moreover, Stansted could turn out to be a monstrous white elephant. One only has to think of Newark, which was a white elephant for a long time.

As a recent leader in *The Times* stated, "Stansted can wait". We should let it develop naturally to the 4 million mark and then assess the position. If the demand is there we shall have to take action, but at the moment I do not believe that it is and, therefore, Stansted should be left alone to see what it can do for itself.

Following the report, the Secretary of State should give priority first to ensuring the future well-being of the independent airlines, on which so much of the future depends. We must not let British Airways totally dominate the scene. We should take steps now to improve the facilities at Heathrow before we talk of further expansion.

Mr. Jessel: The hon. Gentleman said that he was in favour of improving facilities at Heathrow. Will he make it clear to the House whether or not he favours having a fifth terminal at Heathrow?

Mr. Ross: It would be a great mistake to make a commitment which I or a successor might regret in future. I shall not follow the path of previous ministerial mistakes. I am certainly not committing my party to T5 now, nor in the foreseeable future. I would encourage Manchester and any other regional airports that fancy their chances. I would continue to make improvements at Gatwick to press

on with Stolport, and to make better provision for business executives at Farnborough or Blackbushe. Above all, I would take urgent action to improve our public transport links to our airports, with particular emphasis on rail, which should be utilised to a greater extent than it has been. I have given a commitment and I believe to be an honest one.

6.17 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst). The House will appreciate the great sincerity of his speech and the skilful and dignified way in which he dealt with a position that must be extremely difficult for him. I respect and acknowledge many of his points.

I declare a constituency interest. Gatwick airport is in my constituency, as is the head office of the British Airports Authority, British Caledonian, British Airways, Dan Air and many other operations. I am therefore surrounded by a good deal of conflicting advice, which is why my remarks this evening are entirely my own conclusions.

Three important points make the basics of this matter. First, air transport is a thriving and growing industry in Britain. Recent growth has been rapid, and substantial further growth is predicted. The industry has a remarkable record in employment and in the creation of jobs. It has a wonderful record on the earnings of foreign currency and on bringing to Britain enormous numbers of foreign visitors, who have materially benefited our balance of trade. For the industry to continue this excellent record and, in particular, for it to continue to create a substantial number of jobs in future there must be an adequate airport capacity throughout the United Kingdom, especially in the south-east. The inspector has clearly identified when existing airport resources will be exhausted even if the arbitrary limit on air transport movements at Heathrow is relaxed.

Secondly, some views suggest that the development of airports in the midlands, the north and Scotland can replace the development of further facilities in the south-east of England. Airports away from the south-east are all developing strongly, and good luck to them, not just because there is a political will from this House and from the public corporations and others for them to develop, but because there is a strong demand for air transport which is being met by the development policies of those airports.

All the projections are that the growth of both scheduled and charter services at airports away from the south-east will continue. It will be necessary for those airports to be developed and I strongly support the principle. But in no way should that further development reduce the requirements in the south-east. Both can, must and should be met equally.

Thirdly, and most importantly, in the discussions to date there has been little reference to the interests of the customer. It has been a fundamental feature of Government policy that more attention should be paid to the needs of the customer in all sectors of our commercial life. The inspector has considered in depth the needs of the customer and he has found that those needs are best met by the provision of substantially more airport capacity for London and the south-east.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the customers who travel from the north of England, Scotland and Wales who at the moment have to travel to the south of England will not be served by the expansion of Stansted but would be better served by the expansion of the regional airport system?

Mr. Soames: I hoped that I had made it clear that I am greatly in favour of the expansion of the regional airports.

The inspector has considered the needs of the customer. If we want those customers to use British airlines and British airports, there is no option but to provide for airport capacity in the area of the country to which they wish to fly. That, I am afraid, remains largely the London area. If that is not done, the customer will elect to overfly to another capital such as Paris or Amsterdam.

Any decision which does not favour a development of airport capacity in the south-east over the next 15 years will be a decision which ignores the interests of the customers and the opportunities for the air transport industry to create jobs and to earn more foreign currency. Indeed, I have here a letter from the chairman of Dan Air which makes it plain that unless his company is able to develop in the south-east it will not be open to him to assist in the development of the regional airports in the north. In what way could such a decision be consistent with any Government policy objective?

Let me now deal with the facts and figures about the British aviation industry. In 1983 the United Kingdom civil aviation industry earned a profit from the rest of the world of nearly £500 million. Over 100,000 people are directly employed in civil aviation in the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom's civil airlines fly more passenger miles on international routes than any other country's airlines save those of the United States. The United Kingdom total is nearly twice that of France, our nearest European competitor.

In 1983 £18,000 million worth of foreign trade was handled at Gatwick and Heathrow alone—15 per cent. of the total value of the United Kingdom's world trade. The best estimates are that, of the £4·25 billion that tourists brought to Britain last year, £3 billion was spent by 60 per cent. of the tourists who entered the United Kingdom through Gatwick and Heathrow.

I in no way decry the role of Manchester or any of the other regional airports, but by anyone's standards the industry is a formidable contributor to national prosperity. It is an industry in which, apart from the United States, we indisputably lead the world. For us not to face the disagreeable, tough and difficult decisions that lie ahead in a sensible manner would be to throw away an enormous national advantage.

The permissions already granted at Gatwick and Heathrow take those airports almost to saturation point and the limited development of Stansted—as recommended by the inspector and by the 1978 White Paper of the Government of which the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) was a member — is the most sensible, practical and easy course to adopt.

The Secretary of State will be aware of the views of the West Sussex county council on these matters, with which I entirely concur.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): Does my hon. Friend appreciate that a number of his hon. Friends from west Sussex are here to support him tonight and would wish to be associated with precisely what he has said?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I had seen that I was much sustained by my hon. Friends from west Sussex.

Successive Governments have not faced up to the need to establish and sustain an airports policy. There have been attempts to determine policies in the past but resolve has always wavered when decisions to implement them have been sought. Perhaps over-zealous forecasting of future requirements has provided arguable grounds for procrastination and delay. That situation does, most emphatically, not now prevail.

The absence of decisions in the past has foreclosed many options, particularly the possibility of a new green field location, and the inspector's report has now picked a difficult and tortuous way through the options that remain open—better ultimate use of Stansted and more use of Heathrow. The inspector is right to suggest that that can make the necessary contribution within the required time scale and the proper aviation context.

If support for international aviation and the protection of Britain and London's position at the centre is to be sustained, as it should be, there is no alternative but to develop the strength of the London system where that is practical. The risks of not doing so are that international traffic will be lost, not to Manchester or Birmingham—sadly—but to Schiphol, Frankfurt or Paris.

Manchester and other regional airports already exist and have had opportunities to develop services. But that has not come about through any fault of their own but because the air transport industry cannot be persuaded in terms of the realities of life that those airports are part of the London system. I can assure the House that many years passed, as many hon. Members will know, before Gatwick was able to acquire real status as an international airport for that very reason.

The inspector's recommendation for Stansted is the only sensible one that can be made if capacity for the early 1990s is to be met.

Mr. Adley *rose*——

Mr. Soames: May I, please, press on?

The inspector is right to seek firm assurances to limit Stansted's capacity to a single runway comparable with Gatwick. That reduces significantly some of the powerful arguments against a larger, more developed Stansted. The runway is already there. A motorway passes close by and the railway line is not too far distant. A new terminal and supporting developments such as servicing, cargo facilities, car parking and other airport-related facilities will obviously be needed. But the land consumed by those will be modest compared with the original proposals for a fully developed two-runway airport.

A second terminal may be necessary in the distant future, but if the Heathrow proposal is accepted and becomes operational in the 1990s that will be a long way off. The urban development, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden spoke, to support a Stansted expansion will also be correspondingly modest. Unemployment within the labour markets in the travel-to-work area and improved productivity suggest that the demand for new housing and the supporting infrastructure will be less than objectors have forecast. The only room for manoeuvre in the short term is now at Stansted. The resolve to proceed should not be compromised by wishful thinking that Manchester or Birmingham will do instead, because I am afraid they will not. Many will argue that the investment needed to develop Stansted, and Heathrow later, should not be made in the affluent south-east and that it would help to remedy economic imbalance if it were to be made in other regions. I have sympathy with the idea behind that expression, but I do not believe that airport development is footloose in that way. If it is not made in the London system, it will not be made at all.

I now draw the attention of the House to the inspector's summary of overall conclusions in which he deals with the lessons from and the consequences of the past.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): My hon. Friend has talked about additional capacity in the south-east. Is it not a fact that the second terminal at Gatwick will increase capacity there by about 50 per cent.? Will my hon. Friend say something about the fact that the second terminal is slap bang across where a second runway could have been built?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me such a tremendous opportunity to say how grateful I was that the second terminal was located right where a second runway would have gone, because it forecloses the possibility of any development along those lines.

As I was saying, in the summary of overall conclusions the inspector said:

> "The history and development of airports policy on the part of administration after administration of whatever political colour has been characterised by ad hoc expediency, unacceptable and ill-judged procedures, ineptness, vacillation, uncertainty and ill-advised and precipitate judgments. Hopes of a wide sector of the regional population have been frequently raised and dashed. A strong public cynicism has inexorably grown. Political decisions in this field are no longer trusted."

Regardless of the very real and understandable concerns, the Government should accept the recommendations of the report. It has been an exhaustive, extensive and excursive inquiry, and the national interest, which should be paramount in this matter, dictates that the Government should accept the inspector's report, in which they should be sustained by the overwhelming majority of the House.

6.33 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): I can well understand the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) expressing a point of view that is tailored to his constituency. It is a valid point of view, considering the interests in his constituency, but it was obvious that it was not shared by all of his colleagues. When it comes to the vote, I hope many of them will join us in the Lobby because it is vital that we get away from the concept that when we debate air tranport we talk only about the south-east of England. It goes far wider. The trouble has been that the concept of air transport in the past has related only to the south-east. If someone is coming to this country by air, it has been very difficult to come in any other way than through the south-east.

A case should be made in the House for the development of the regional airports, and I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) for putting that case. That view is shared by many Conservative Members. If the proposals outlined in the report go ahead, they will lead to a widening of the north-south divide—a divide that is far too wide already. The north gets a poor share of the national cake. Unemployment is far higher in the north

than in the south. Because of the Government's economic policy there has been an overall decline in industry, but that decline has been far more rapid in the north than in the south. Service industries are more developed in the south than in the north. The same occurs in the Health Service and in education.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced recently that aid to the regions will be cut. That will make the position far worse. If the development of Stansted goes ahead it will add to the burden that we have to bear in the north. I do not believe that it is possible to plan air transport to the year 2020. That is far too far ahead. It is reasonable to look only as far as the 1990s or the year 2000. The Eyre report has tried to look too far ahead. Therefore, hasty conclusions have been drawn in regard to Stansted. The inspector was trying to fill a gap to the 1990s but his recommendation is an expensive way to fill that gap. The cost would be £1,500 million to £2,000 million. That is money that should go to the regions.

We have to get away from the idea that the only way people can come here is to fly to London and then travel to the regions. A case should be made for the hub and spoke approach of using Manchester airport. Of the people who come in via London, 30 per cent. do not want to do so. They should be allowed to fly to the regions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe said that only 38 per cent. stay in London while the rest go elsewhere.

I represent a constituency, Warrington, North, with one of the most successful new towns, and a very successful science park. If we are to attract related industries, they want to be able to transport their goods all over the world. Therefore, they want good communications, which means airport facilities.

Airport facilities are also necessary for tourism. Chester is an important tourist centre in the north-west. If we are to attract tourists, regional airports, particularly Manchester, should be developed.

Mr. Bill Walker: I am fascinated by what the hon. Gentleman has been saying. I ask him to accept that I am not an enemy. Can he suggest how airlines can be persuaded to take up the licences that already exist but are not used for services in and out of Manchester? What positive suggestions can he make to encourage airlines to develop services? There is not a shortage of terminal facilities or gateways but the airlines are not going there. What does the hon. Member suggest?

Mr. Hoyle: That is a fair point, but airlines have been prevented from going to Manchester as a matter of policy. Manchester has been excluded as a gateway to the United Kingdom for United States airlines because a bilateral agreement between Britain and the United States discourages them even from considering operating scheduled services from Manchester. Other foreign airlines wishing to use Manchester have been refused licences by the Government unless a British carrier gains something in return. That is one of the problems that Manchester has faced. We all know that Singapore International Airlines wishes to fly from Manchester, but at present it is unable to do so.

We want to develop intercontinental services. British Airways has recently announced a gratifying expansion of services from Manchester. There will be flights to New York in April, to Hong Kong in the autumn, to Munich, Malta and Geneva this summer and to Athens, Madrid, Oporto and Lisbon in 1986. Those are welcome signs for the future, but if Stansted goes ahead that welcome growth will be very much less. Even worse, not only will Manchester and other regional airports fail to develop fully but I fear that Speke airport in Liverpool may be forced to close. That would be a tragedy for Merseyside, with the loss of 500 direct jobs and many more indirect job losses. All airports generate jobs. Manchester accounts for 5,000 direct jobs and probably 15,000 indirect jobs. Here I must disclose an interest because 10 per cent. of the direct jobs are in Cheshire. Expansion is therefore vital to my area.

Manchester is at the centre of a region with 20 million people — 40 per cent. of the total United Kingdom population — whereas the south-east contains only one third of the population. There is no immutable rule that all major airport facilities should be in the south-east. If we are to attract employment as well as tourism to the regions we must do all that we can to ensure expansion of airport facilities. If Stansted goes ahead that development will be cut back and instead of getting away from overlocation of facilities in the south-east we shall underpin the existing system and further impoverish the regions. We do not want that to happen. We want the regional airports to expand. The success of Manchester shows that this could be achieved, with feeder services from the other regions. I do not share the pessimistic view that if Stansted does not go ahead the benefit will go to the continent.

Mr. Mark Carlisle (Warrington, South): Not every hon. Member can speak in every debate, but he will appreciate that the case being made by the hon. Gentleman is of as much concern to people in my constituency as it is to those in his. The extension of Ringway airport and investment in those facilities and the jobs that they support in our area are thus equally important to both of us although we are on different sides of the House.

Mr. Hoyle: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for that intervention. We both have thick files of correspondence from companies in our constituencies pressing for the expansion of Ringway airport. It is no use spending public money on developing an attractive new town such as Warrington if the aim is then defeated because the airport is not expanded as the industries so successfully attracted to the area desire. Warrington has become one of the most successful new towns and a most attractive place to live, but businesses coming in regard the expansion of scheduled services and cargo facilities at the airport as vital to success in the future. They are glad that the new cargo terminal is going ahead, but the scheduled services are equally vital.

I have noted the number of interventions from Conservative Members to rebut the argument that the south-east is the answer to all our problems. I fear that if Stansted goes ahead it will not even be ready in the 1990s as the inspector has suggested. It may also prove to be a white elephant, involving vast and unnecessary expense. In looking to the year 2020 the inspector has looked much too far ahead. We cannot foresee what will happen by then, but if we go ahead with regional development we shall begin to see what further developments are necessary. The inspector suggests that Stansted will make a huge leap, catering for 15 million and eventually 25 million passengers per year, but we do not know whether airlines will go there. Charges will be low because the BAA is subsidising them, but we do not know whether that

[Mr. Hoyle]

will be sufficient incentive. The Government will have to provide further inducements, but I fear that after all the disturbance and expense the traffic will not materialise. We know that there is demand for additional traffic in the regions. We know that the regions will respond, as the success of Manchester shows.

I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State say that he intended to listen to the arguments. I hope that everyone will listen. Even better, I hope that Conservative Members will express their disquiet in action by voting with us today. The Government will then appreciate fully the extent of the opposition to the Stansted proposal among Members on both sides of the House. The question crosses party lines and it cannot be decided on a party political basis. We must reach a decision based on what is best for the national interest. It cannot be good to widen the north-south divide in this way. The divide is already widening. One way to redress the balance is to put more money into the regions.

If we do not put more money into regional airport developments we shall be cutting off an arm that is vital to the regions, especially the north, in attracting new industry if there is an upturn in the economy. Without that development, we shall be competing with both hands tied behind our back. I hope that in the Division today the whole House will show that the answer lies not in Stansted but in developing the regional airport system.

6.49 pm

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): The average length of speech so far has been 23 minutes. I hope to be rather quicker than that.

Mr. Eyre, the inspector, described himself as a "reluctant volunteer" in this exercise, and I think that there is every reason for that. This is clearly a political decision. The method of using the planning inquiry is proving very unsatisfactory.

I give my thanks to the Government for arranging the debate. I have never criticised them, nor do I, for not tabling a substantive motion, but it leaves the House in a difficulty. I hope that somebody is beavering away in my right hon. Friend's Department to find a better way of coming to solutions and bringing these matters before the House in future.

The inspector has deluged us with figures. There is not a lot to be said for trying to quote them all, but one thing must be said. On the inspector's own figures the case for a massive expansion of capacity in the south-east has not in my view been made out if one interprets that massive increase as the necessity to build Stansted to the extent he sets out.

In 1985, to use the inspector's figures, there will be nearly 10 per cent. more capacity than passengers. In 1990, there will be about 4 per cent. more capacity than passengers. I refer to the south-east, using his figures. After 1995, if one accepts terminal 5—and I know that some of my hon. Friends would not — but without Stansted there will be 13 per cent. more capacity than passengers. It is not until 2000, if one accepts the inspector's figures, which most of us do not, that one begins to go over the top. On this basis there would be no urgency for any of us who did not object to the development of the fifth terminal.

Now hold on a minute, says Eyre, "there is a problem between 1993 and 1995; we shall go over the top before the terminal is completed. The shortfall amounts to 25 million passengers, he says, if BAA fully utilises its assets at Heathrow and Gatwick rising to 8·5 million if it does not.

Even if those projections are not overestimated, as I believe that they are, the shortfall is still based on the assumption that Luton does not go up to 5 million, that Stansted does not exceed 2 million and that there will be virtually no growth in the share of the regional airports between 1990 and 1995. None of those three propositions seems to me to be tenable.

If one takes those three possibilities, one observes that there is plenty of opportunity to fill his perceived gap without going into massive investment in Stansted. On the other hand, if we proceed with Stansted, we make proposals for another 15 million passengers at minimum, we have an expenditure of give or take £1 billion and the destruction of a large area of the countryside in order, let us be clear, to relieve the pressure on BAA and tour operators for the need of a little ingenuity and effort between 1993 and 1995.

The inspector's case for Stansted therefore rests in my view not on present needs but on future prospects. He wants to find a solution until 2020. The inspector said:

". . . the London airports system must have a capacity capability which could meet needs as, when and if they arise over a period of the next 30 years or more."

Such a proposition is untenable. If it were applied to any other activity, the people involved would of course applaud it. But it is absurd to suppose that such resources can be diverted as, when and if they may arise over 30 years.

The inspector's report is riddled with his fixation for certainty and the desire to complete the whole issue once and for all. I think that he wants to go down in history as the man who did it. He says:

"The production of a committed strategy now should remove the need for major reappraisals, examinations, studies and inquiries during the next 30 years or more."

Such a conclusion shows that intelligence is no guard against naivete.

My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) drew attention to the changes that are occurring in technology. If we are considering the period between now and 2020, I am convinced that our children will be on package tours into outer space by then. The only certainty in all this is that the pace of technical change has far outgrown the ability of people to forecast accurately the way in which airport movements will develop.

As to the effect on the north, the inspector, as one might expect, was dismissive of the case for the north. He showed intense irritation. It seemed as though one was disturbing the smooth running of his mathematical model. Many of the points that he dismissed were not so daft as he seemed to imagine. He dismissed 1 per cent. of public expenditure on the airport alone as insignificant. I should like to hear that confirmed by the Secretary of State for the Environment. The inspector dismissed the proposition that profitable nationalised institutions such as BAA should make a contribution to the Exchequer. I look forward to having confirmation of that from the Chancellor. The inspector ignored totally the general economic effects of airport development in the northern region.

More important, the report spells out clearly why Stansted as planned will siphon off the growth from the

regional airports. The inspector himself does the job. He is describing not three airports but an airport system. He is talking about a

"single category A gateway international airports system."

It is one airport in three places. The object of the exercise is to transfer non-scheduled and other leisure services to Stansted in order to transfer scheduled services from Heathrow to Gatwick. Luton, it is said, will attract leisure services inside and outside the south-eastern area.

The concept of one south-eastern airport sounds fine as a unit until one examines what it means in practice. The British Airports Authority made a profit on its trading concessions last year of £98·8 million. Only Heathrow broke even on traffic costs. Four million pounds went to Stansted. We are told by Mr. Payne that that subsidy is to continue.

British Airways sent all Members of Parliament a position paper which says:

"As an inducement to prospective airlines/users, Stansted charges would remain lower than those at Heathrow or Gatwick. Considering Gatwick expansion as a discrete investment, the level of income generated would be unlikely to be sufficient to provide an adequate return on capital employed. In such circumstances, Stansted would rely on a cross-subsidy from Heathrow/Gatwick."

At present that £4 million works out at £11 per passenger. Applied to Manchester, it means that the airport would be getting the equivalent of £66 million subsidy a year. I am not asking for a subsidy—we do not want one—but I am making clear the size of the operation already taking place at Stansted. Tour operators at Stansted will be paying £1,079 in landing fees. In Manchester the figure is £3,995. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) asked why Manchester is so dear. In fact, Manchester is the cheapest outside London. The reason why London is cheap is that if one multiplies that £11 by the 450 passengers in a jumbo one comes pretty close to the subsidy affecting Stansted.

It is clear that whatever my right hon. Friend decides to do we must be certain that Stansted is maintained as a discrete operation, relying upon its own operations to make its own profits. I wonder whether, if that condition is imposed, the British Airports Authority will be quite so keen to take it on.

Today we are confronted with many scares. One of them is that we are trying to compel people to go north. There is a certain irony in that because for years people in the north have been trundling down to Luton to pick up their tours. Some of us did not take kindly to the CAA which is reported as saying

"Short of compelling people in London and the South East to travel by road and rail to the Midlands and North in order to catch flights . . . "

We have been doing that for 10 or 15 years, so that that is a bit thick.

We are not seeking compulsion. If the imbalance in subsidy between Stansted and the regional airports were put right the ability of those airports to compete, particularly in the leisure trade, would be much sharpened and there would be a considerable movement in the airlines' own choice about where they sought to go.

The second limitation on the development of the airports is licensing. Reference has been made to unused licences. There is a penumbra about negotiations which never quite come to the surface. The Ministry will say "We have not had an application." The reason is that people will not spend nine months preparing an application if they know that it will be turned down. There is a lot of wink and nod in this business. Some licences which were dropped have been taken up again.

Specific and important changes have to be made. For example, we cannot fly into Manchester from the United States if we do not use BA. We are covered by the Bermuda 2 agreement. That applies to freight as well as passengers. I referred to an example the other day because it staggered me. The largest American freight airline is Flying Tigers. Four times a week that airline flies between Brussels and New York. About 70 per cent. of the freight comes from the north of England. It goes by truck and boat to Brussels and is flown in an aircraft which passes over Manchester airport.

I know that my right hon. Friend will do his best to bring about changes in Bermuda 2, but he may not be so keen about some other matters. Many licences have been opposed by British Airways in the past. It is a matter of assessing whether the development of the airports is as important, more important or less important than British Airways' profits.

Let us take the classic case of Singapore Airlines. Opening up the route between Singapore and Manchester would mean some loss of money to British Airways. Our estimate is about £2 million revenue, which means that we are talking about a much lower sum in terms of profit. One must set against that the fact that our business men have to take an extra day off, and other factors. These matters have to be decided with a fresh mind. We have to look at them from the point of view of the people who use the regional airports. If we do that, we shall begin to see a different ball game. We should consider better the tourist trade and improved communications by rail and accelerate the links with the main rail lines. We should make a better effort to ensure that the 29 per cent. of people who begin their journey in the regions are accommodated in the regions.

My right hon. Friend is a worldly-wise man. I think that he and I share a scepticism about many of the propositions put before us which parade as idealism but which are merely vested interests dressed up. However, I urge him, just occasionally, to recognise that for some issues scepticism is a bad guide. Opposition to the Eyre report is one such issue.

There is a solution in which practicality, realistic planning and vision walk hand in hand. In coming to that conclusion, I want to leave my right hon. Friend with this thought. I want him to understand clearly that the sense of division in the country is not drummed up for the occasion. It burns in the minds of people of all politics, and of none. It is not a passing fashion. One can feel it; one can taste it. It is in the very pulse of the north. The remedy does not lie in huge sums of money — though they may be important — nor in yet more statistical analyses. The remedy lies in commitment and, above all, in imagination.

The Eyre report is the product of an unimaginative, legal and bureaucratic tradition that the Government set out to challenge. It is clever, polite, arrogant, logical—and wrong. It is concerned with established guidelines for policy and not with establishing a new national policy.

Despite the speech of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), which I found offensive and silly, I am asking all my right hon. and hon. Friends who feel that the massive expansion at Stansted should not take place to vote with Opposition Members for the Adjournment of the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the House that the 10 minute limit on speeches is now in operation. I appeal for co-operation. If time is nearly running out, I shall try to assist hon. Members with some sign language.

7.7 pm

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): I am grateful for being given the chance to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester), who made two observations which have thrown my speech somewhat. He began by condemning the Eyre report. The hon. Member for Lancaster (Mrs. Kellett-Bowman) has the full report with her. I am sure that she will pass it round to any hon. Members who wish to read it. I have only the summary. Chapter 10 on page 28 bears out what the hon. Member for Withington said. Paragraph 7.7 of the conclusion states:

"Regional airports should not"—

note the words—

"and cannot make so large a contribution to satisfying future demand as to remove or substantially reduce the need for further capacity in the south-east."

We know the inspector's view right from the start—he is totally prejudiced.

Hon. Members of my age group in the Chamber today will remember that when the silent films gave way to the talkies the Indian always used to say to the cowboy "White man speak with forked tongue." Likewise speaks the chairman of the British Airports Authority. He knows my view. He tells us in the north that he has no objection to regional airports. One must ask what he has done to assist the regions. The answer is, precisely nothing. When the Civil Aviation Bill was going through the House I said that it was the "Civil Aviation (Norman Payne) Bill". He has left his mark on the report.

Mr. Gale: Of course he was heard. He gave evidence to the inquiry—so did NOERC.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Of course he was heard, but this is supposed to be a neutral report. The hon. Gentleman should not be excessively influenced by one person or one organisation. The north-west and the north have been ignored. The views of the people of Manchester are not unknown. We believe that we deserve a share. I agree totally with the recommendation in the Eyre report that Heathrow should be expanded. I believe that the figure of 275,000 movements per annum was plucked out of the air.

When I last spoke on this issue, I referred to the time, 45 years ago, when I was a navigator. When we returned to base we were stacked at various levels, normally at 500 ft., and wondered whether our fuel would run out. The stacking caused noise problems in the area. This is happening above places like Midhurst. It is no laughing matter if one lives at Midhurst. However, there have been substantial advances in technology since then. To put my point in perspective, I should mention that at the end of the war I was using some of the most advanced radar equipment in the world. When I now enter a cockpit, I am staggered by what can be done.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): The hon. Gentleman says that he agrees with the Eyre recommendation about Heathrow. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned noise. Does he not think that it was a little presumptive of Eyre to recommend that there should be a curfew, not only at Heathrow, but at Gatwick, when his inquiry did not consider the problem of noise? No evidence on noise was taken. Surely, therefore, the number of movements into and out of Heathrow is pre-empted if a stipulation is imposed that there should be a curfew. Because of the technological advances to which the hon. Gentleman referred, surely it is time for the curfew to be a thing of the past.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Traffic-handling methods will be substantially improved. Aircraft will stay on course and will be controlled from perhaps 2,000 miles away. These methods will result in economic cruising and low speed safe flying. As for the hub and spoke concept, aircraft like the Super 748, the ATP and the 146 will be extremely quiet. They are mainly hub and spoke aircraft. Therefore, their operational performance will improve. This bears out the point made by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin).

There will be similar advantages with long-haul flights. The Airbus is a much quieter aircraft. Those of us who used to try to sleep at the end of a grass runway with a couple of Merlin engines going over every two minutes sympathise with those who live near Heathrow. However, the noise level at Heathrow will steadily decrease, particularly by 1986, when the Trident will be phased out. The BAC111s will be able to fly only if they are fitted with hush kits. The new generation of aircraft will be quieter. We shall move to about 330,000 movements per annum at Heathrow, with less noise being generated. So the figure plucked out of the air of 275,000 movements per annum is no longer sacrosanct. Therefore, I support the creation of a fifth London terminal and an increase in the number of landings at Heathrow.

However, I cry, "Halt, hold, enough" about Stansted. I want there to be positive discrimination in the interests of the regions. The British Airports Authority practises discrimination over its pricing policy at Stansted and Luton. The local authority at Luton has complained bitterly that, while Stansted was and is being subsidised by Heathrow and Gatwick for handling predominantly charter flights, Luton, which is engaged in the same business, is being undercut on account of cross-subsidisation by the British Airports Authority. It seems that Eyre is a very expensive proposition if it is related to what is said by the BAA. We are told that Stansted will be a super charter airport. Although it may take some scheduled flights, it will be used mainly by charter aircraft. That is unfair.

I deal next with the north-west and the north, a deprived area that needs to be supported. Questions have been asked about why certain routes have not been taken up. Predominantly, it is because they are unattractive routes. It is as simple as that. Let us not make a mystery out of something that is simple. I hope that the projected flights by British Airways from Manchester to the United States and from Manchester to Hong Kong are a great success. This region needs to be supported. This project demonstrates what can be done with scheduled flights. If flights were attracted to the north, the load factor in the south-east would be relieved. Instead of traffic being diverted from Heathrow to Schiphol, it will be diverted from Heathrow to Manchester. There will be positive discrimination in favour of the north-west.

My only regret is that Ministers will not be present for the vote tonight.

7.17 pm

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I am grateful for the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones). I cannot support all that the hon. Member said. Nevertheless, I respect his tremendous experience and his views concerning regional airports. I shall confine my remarks to the reasons why I believe that a fifth terminal should not be constructed at Heathrow. I do not intend to deal with other issues. However, the Government must reach a conclusion on Stansted, Gatwick and the provincial airports. They must make up their mind about how to approach the matter and at the same time satisfy both the major and the smaller airlines.

Even if we began work tomorrow on a fifth terminal it could not be completed before 1996. That is an important matter. Even if we began work this week upon that terminal it would be too late to meet the immediate demand. Even if work upon the necessary road and rail connections were to begin now, they could not be completed before the year 2000. Even if it were authorised, this would be too late.

My constituency is one of the worst affected by noise. I have fought consistently to reduce the noise, by pressing for a limit on the number of flights and by urging the development of quieter aircraft. Such planes will result in some reduction of the noise. The noise level under the Heathrow flight path is not only almost unendurable during the day, but is unacceptable at weekends. I do not accept that the noise can be reduced in the immediate future, whether or not quieter aircraft are introduced.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the Roskill commission, the third terminal, the number of flights being limited to 275,000 a year, the fourth terminal and so on. I thought that the fifth terminal had been buried without trace. Unfortunately, it was brought back to life by a planning application by Uttlesford District Council.

I object to the fifth terminal because it will lead to increased noise, traffic congestion and the removal of the Perry Oaks sewage station. There is also considerable opposition from local councils. Between 500,000 and 1 million people already suffer the almost unendurable noise under the flight path to Heathrow. The removal of the sewage plant might not take as long as was first thought, but it would still delay the building of a fifth terminal. Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Surrey county councils and others oppose the building of a fifth terminal. I received a letter today from Berkshire county council setting out its objections.

One of the most difficult problems posed by a fifth terminal would be road congestion. Cromwell road is the most congested part of London apart from Hyde Park corner. The extension of the Piccadilly line was welcome, but I am told that it carries only 8 per cent. of the Heathrow traffic. Whatever we do, we cannot improve the road network. The Cromwell road and Talgarth road areas are so built up that it would be impossible to widen those roads. Even if they were widened, they could still not take all the traffic. If a fifth terminal is built, traffic will be nose to tail from central London to 10 miles outside the city. Even if the rail link were completed and the Piccadilly line were extended further, people would still choose to use the roads, which would result in enormous traffic congestion.

The Government have given numerous promises that a fifth terminal would not be built. Sir John Nott said:

"we do not favour a fifth terminal, and that is also the view of the inspector." — [*Official Report*, 21 February 1980; Vol. 979, c. 694.]

On 3 November 1980, in column 411, my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said in answer to a question that the Government's view remained the same as was stated in the House on 17 December 1979. On 23 July 1981, in column 193, in answer to a question put by me my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Trade confirmed the Government's views again and, on 3 March 1982, I intervened repeating the Government's pledges. Pledges were also given on 22 February 1984 in column 948, on 21 November 1984 in column 301 and on 20 December 1984 in column 567. The Government have given unequivocal pledges that they will not construct a fifth air terminal.

Apart from increases in noise levels, practical difficulties will be caused by the building of a new terminal. Much more important, though, are the pledges given by the Government. The circumstances have not altered and I trust that the Government will honour those pledges.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is always generous in giving way, but he was not able to give way to me today when I wanted to ask him a question. The form of our debate was inevitable because of the legal complications, but a vote in the House will be of no significance, because it could be interpreted outside as a vote for or against the fifth terminal and for or against the development of Stansted. The whole thing is mixed up. If hon. Members vote to reject the inspector's report, are they rejecting the fifth terminal? Are they rejecting the development of Stansted? Are they rejecting regional airports policy? The truth is that they will be rejecting the lot.

Surely the object of the debate is to give the Government the opportunity of listening to those of us who have constituency and national interests at heart and to form a judgment on our views.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): My hon. Friend says that any vote in the House could be interpreted in any way, but I hope that no vote will be interpreted as opening the way to a reconsideration of a green field site.

Dr. Glyn: I agree with my hon. Friend. A vote in the House would be meaningless because the public and the press could interpret it as meaning whatever they wanted it to mean.

The Government gave a pledge and I rely on them to make sure that it is honoured.

7.27 pm

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate and to follow the excellent contributions that have already been made.

The debate is important, and the Secretary of State said that he would listen carefully to what was said. I hope that he will also take careful note of what is said. Ministers will not be voting at the end of the debate, and it is therefore important that as many Conservative Members as possible vote to show the strength of the House's feeling on this issue.

I strongly support the case put by the NOERC, and I oppose the major development of Stansted. I support a

[Mr. Peter Pike]

national airports policy, with more development of regional airports. That will best meet the needs of the nation in the years ahead.

The financial involvement in Stansted would be £450 million for the airport and associated developments, £160 million for a rail link and between £500 million and £1 billion for infrastructure, depending on the ultimate potential of the airport. That investment will be made at the expense of other parts of the country. It will not be additional public expenditure, and the other parts of the country will have to pay for that major investment in the south. That is a major factor.

Airports attract jobs, and I am aware of the developments that took place because of the foresight of the former Manchester city council, and later of the Greater Manchester and city of Manchester councils, which co-operated with each other. I have that awareness because at one stage I lived close to Manchester airport. The councils have always been prepared to develop the airport in advance of demands to meet the needs of those in the area. Job opportunities are not confined to Manchester airport. Developments within the airport have a ripple effect in the area generally.

Unemployment in the north is far worse than in the south. In the south as a whole there is unemployment of between 6 and 9 per cent., and in the Stansted area there is a very low rate of unemployment. It would be wrong to create more job opportunities in an area where opportunities are already better than elsewhere instead of taking the development to the north. Job opportunities for white collar and service industry employees in my constituency are minimal as it is heavily over-dependent on manufacturing industries. It is over-dependent also on factories and other industrial buildings which were erected before 1914, which have long since seen their better days. It is important that development money should be put into the regions.

There are about 20 million people living in the area around Manchester airport, and if more services were available from the airport they would be used. By concentrating on Manchester airport, I do not underestimate the importance of developing other regional airports. I am emphasising the importance of Manchester because I am well aware of its importance in constituency terms. If those living in the Manchester area want to take a flight from Manchester airport for their holidays, it is necessary for them to make an early booking with the travel companies. That is imperative if they want a flight direct from Manchester. Two years ago I tried to get a flight to Bulgaria from Manchester and was unable to do so. Ultimately, I had to accept a flight from Gatwick.

Bringing one's wife and children down from Manchester to London so as to fly from Gatwick can involve considerable additional cost. Those who do so will opt to fly, to travel by train or to use their car. There is extra expense, and sometimes great inconvenience. Those who use their car are left wondering in what state they will find the car when they return from their fortnight's holiday.

I am glad that the Minister for Housing and Construction is on the Government Front Bench because I am aware that he received a copy of a letter which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* a few weeks ago on housing development. The letter which was sent to him was signed by Mr. Alf Norris and Mr. Patton, the chairman and secretary of the National Housing and Town Planning Council for the North West Regional Executive Committee. The letter is directed to the housing development that would have to take place at Stansted. This would happen at the expense of housing in other areas.

The letter reads:

"During the past few years housing programmes have borne the major part of public expenditure cuts and the incidence of identified homelessness has increased. Against such a background many local housing authorities will view the recommended development of Stansted with concern and dismay. In his report Mr. Graham Eyre, QC estimates that a projected capacity of 15 million passengers a year would require the construction of some 10,000 new homes and if capacity were boosted to 25 million passengers some 17,000 new homes might be required. The evidence presented to the inquiry by the Department of the Environment made it clear that development in and around Stansted should be facilitated by a reallocation or re-distribution of resources and the Government could not be committed to provide new additional capital investment."

If that is taken literally, it means that the Government will deprive other areas to pay for development at Stansted. At the same time as paying for that development, they will not get the type of air service that they require in the region. I am sure that the argument on housing could be advanced to cover hospitals, schools and many other items of infrastructure.

It is clear that financial and infrastructure developments, and future Government capital investment would have greater emphasis on the south if the Stansted development were to go ahead. It is believed in the north that there is currently a two-nation divide. If the Government decide to go ahead with the Stansted development, the divide will become even wider. That will strengthen the belief of many that the Government intend to make Britain a two-nation state.

It is no good issuing licences and then saying that they are not taken up if they do not include destinations to which people wish to travel. It is obviously important that passengers should be able to fly direct to America from Manchester. Many industrialists in my constituency have emphasised the importance of communications. They speak of the need to improve the motorways and the railway system and stress that there should be much better direct air connections to the continent and the United States.

The argument that I am presenting is supported fully by Lancashire county council, which believes firmly in the proposals of the North of England Regional Consortium. Those proposals are supported in turn by the North East Lancashire development association.

I presume that within the past couple of days most hon. Members have received the book entitled "Deadlock at Stansted: The Way Out" by Sir Colin Buchanan. We all know of Sir Colin's reputation on road transport. I am sure we are all aware that he served on the commission which considered the third London airport in 1968-70. Sir Colin's conclusions are important. The book states:

"Complicated and intertwined and to some extent unassessable though the issues in this controversy may be, they nevertheless seem amenable to a commonsense judgement. It cannot be said that a proven case exists for a third London airport; the London airports system as postulated by the Inspector seems designed to continue a heavy draw-in of traffic from the regions to the disbenefit of regional travellers; to give the regional airports greater scope would make sense in relation to the spread of the population and would aid economic recovery; and finally there is the incontrovertible environmental case against the expansion

of Stansted expressed by many parties with a strength and conviction which no government could over-ride except by decree little short of brutality.

Everything surely points in one direction, namely to leave the position as it is described in the guide book".

That sums up the case, and I hope that when the Division takes place Conservative Members will support Opposition Members in the Lobby.

7.37 pm

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): It is 12 years since my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), the then Prime Minister, told me to get on with the job of building a third London airport and to have it ready by about 1985. The reason for his instruction was the report to which the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) has referred. It told us that by 1985 to 1990, on all the projections of the British Airports Authority, the Civil Aviation Authority and the other aviation organisations, London would be so clogged with aircraft and passengers that everything would come to a dead stop.

We are now in 1985. We all know that I failed—and that the third London airport was not built. However, London has not come to a dead stop. That leads me to conclude that the Government should be sceptical of all the statistical certainties that are offered to them by experts. Sir Norman Payne has been quoted today as calling Stansted an "oasis of opportunity". Norman Payne, as he was when I was an Under-Secretary of State in the Department of the Environment and the responsible Minister, told me that Stansted was the wrong place and that the right decision was Maplin.

Had we gone for Maplin, it would have been the right decision for the nation and the right decision for hon. Members who represent people around Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton because we would have moved the growth of traffic away from these places and put it where it belongs—on a site adjacent to the sea. But for the fact that the Conservatives lost the 1974 election, Maplin would today be in operation. In the event, the Labour party killed it. As a result, we now face the sad fact that we shall require more airport capacity in the south-east by the early 1990s, but we do not have it. So the only question is where is that capacity to be provided.

My view is similar to that of British Airways, whose chairman I admire. I favour increasing the use of Stansted to the capacity that it now has. That could probably reach to between 4 million and 5 million passengers per year, and while that would not be greatly popular in the area such development could be sustained. It could also be done quickly and relatively cheaply, and with the M11 already in place that would be a sensible decision to take.

Secondly, I strongly favour an improvement of our regional airports. But I am not in favour of coercing people. We should go for the development of regional airports, notably Manchester, in line with genuine market demand. I am not sure what that demand is. We heard from the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) about the Bulgarian airline's letting down Manchester. Perhaps it had reasons for doing that. I favour increasing regional airports but only at the rate that proper market demand will bring about.

Neither of those solutions — the development of Stansted and developing the regions—will fill the gap in London. I have therefore come to the reluctant conclusion that the right decision is to get on now with the fifth terminal on the sewage works at Heathrow. I regret to have to say this because I, too, as a Minister gave pledges that we would not increase Heathrow airport nor build at Stansted. But we are today in a new situation. We have to deal with things as they are.

We should, therefore, get on fast with the fifth terminal at Heathrow, and I must tell my hon. Friends, whose feelings, heaven knows, I understand, that this will not be as bad as they fear. Fortunately, there has been a dramatic quietening of aircraft. The noise problem will not be as severe as they suggest.

Unfortunately, our record as a nation in getting on with great and imaginative projects is not good. We did not do the Thames barrier well. We have failed so far with the Channel tunnel. That is why I am concerned over the inspector's depressing conclusion that we could not build a fifth terminal at Heathrow before 1995 or later, that it could take 15 years. That is not acceptable to a modern nation. I appreciate the differences, but we built an airport on the Falklands in about 18 months.

The problem, however, is not the building but the planning. There is the rub. The Minister will find in his Department, if he turns up the records, ample material from the water industry—I had some reponsibility for that, too — to demonstrate that the technology is available rapidly to change the sewerage system at London airport, by flaring and other systems. We do not need, as the inspector suggested, two or three years to test the feasibility of removing the sludge beds. It is feasible. Nor do we need three or four more years to complete the removal of the sewage works to another place. All of that could and should be truncated.

The Government should therefore decide quickly to get on with the fifth terminal and put all their backing behind it. Let them bring before Parliament a special development order. Never mind having further planning inquiries. Let us get on with it now, reflecting on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) that Governments of both parties have lacked the ability to grip exciting, important national projects and carry them through effectively.

What my right hon. Friend wants to hear today is where we stand. I recommend that we should take Stansted to its existing capacity, build up the regional airports as far as possible in accordance with what the market demands and, above all, go now for the fifth terminal at Heathrow. Let us make London the best and most modern airport in the world.

7.45 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Hon. Members will note that I am wearing a Manchester International airport tie. Thus, my allegiance is not in any way hidden. Manchester International is extremely important to my constituency. The only trouble with it is that it is not called Stockport international as it should be because it is only 10 minutes away from Stockport and the main flight path goes directly over my constituency.

Despite the extreme importance of that airport to my constituency, I join other hon. Members—this shows that we are not being dog in the manger over the issue —in recognising the necessity for some expansion in the south-east, although that is contrary to the view of many pressure groups in the south-east. Indeed, to us in the north-west which is short of jobs and suffering great

[Mr. Tony Favell]

unemployment problems, it seems extraordinary to build a second terminal at Gatwick right in the centre of the place where the second runway should be, all to reduce expansion.

We would give our right arm for that sort of chance around Manchester. We find it equally extraordinary that people in the vicinity of Heathrow should be campaigning against further development, although that would result in a boost to the economy and more jobs. Because we find that extraordinary, we in the north-west are inclined to say, "A curse on your house and to heck with you in the south-east."

However, we have a duty to United Kingdom Ltd. and we recognise the extreme importance to Britain of the aircraft and airline industry. For that reason, and having studied the figures, we accept that there must be some expansion in the south-east. Where is that expansion to take place? The choice seems to be between terminal 5 at Heathrow and an expansion of Stansted, or both.

The Department of Transport has accepted that there is need for expansion, at the most by 15 million passengers, and it is clear that the best place for that expansion is Heathrow. That is where the passengers want to be. At present, Heathrow is the largest and most successful hub airport in Europe. To retain its success, it must expand, otherwise the traffic will go to Schiphol or Paris—not because Stansted has not expanded but because Heathrow has not expanded. That will drive additional transport away from the south-east, and the sooner we recognise that the better.

Anybody who has taken an interest in the airline industry realises the importance of hub airports. Where better to look for proof of that than Atlanta where, with a population of just over 1 million, that city last year catered for 38 million passengers. That happened merely by developing a hub network. If we do not continue to expand our hub network at Heathrow, we shall be failing not just the south-east and the north but the whole nation.

It is nonsense to suggest that scheduled traffic can move to Stansted. It will not move there. People do not want to go there. We have seen what happened when people tried to direct traffic from Heathrow to Gatwick. We remember that Air Canada, Air Portugal and Iberian Airways said, "Over our dead bodies." In fact, they did not go to Gatwick and, in the end, British Airways moved its Iberian routes there and suffered a great loss.

There is absolutely no need for development at Stansted. There is the proposed terminal 5 at Heathrow, the second terminal at Gatwick, now being built, and there is capacity at Luton by catering for 3 million. During the past four years the number of flights into Luton has decreased because of the predatory methods adopted by the British Airports Authority at Stansted and Gatwick. That is what will happen to the rest of the regional airports throughout the midlands and the north of England if this vast airport at Stansted is expanded to take 15 million passengers. It is clear that the only flights to use Stansted will be charter flights, no scheduled flights. That will have dreadful effects on the regions.

Only 7 million or 8 million charter flights use airports in the south-east. From where will the expansion to 15 million passengers come? Assuming that every single charter flight moved from Heathrow and Gatwick to Stansted, there would still be room for another 7 million passengers. Obviously, the extra traffic will come from the regional airports — East Midlands, Leeds-Bradford, Birmingham, Manchester and Luton—and will have a devastating effect on those regions.

Clearly, we must improve the scheduled services from Manchester, and I support what hon. Members representing the north-west have said. I point out to those hon. Members who represent airports in the midlands and north of England the number of charter flights as a percentage of international flights using airports in the regions: East Midlands, 90 per cent.; Leeds—Bradford, 72·7 per cent.; Birmingham, 73·5 per cent.; Manchester, 81·6 per cent.; and Luton, 99·6 per cent. Would not Sir Norman Payne like this 15 million capacity leisure airport at Stansted? What effect would that have on the regions, losing not what they hope to obtain in the future but what they already have?

7.52 pm

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): The one mistake that hon. Members have not made in this debate is to argue that this is a party political matter. It is extremely useful that the Ministers will not participate in the vote. It is important to recognise that ministerial pronouncements are not exactly written on tablets of stone, no matter which party the Ministers represent. The atrophying effect of office as shown in a person's mental attitude seems to suggest that some people do not look at the position outside the south as flexibly as one would hope.

I hope that we are arguing for a distribution of airports, which are vital economic necessities covering and servicing not just one part of Britain, of which London is the capital, but the whole of the United Kingdom. It is valuable to point out that we are not talking about a country the size of the United States, where there are thousands of miles between cities. We are talking about a fairly small island in which it is useful to find that economic resources and transport resources, of which airports are the key, are distributed to allow the development of our national assets.

I am not making political points, but it is important to note that there was unemployment of 5 per cent. in the constituency that I represented in 1979. Even with the adjustment of statistics, the rate is now between 20 and 30 per cent. We are talking about Manchester airport, which serves not just Bolton and the north-west, but is an international airport. There are 70,000 unemployed youngsters under 25 and another 20,000 youngsters on various schemes in the north-west. There is long-term unemployment of 100,000 in the same area. In the south there is unemployment of between 6 and 9 per cent., and perhaps around Stansted the rate is much lower—3 per cent. or so.

My argument concerns not simply the fact that the airports produce jobs, but the fact that an airport at Manchester provides the economic gateway to the region. What employer from Japan or elsewhere will establish a factory in a north-west town when he needs to fly to Heathrow and then drive up motorways for three or four hours? The north-west has lost many key manufacturing industries. When and if the economic revival comes, the airport will be the vital link and the lifeline by which we can regenerate economic activity.

Manchester airport is midway between Scotland and the south of England. A great deal of tourist trade can be

generated by air communications, and that is vital to the region's economy. In the past, Manchester airport has been actively discriminated against. The long-stay car park at Manchester charges £2·90 a day, while the charge at Stansted is virtually a few pence a day. I am told that, because of the Bermuda agreement, American carriers are not allowed to fly to Manchester airport.

We are asking for what the textile industry has requested under all previous Governments — fair competition. We do not make our request on a party basis — Labour, SDP or Liberal. It seems that SDP and Liberal Members cannot find time to attend the debate. We ask those who have an interest in the north-west region to support its key airport. If a third airport is created, it should be created in an area that will serve not only the north-west but virtually the north of England. We have a right to say to the official minds, "Britain does not stop at Watford."

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Civilisation stops at Watford.

Mr. Young: It depends on the area from which one comes. Judging by the behaviour of some hon. Members, I should not have thought civilisation had even entered the south.

It is necessary to recognise that millions of north-west constituents will depend on Manchester airport, including the communications thereby provided. We need the support of the House — *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentlemen wish to have the Floor, I shall give them the opportunity to do so. It might be useful if they listened to the northern and not simply the southern point. We are talking about the north, and hon. Gentlemen would be courteous if they listened to our point of view.

We should recognise that many hon. Members, from all parties, are talking on behalf of their constituents who will need this link, and we hope that the vote will show the Minister that that link must be provided.

8 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young) has spoken with great force about the needs of his town and region. I will take up later the points that he made.

First, however, I should like to remind the House of the population statistics for the areas around Heathrow and Stansted. The Home Office figures, based on the 1981 census, show that within 10 miles of Heathrow there are 1,700,000 people. Within 10 miles of Stansted, there are 115,000 people — only one fourteenth as many. The large number of people living around Heathrow are just as sensitive to the quality of their life and surroundings as anyone else. I include my constituents in Twickenham, Teddington, the Hamptons and Whitton.

The House should not forget that five Members who represent constituencies near Heathrow are either Ministers or Whips, and, by convention, they do not speak on matters affecting other Departments — my hon. Friends the Members for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Hayhoe), for Putney (Mr. Mellor), for Esher (Mr. Mather), for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) and for Reading, West (Mr. Durant), who is in his place. My hon. Friends have made their views known in their own way, and no one should assume that if there are five fewer speakers from the Heathrow area the people living there are any less well represented.

The large population around Heathrow has been told time and again that it is Conservative Government policy not to build a fifth terminal at Heathrow, and it has believed it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins) quoted eight instances of statements by Ministers in the present Government to that effect. I can add another. On 4 August 1981, when he was Secretary of State, the Leader of the House wrote to me on this point. He said:

"In his letter to you on 13 November 1980, which was issued as a Press Notice by my Department, Norman Tebbit, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade, confirmed that the Government's view remained unchanged; and in reply to a Parliamentary Question by Kenneth Carlisle on 13 May 1981, I re-affirmed the Government's view that a fifth terminal at Heathrow should not be provided. I do not think this can leave you in any doubt about the Government's view on this matter."

Those repeated statements of policy have come to be seen as amounting virtually to pledges. There will be a great sense of betrayal in constituencies around Heathrow if a fifth terminal is built. Those who want the pledges abandoned are saying that the opinion of a planning inspector who is no more than an adviser — albeit a distinguished adviser — should carry more weight than the commitment and good name of a Conservative Government.

The previous inspector, Mr. Justice Glidewell, was just as eminent as Mr. Eyre if not more so. He reported on the Heathrow fourth terminal with great distinction and took exactly the opposite view. He said:

"it is in my view essential that, if they decide to permit Terminal Four, the Secretaries of State"—

the Secretaries of State for Trade and for the Environment —

"should at the same time reiterate that it is the Government's policy that there will be neither a fifth terminal nor any major expansion at Heathrow".

That view was accepted by the Government. There is no reason whatever why the House should attach more weight to the opinions of Mr. Eyre than to those of Mr. Justice Glidewell.

The traffic aspect is extremely important. With three terminals open at Heathrow, the number of passengers there per year is 28 million or 29 million. When the fourth terminal opens later this year, it is expected that there will be 39 million passengers per year. If a fifth terminal were built, there would be 52 million — nearly double the present figure. That could mean an extra 60,000 or 70,000 passengers passing through Heathrow every day, with all the necessary back-up services. Eighty per cent. of passengers go to Heathrow by road and, however one may fiddle about with railway lines, that proportion is unlikely to drop substantially.

Most hon. Members are familiar with the A4, the Cromwell road, which leads through west London towards Heathrow. That road is already heavily congested, and not only at peak hours. The extra traffic for the fourth and fifth terminals would jam up the Cromwell road. Mr. Eyre had no adequate answer to that problem. The congestion would spread into parallel roads and, eventually, throughout west London.

There are already 750 flights a day through Heathrow. At times, a plane flies over my constituents every 1½ minutes. It is the frequency of the flights that distresses people, not merely the peak loudness of each flight. The assumptions made by the inspector and repeated by various statutory bodies are based on the noise and number index. I was glad to see from a letter that I received only

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

this morning from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport that the noise and number index and the formula for assessing the amount of aircraft noise is under review and that there will be a fresh report on it in April. The new report may render invalid some of the inspector's assumptions about the measurement of aircraft noise.

People in my constituency and neighbouring constituencies will not be content with a continuation of the present level of aircraft noise. They want a substantial and permanent reduction. The burden of aircraft noise must be shared more fairly. It is totally inequitable to pile more and more of a burden—whether the burden is in the form of traffic or of aircraft noise—on the 1·75 million people living around Heathrow in order to protect the far smaller population around Stansted. We should remember that, although I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) said, three out of four members of that population do not want that protection in any case. Even if we take those living within a 10-mile radius of Stansted rather than a 30-mile radius—

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jessel: A significant proportion of people within the 10-mile radius do not want protection.

Stansted is not virgin territory. There is a great fat runway two miles long there. That excellent runway is under-used. The excellent motorway connection between the M11 and the M25 and other good roads provides the capacity for a great deal more traffic. All those national assets are being under-used.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: The situation is ludicrous. Neither Heathrow nor Stansted appears to want the extra facility, but Manchester is longing for it.

Mr. Jessel: The nub of the problem is that every year 3 million more people want to fly in and out of south-east England. The figure for this year is 47 million, not 45 million as has been said. The inspector calculated that the figure would rise to 61 million in five years and to 75 million in 10 years. He worked out that by 1990 there would be no more room at Heathrow and Gatwick for any more passengers. He also calculated that there is no way in which the fifth terminal at Heathrow could be opened before 1996.

It is only in the past few days that we have suddenly been told that there will be no need for a new waterworks. If so, why was not that point made during the inquiry? The case remains completely unproven. The inspector found that, because of the need to move the waterworks at Perry Oaks elsewhere, it would take 12 years to construct the fifth terminal at Heathrow. The fifth terminal at Heathrow, therefore, could not do the job in time. He concluded that only Stansted could provide the additional capacity to meet the demands during the early to mid-1990s.

The Manchester argument, about which we have heard a great deal and will no doubt hear a great deal more, sounds all right until we ask what it means. It means that someone who lives in Twickenham, Eastbourne or Finchley who wants to take a holiday in Spain after 1990 will be told "Sorry chum, you cannot go through Heathrow or Gatwick because there is no room for you. To get your holiday in Spain you must go to Manchester". People will not stand for that. The same is true for incoming Americans who want to do their usual Tower of London and Stonehenge trip. Rather than come through Manchester they will go to some other country——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's 10 minutes have come to an end.

8.10 pm

Mr. Graham Bright (Luton, South): This debate is crucial to my constituents. Since 1979, we have had to live with the possibility of Luton airport having to be closed if there is major development at Stansted. That would mean the loss of more than 7,000 jobs and the closure of the second largest business in my constituency. I do not know of any other right hon. or hon. Member who is faced with such a prospect. My sentiments are shared by my hon. Friends the Members for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) and for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel). The prospect is utterly unacceptable to us.

It is ironic that the threat of closure should ever have hung over Luton. The discussion about the siting of London's third airport ignores the fact that Luton is already the third airport in the capital's system. With 2 million passengers a year now, a capacity to take up to 5 million passengers a year, excellent motorway connections and an adjoining railway line to London—it is much closer than Stansted and takes only 30 minutes—Luton airport is perfectly capable of playing a greater role, especially in scheduled services. Indeed, we would welcome the opportunity that a longer runway and parallel taxiways would give us to expand our passenger handling capacity to 10 million—double the present capacity. That would involve taking only 100 acres of land. That is an option which would increase the capacity and the flexibility of the London system and remove pressure for the development of Stansted.

The recent problems of Luton airport have not been confined to the threat of closure. It has faced difficulties because of the existence of heavily subsidised facilities and charges at Stansted which are, of course, designed to attract our charter traffic away. The BAA has used its monopoly at Heathrow and Gatwick to squeeze out competition from Luton. That casts serious doubt on the BAA's claim to be the guardian of the national interest in airport matters, especially when its justification for developing Stansted is supposed to be the need to meet international competition. If it is not prepared to meet competition fairly at home, the claim is bogus.

For that reason, I am not prepared to go the whole way with the inspector, Mr. Eyre, at the recent planning inquiry in blaming successive Governments for the difficult problems that we now face. Any Government must take into consideration the views of their supporters, the environmental lobby, transport interests and many other factors.

Mr. Eyre has overlooked the pressure that a major public sector monopoly, the BAA, can bring to bear on policymakers in the long term by its insistence on the need to cater for passenger growth. It has an overwhelming interest in buttressing its own position. Hence the unremitting pressure since 1965 for the development of Stansted, the difficulty in developing a coherent strategy for regional airports and the BAA's efforts to take over Luton and the major regional airports in the 1970s and,

now, to preserve its monopoly. Until it is broken up and its component parts are sold to the private sector within an appropriate regulatory scheme, such conflicts will have to be resolved politically rather than settled in the market.

I do not believe that either the BAA or the inspector has made out a convincing case for the instant development of Stansted. According to Mr. Eyre's figures, he expects 61 million passengers to pass through London's airports each year by 1990, but his assessment of the passenger capacities of the existing planned and committed London airports system for that year is 63·5 million passengers. That might well be an underestimate as Heathrow, with a capacity of 38 million passengers a year, Gatwick, with a capacity of 25 million passengers a year, and Luton and Stansted combined, with a capacity of 9 million passengers a year — with the expansion of Luton it would obviously be greater—there would be an overall capacity of 72 million passengers a year. We shall have the capacity to handle the anticipated level of passenger traffic in 1990 irrespective of whether we decide to develop Stansted now. It is entirely wrong to suggest that Stansted is the only choice that will meet the demands of the 1990s in time.

The public inquiry has reinforced the argument for the development of a fifth terminal at Heathrow. The Perry Oaks site is clearly more suitable for airport development than any other location in the south-east and, indeed, the whole of the United Kingdom. The inspector believes that it is better from an operational point of view than terminal 4 and its development would prevent the imposition of the costs of split-site operations in our domestic airlines. British Airways says that its costs would rise by one fifth if Stansted were developed. There would also be a chance of relieving pressure on the central terminal area and the main access roads and tunnels into the airport. As heathrow is the hub of our international air services network, and as the development of the airport to full potential offers major operational savings to the airlines, a fifth terminal is the logical solution for the south-east.

Growth in the south-east, whether at Heathrow, Gatwick or Luton, is not the entire answer. Regional airports such as Manchester and others in Scotland have reached, or are reaching, critical stages in the development of their services. They have catchment areas and unutilised capacity sufficient to handle far greater numbers of passengers. The existence of the BAA in its current form must not be an obstacle to their development. It will be no service to Britain to reinforce the BAA's grip on our airport policies by promoting the growth of Stansted. Luton is ready, able and willing to play its part, with a fifth terminal at Heathrow, in coping with passenger growth in the south-east for the foreseeable future. It makes sense to expand our existing airports and to avoid artificial commitments on air traffic movements and terminal development of the disastrous kind that were made in the 1978 White Paper. Moreover, ignoring the potential of our regional airports will not be acceptable any longer.

There is no profit in looking back at the past 20 years of confusion and missed opportunities. Now is the time for new policies and, if possible, a new consensus. Nobody in north-west Essex wants major development at Stansted. However, such expansion is possible at Heathrow, Luton, in the regions and in Scotland. The only body with a real interest in developing Stansted is the BAA. It is that body, and the project that it has conceived, that should disappear in the interests of the whole nation.

8.17 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I found it rather entertaining to hear the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) trying to shove passengers off from Heathrow to Stansted as there are obviously many people in the south-east of England who want further development at neither Heathrow nor Stansted. In the north, however, we would give our right arm just to have the opportunity to expand regional airports, the survival of which might be put at grave risk if the Government's weight is put behind the Stansted proposal.

When the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) extolled the virtues of Maplin as a third London airport, partly because it was by the sea, I smiled wryly because Liverpool airport is by the sea and has many of the virtues to which he referred. The hon. Gentleman talked about not coercing people to use such an airport. The hon. Member for Twickenham revealed yet again the gap between the imaginations of those who live in the south and those who live in the north when he said that his constituents could not be forced to go to Manchester or other northern airports to go on holiday or travel on business. I have news for him. That is precisely the problem that people who reside in the north of England face.

A person who lives in Liverpool and wishes to go on a summer holiday to a foreign land can fly direct only to Yugoslavia, thanks mainly to the drive of Merseyside county council. If he wishes to go to Spain, he may get a flight from Manchester. But the weight and balance of airport development is tipped towards the south. Those of us who live in the north must drive to Luton or get the train to Heathrow or Gatwick. That is part of the problem of living in the north of England, but many people in the south are unready or unable to recognise it. The expansion of Stansted will endanger the role of Manchester and the complementary airport of Liverpool.

The airport of Liverpool is already threatened by the plans to abolish Merseyside county council. No one has made it clear whether any authority will be capable of assuming that responsibility when the council is abolished. Far from getting a second terminal, Liverpool airport has recently managed to get a grant of £1·9 million—that shows at least some commitment on the part of the Government — towards building a new replacement terminal. We would love to be able to say that we were building a second terminal.

My constituency is in a county which has an average unemployment rate of more than 20 per cent. One third of the 150,000 unemployed have been without a job for well over a year, and often for well over two years. Therefore, we would welcome another terminal. However, we cannot even get a duty-free shop at Liverpool airport because of the arbitrary qualifying quota of 100,000 international passengers laid down by the Government. Yet many passengers who travel from Liverpool airport are international passengers, who must take an internal flight from Liverpool to Heathrow or Gatwick to pick up an international flight.

Many decisions are taken by the Government and their advisers whose roots are in the south. Not everyone needs or desires to start a journey from London airport. Airports such as Liverpool could handle a greater volume of traffic. Liverpool airport has one of the most up-to-date runways in the country, which has even taken Concorde. The drive

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

of Merseyside county council has led to the development of a new control tower, modern fire-fighting facilities and the beginnings of the development of a new replacement terminal. Flights go out and come in over the river, which is a safe route. Liverpool airport is more often fog-free than most airports in the United Kingdom, and is an ideal diversionary airport for Manchester, Gatwick and Heathrow.

Manchester airport is connected to an excellent motorway system, which includes the M56, M53, M57, M62 and M6. It is an ideal site for development, providing the Government create the balance more in favour of the distressed parts of the United Kingdom, that is, the north-west.

I plead with the Government to consider the position carefully and to examine what is happening in the House tonight. The only reason why the Government have not called a three-line Whip tonight is that they realise they they are not satisfying the House with their proposals to expand Stansted and Heathrow, which totally ignore the needs of the north-west and the northern regions.

If the Conservative party wants to confirm the view of many people that it is fast becoming the south of England nationalist party, it should continue with its present trends. If it wants to expand and ensure that areas such as Merseyside get their fair due, it should consider Manchester and Liverpool airports. There is no use talking about regional policy while cutting regional aid. In Merseyside the six local authorities have suffered a cut of £176 million since 1979. That cannot be allowed to continue.

The Government can show faith with people in the north-west by not supporting further development in the London area. They should see to it that Manchester gets its fair rewards. They should consider the disadvantages that at present accrue to Manchester, and consider regional complementary airports such as Liverpool. Such a move would introduce much investment and economic activity in that deprived area.

8.25 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) made a staunch and eloquent defence of the interests of his constituents, as I would expect. I do not doubt the fervour with which he and other hon. Members have put the case for the expansion of regional airports to serve the economic interests of their areas.

The demands of those regions are persuasive, and the environmental and economic interests of the hon. Members who represent seats most closely affected by prospective development in the south-east are understandable. Although I cannot claim to have as direct a constituency interest as them, I hope to display more objectivity and less emotion.

I, like all my right hon. and hon. Friends, have read the report with care. I am bound to declare my credentials at the beginning, which are that I broadly support the recommendations of the Eyre report. I hope that my views and those of other hon. Members present in the Chamber will be taken fully into account by Ministers.

When the subject was first raised about 20 years ago, there were projections for air transport growth which have not been fully realised. Nevertheless, there have been great opportunity costs from not making the essential decision at that time about the development of a third London airport. It is ironic that since Sir Peter Masefield first espoused the case for a third London airport at Stansted we have gone full circle via Wing and Maplin back to Stansted, and now face the same decision 20 years later.

Did we serve the national interest by failing to grasp the nettle, prickly though it was, during those years? Has not the time come to make a clear and final decision? There must be no more prevarication. The people, regions, towns and communities involved are entitled to expect a clear and final decision. That decision should be the one set out in the Eyre report.

Too often we assess the future capital cost of such a decision, but fail to take account of the cost incurred through failing to take a decision earlier. A heavy responsiblity rests with a succession of Ministers with responsibility for trade and aviation, who have not served the country well by failing to make a decision on this highly sensitive, political, judgmental issue. Nevertheless, such a decision can now be made and it should be for a major expansion of Stansted airport.

There has been far too much talk this afternoon about the alternative advantages of meeting, by a minimalist approach, the least possible forecast movements of air transport. There has been insufficient desire to satisfy fairly empirically verifiable and objective judgments as to what passenger transport demands will be in the south-east over the next 15 to 20 years.

It is self-evident, from careful reading of the report, that there is no alternative to the development of Stansted. Much as one might like to see the demand-led expansion of some regional airports, the hard fact is that while certain improvemens can be made, and some new routes can and should be opened—I hope that will happen—consumer demand, both internationally and domestically, will remain predominantly in the south-east.

Mr. Churchill *rose*——

Mr. Nelson: Like others, I have waited to make my speech. I have a limited time to make my points and I wish to conclude my remarks.

From my reading of the report, such a demand will be prevalent. It behoves the Government to respond and the recommendations in the report, in particular for the expansion of Stansted, will in my view satisfy this.

However, I link with that the importance that I place on the need not to make any concessions or to fudge judgments in responding to the report. In their eventual response to the inspector's report, the Government will be heavily tempted to try to satisfy, for political and other motives, all the fair points of view which have been represented. I shall judge the Government's response by the extent to which they genuinely take the opportunity to do objectively what they consider is in the national interest, and not to dilute an essential decision which should be made for the future.

Although Heathrow, Gatwick and other areas have been developed in the past, they have been developed too slowly and in such a manner as already to lose a substantial amount of business and traffic to elsewhere in the world. No one can assess the value and extent of business that we have already lost to Paris, Amsterdam and elsewhere in terms of passenger movements, freight and the associated

business. However, I believe that the cost to Britain has been enormous. That is the cost of failing to make decisions 20 years ago and in the intervening period.

We must have hope for the future. We must not proceed on the most pessimistic assumptions about economic growth and the attractions of Britain both for business and tourism. We should proceed on the basis that we will make new facilities work and that they will attract new business to Britain through Stansted and elsewhere. Therefore, not only should there be a firm Government resolution and decision in favour of the Eyre report, but it must not be watered down.

There will inevitably be behind-the-scene bids for a Government response to suggest a phasing of any increase at Stansted, for a limit on the number of passengers who can be dealt with and for an absolute guarantee that the capacity will not increase beyond a given level in the foreseeable future. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will resist these overtures to the extent that they have taken note of my remarks, although I recognise that it is a matter of judgment. I believe that I have made my point. I want the report to be implemented and I want no watering down of its recommendations.

I am not on my own. I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) said earlier. Much of what I have said in support of Stansted rests on the efficacy of the rail link with London and it is essential that that is not intermittent but is a direct through link.

With those remarks, I hope that I have left no doubt in my right hon. and hon. Friends' minds as to my views on the issue.

8.33 pm

Sir Walter Clegg (Wyre): I cannot agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). It is particularly galling to those of us from the north to find that when we are forced to take flights from Heathrow or Gatwick we are supposed to be starting our flights from the south-east and are south-east originated. We are nothing of the sort. We are forced there by a set of circumstances.

One of the penances of debating in the House of Commons is to hear speaker after speaker making one's points infinitely better. Many powerful voices have spoken for the north of England tonight. In particular, I want to take up one or two of the threads which my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) pursued.

First, my hon. Friend talked about the feeling in the north. He said that it was something tangible, something that could be touched. I can back him up on that. The north has a chip on its shoulder, and I do not like that. At one time it was a nice sporting chip—one will have a better chance of playing for England if one plays at Lords than at Old Trafford or Headingley. But it has become worse than that.

As the circumstances have changed between the south and the north, I have become worried about the south-north feeling that is developing. I want to see it stopped. That is why we have heard that the North of England Regional Consortium covers all the old rivalries within the north and stretches from the Irish sea to the North sea, from the Solway to the Mersey, and from the Humber to the Tyne. All have united in opposing the development of Stansted for the reasons which have been cogently given in the House tonight by those supporting the North of England Regional Consortium.

We sometimes misunderstand why there is the concentration of flights in the south-east. It is partly historical and partly due to the fact that the airlines have found it easier because of the cross-subsidisation of the southern airports which is not available in the north and which makes our landing charges higher.

I read something in the inspector's report which I found rather strange. He said:

"Governments can do little to influence the entrenched pattern of air services which is inevitably governed by market forces."

It is nonsense to say that the Government cannot change that pattern. It is ludicrous that the market is referred to there as a free market when one thinks of the International Air Transport Association, the Bermuda 2 arrangement, the licensing restrictions and the communications between Government and Government.

My fear—it is shared by many of my hon. Friends in the north—is that the present position will be frozen into the system because expenditure on Stansted will make those airlines which operate from it wish it to work, and the wish will be father to the thought.

We do not want to play dog in the manger with the south of England. If it needs expansion for its own purposes, so be it, but I am implacably opposed to a major development at Stansted. My feet will take me into the appropriate Lobby tonight, and I shall not be alone.

8.38 pm

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Unlike hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I must confess that I am not an authority on airports. I have been impressed by the breadth of knowledge that has been expressed in the debate.

However, as a representative of an inner city area, I am an authority on deprivation. As a former member of the Manchester city council, although, regrettably, never on the airport committee, I am extremely proud of that airport. The alderman who cut the first sod of grass at Manchester airport had to have police protection against a volatile crowd who did not want the airport. There has been criticism in years gone by because of the imposition on the rates. But what a difference today! Today that airport is the dual jewel of the north: it makes contributions to the rates and a marvellous contribution to the region.

I was dismayed at the beginning of the debate when I listened to the south-east lobby. We have heard the Watford gap mentality coming through once or twice. The North of England Regional Consortium has been criticised for its role. Some of the arguments have put forward the old divide and rule idea of separating Manchester from the other regions. The consortium does not want a "beggar thy neighbour" mentality. We have regard for unemployment in the south-east. Arguments have been thrown at us about job creation. The 50 per cent. male unemployment rate in one part of my constituency should be compared with the level of unemployment in the south-east. In Greater Manchester about 70,000 of the under-25s are unemployed; 100,000 have been unemployed for over six months. That is deprivation.

The consortium has pointed out that comparative statistics on unemployment are well known and need not be rehearsed. There is a substantial difference between the

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unemployment rates in Scotland, Wales, the north and the midlands and those prevailing in the south-east. The creation of further jobs in rural Essex and Hertfordshire will have no immediate beneficial effect on unemployment in other parts, including the south-east. The proposal to create a further 25,000 jobs in that area, where unemployment averages 6 and 9 per cent., is not a priority. Indeed, it is inconsistent with the Government's location decisions on such developments as the Nissan car factory, which, for a variety of reasons, was routed to the north-east. In regard to the disparity between the north and the south-east, average earnings are lower in Greater Manchester. The inner cities are at a disadvantage.

Objections are coming not just from Manchester. At the inaugural meeting of the North of England Regional Consortium three years ago there were people from all over the country, and there was support across the political spectrum, just as we have heard in this debate from the hon. Members for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) and for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst). Local authorities and the tourist trade supported the chamber of commerce. They realised that the spin-off effect, if Stansted should be developed, would be to the disadvantage of the northern regions.

The consortium asks legitimate questions about resources. What effect will the reallocation of resources have on the capital expenditure plans for local authorities at a time of dwindling capital allocations? Who will fund the 17,000 new houses and all the infrastructure that will be required? Will it be the Manchesters, the Liverpools, the Sheffields or the Newcastles? The consortium points out that even inner areas of London will not be immune. So we have decaying urban areas badly in need of revitalisation which will be subsidising new towns in the south-east. The regional dimension has not been taken into consideration in the report. The question about priorities has never been put. Justification cannot be made for expenditure well in excess of £1 billion in the south-east at a time of cutback in public sector financing which will affect the north.

The inquiry has dwelt only on the development of airport facilities and has missed out completely the importance of the air transport industry. There are two important elements. Without question there is a need for wider consideration of the development of the air transport industry in the United Kingdom. Secondly, the decision taken ultimately by the Secretary of State must take account of the regional dimension. The spread of aid for the regions is very thin. Many regions are in dire need of revitalisation. This is an opportunity that should not be missed. This is only one aspect of regional policy.

There are further broader issues concerning major capital investment. In his evidence to the Stansted inquiry the leader of West Yorkshire metropolitan county council indicated that regional policy must take account of regional conditions, which are so bad that no national investment decisions should be taken without first considering the regional dimension. Therefore, it is not just a Manchester versus Stansted argument. Attention must be drawn to the neglect of the midlands, the north and Scotland. If Stansted is developed, if a fifth terminal is built at Heathrow, and if there is a Channel tunnel, this island will eventually sink, as has been forecast, because of the imbalance of being weighted down by the south-east of England. There is a case for regional airports. Finance invested in the regional airports would act as a catalyst to revitalise and reinvigorate areas with tremendous human resources. To neglect them further would be a catastrophe.

At the Stansted inquiry, and throughout its case since, the consortium has argued that there is no need in purely air transport terms for a further major development in the south-east of England to meet south-eastern air transport needs. All the analyses show that an excessively high percentage of regional air travellers are currently forced to use airports in the south-east. If those travellers could be reallocated to services from local regional airports, expansion could take place in the regions and not in London.

The consortium has also argued that the effects of the reallocation would be to bring substantial economic and employment benefits to the regions. Such benefits are more than justified by the widening disparities in employment opportunity and social and economic conditions as between the south-eastern region and the remainder of the country. That is not to say that the consortium has ever failed to acknowledge equally dire problems which exist on a localised basis in parts of the Greater London conurbation, but merely to observe that in quantitative terms the scale of the problem elsewhere is greater. Like most of my hon. Friends, I appeal to as many as possible Conservative Members to support our campaign by joining us in the Lobby tonight.

8.48 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I am genuinely sorry for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. He has as disparate a portfolio as the craggy-visaged, iron-watchchained Alderman Foodbotham, chairman of the Bradford tramways and fine arts committee in the old days, about which Peter Simple writes so eloquently. One day he is on the buses; the next day he is proposing a Bill to deal with London regional transport; the next day it is those confounded airports again. I am only glad that at least we have given him some respite from the Civil Aviation Bill. I am sure he is glad that we have, particularly if he studies the inspector's report. I hope that at the end of the debate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or the Minister of State will state clearly the Government's intentions with regard to that legislation. The unanimous verdict of all informed parties is that the artificial statutory limit of 275,000 air transport movements per year at Heathrow is totally unjustified. Moreover, taken annually, the 275,000 ATM limit will be exceeded this summer even before the fourth terminal comes into operation in the autumn. I hope that this matter can be laid to rest today.

Secondly, I hope that the Government will listen to the very wise words of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths), formerly a Minister responsible for these matters. In a powerful and succinct speech he emphasised that Heathrow is a major national asset. The inspector, too, made that point. There is no airport with a comparable range of international services anywhere in Europe and we would be foolish indeed not to maximise its potential. As Mr. Eyre pointed out, however, to do so we need—and have needed for many years—a fifth terminal on the Perry Oaks site. I hope that at the very least my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction will approve that planning application.

We are all conscious of the pressures in the western part of London. A necessary prerequisite for such a development is the construction of a motorway spur from the M25 to the fifth terminal, proper railway links to Feltham and Iver, an extension of the underground system to the fifth terminal and improvements to the M4 and the A4, as well as the trunking of the Hayes bypass to which my hon. Friend for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) will no doubt allude if he is fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Many people are worried about the potential noise impact of such an increase in capacity at Heathrow, but we should not be too alarmed. The inspector sets out good figures to prove the point, as do British Airways, and they explain that the introduction of new noise regulations at the begining of next year for British-registered aircraft and at the begining of 1987 for most foreign-registered aircraft will mean that the noise nuisance, which is such a worry to many local residents, will diminish, even if the passenger throughput at Heathrow is dramatically expanded.

Mr. Jessel : Does my hon. Friend appreciate that it is not just the peak loudness of each flight but the frequency and number of flights—already 750 per day—which distresses so many people? I might also point out that the runways go east and west whereas my hon. Friend's constituency is to the north of Heathrow——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes and he is now trying to nick someone else's.

Mr. Wilkinson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not think that intervention was really worthy of my hon. Friend. I have always supported full use of Heathrow, just as I supported the full use of regional airports when I represented the constituency of Bradford, West. I still support the expansion of regional airports. The expansion of Heathrow should be seen as part of an overall strategy. It has not been made sufficiently clear in the debate that the future of many regional airports is directly tied up with the future of Heathrow. The feeder services which run from the regional airports into Heathrow to interline with international services are vital to the survival of many of the regional airports. I think that the inspector is broadly right when he says that there is only marginal potential for alleviation of demand through the expansion of regional airports. That is not to say that the regional airport expansion should not take place. There is a manifest case for it on grounds of regional development and equity, on economic grounds and on air transport grounds, but we should not delude ourselves that it will make all that much difference.

For all those reasons, I believe that from about 1995 we shall need a further expansion of the fifth terminal across the western perimeter road to the ground now covered with market gardens. I believe that is the most sensible strategy. Forecasts must always allow a margin for error. The inspector has made very generous allowance for error. His projection is way above the mean between the lowest and highest estimates of future demand. The CAA's own figures in document CAP 502 show that up to 1995, even with the present confines of Stansted, the additional demand that the inspector envisages for the south-east airports can be met. If Luton airport is developed up to 10 million passengers per year, as my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) suggests, and if Heathrow is used to the full with a fifth terminal and 53 million passengers per year, it will be possible to meet the demand planning value given by the inspector for the year 2000 with Stansted handling only 5 million passengers per year.

Before we unnecessarily despoil the most beautiful countryside around Stansted I hope that we shall do everything possible to maximise the use of Heathrow. It is not beyond the wit of man to provide alternative sewerage facilities to those at the Perry Oaks site. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds was absolutely right about that. I believe that such an overall strategy could provide the basis for a consensus on which the Government, the Opposition and the country could unite. It is for this reason that I put it to the House. For this same reason, too, I am pleased that we are not making it a party matter in the Division Lobby. I believe that we should express the view that, with future demand projections so uncertain, it would be quite wrong to commit ourselves, in effect, to putting a Gatwick, with 15 million passengers per year, or, by the mid-1990s, the virtual equivalent of today's Heathrow, in the exquisite and unspoilt countryside of Essex. My hon. Friends and I believe that would be wrong and we shall seek to express the view in the Division today.

8.58 pm

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): The Secretary of State, in opening the debate, referred to the extreme delicacy of his position, a phrase which one can well appreciate from one who finds himself poised so awkwardly on the horns of a dilemma.

The House is invited tonight to give its verdict on the inspector's proposal for a massive expansion of Stansted and for a huge investment of resources in the south-east of England. Such a development in my belief is undesirable and unnecessary, and would represent a most un-cost-effective use of national resources.

The inspector betrays his own south-east bias in the concern which he expresses about the possibility that, were there to be major expansion of regional facilities, people from the south-east might conceivably have to go to Manchester to take an aeroplane, yet he takes little account of the plight with which so many northerners have been confronted and remain confronted and, if the inspector has his choice, will for ever more be confronted: that they have no choice when they want to go abroad but to interline via Heathrow or one of the European transit points.

Although Manchester is the greatest city in the United Kingdom outside the capital, there are no more than 20 foreign destinations to which one can fly direct from Manchester. On some of those flights there are restricted traffic rights and many of them are scheduled only one day a week.

What we in the north are battling against is the concept so admirably displayed by the latest British Caledonian advertisement which, for the benefit of those hon. Members who do not travel regularly through Manchester airport, I read:

"Manchester—London—one stop—the world".

It is to this precisely that we in the north object. Why do we have to go via London in order to get to the world? Although I have the greatest respect for Sir Adam Thompson and for his admirable airline, which I use

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regularly, the advertisement epitomises the problem with which we in the north-west are confronted, that we have to travel via London or one of the European Community countries to get anywhere.

This is an outdated syndrome which has been dead and buried for 15 years in the United States. There was a time—people have forgotten it—when one could not get anywhere in the United States without going via what used to be called Idlewild, now JFK. Anybody with any sense travelling now to a destination on the west coast, the south or the mid-west will go many miles out of his way to avoid the horrors of JFK and the eastern seaboard airfields.

Exactly the same attitude has developed among northerners who, although we recognise that at present we are forced to interline, will interline more regularly via foreign airports—Schiphol, Zurich, Charles de Gaulle—in order specifically to avoid Heathrow airport.

The huge numbers of passengers from the north have no choice at present. I was intrigued that the BAA should have let the cat out of the bag in its earlier propaganda for the debate which took place in the House before Christmas. It proudly paraded the fact that no less than 80 per cent. of the passengers coming through the London area airports wish to do business in London or the south-east. However, the flip side of that coin is that no less than 20 per cent. of passengers have no wish to go anywhere near the London area airports. The latest figures for 1984 show that the figures on which the inspector based his report are entirely outdated. At present it is not 20 per cent. who do not want to go near London area airports but 29 per cent., an increase of 45 per cent. on the figure on which the inspector based his decision.

Nearly 15 million travellers from the regions who have no wish to pass through London have to do so. That is the equivalent of the entire throughput of Gatwick airport. It is estimated that that 15 million will have increased to 25 million by the end of the decade. In consequence, the London area airports are unnecessarily congested. This in turn leads to demands and fatuous proposals such as we have had from the distinguished inspector, the only effect of which will be to aggravate the situation whereby northerners are unable to travel from their local airports and more and more people are encouraged to go through London. The extent to which people are interlining via other terminals might not be readily appreciated in London.

We have heard the suggestion that if we restrict growth at Stansted people will use other European airports. Many northerners are doing precisely that. Business men wanting to fly to Hong Kong from Manchester will go to Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Dublin or Paris to avoid Heathrow.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Is it not hopeful that in the autumn people will be given the opportunity to fly direct to Hong Kong from Manchester with British Airways?

Mr. Churchill: Yes. I warmly welcome that. It is long overdue. At present people are more likely to use Swissair and travel via Zurich which gets them to Hong Kong two hours sooner than flying British Airways via Heathrow.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) that, far from there not being the demand in the north-east or the north-west, in 1981—thanks to Sir Freddie Laker—no fewer than 11 DC10s a week flew between Manchester and the United States. Three flew to Los Angeles, four to Miami and four to New York city. Today there are no such flights.

I am delighted that British Airways is planning a three-times-a-week service as from the autumn this year. We shall then be served about one quarter as well as we were by Sir Freddie Laker's airline before he was done down.

I have three suggestions for my right hon. Friend. Will the Government develop positive policies to the maximum to ensure that regional demand is satisfied? That must mean a major expansion of Manchester and other regional airports, and abandoning plans for major developments at Stansted. Secondly, will my right hon. Friend give the BAA its marching orders? Will he make it clear to it that the predatory pricing in which it is indulging at Stansted by subsidies from Heathrow and Gatwick is unacceptable? As an example I cite the cost of landing a jumbo jet at three airports. At Heathrow the cost is £4,930, at Manchester £3,908 and at Stansted £1,071—barely one quarter of the economic charge that has to be made in Manchester. As a direct consequence Manchester has lost at least one regular far east freight flight. It has now gone to Stansted. The massive volume of freight which goes by road to London is ludicrous. Some goes on roll-on/roll-off ferries to Amsterdam and elsewhere. But half the freight delivered to Manchester airport is sent by road to Heathrow for onward transmission.

Finally, I suggest to my right hon. Friend that he ought to reconsider the Bermuda 2 agreement and adopt a liberal policy towards foreign airlines. If need be, he should take British Airways and British Caledonian by the scruff of the neck and make it clear to them that their dog-in-the-manger attitude towards those who are seeking traffic rights out of Manchester and the regional airports must change. Those hon. Members who represent Manchester constituencies and constituencies elsewhere in the north of England will not accept what is believed to be an undesirable, unnecessary diversion of resources to a misconceived project in the south-east.

We demand that the Government should take full account of the case for Manchester. Until Manchester becomes the second international gateway of this country, I could not support any major development at Stansted.

9.12 pm

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): Stansted has been an issue for many years. However, it is only during the last three or four years that it has come to a head. There is a strong belief, which cuts right across party lines, that the Stansted proposals will not benefit Britain in any way. We are referring not just to an airport but to the infrastructure that would be needed. Very considerable investment would be involved. Roads, sewers, rail services, houses, and schools would have to be provided, and they would cost many hundreds of millions of pounds. We believe that massive expenditure of this kind ought to be invested somewhere other than in the south, as is consistently the case. This should take place, not just because of the expenditure that would be involved, but because of massive unemployment in the north. In the Stansted area, unemployment stands at about 9 per cent., yet in the north-east and the north-west of England unemployment stands at over 40 per cent. Because of this massive unemployment, money ought to be invested in the north.

Ministers have attempted on previous occasions to convince hon. Members that there is no alternative to Stansted: that if Stansted is not developed the traffic will go to Schiphol. It is not a convincing argument. Hon. Members of all parties have been critical of the theory that people would rather cross the English channel, involving additional expense, and travel to Schiphol than go to an airport in the north of England. I represent a Manchester constituency but this is not a Manchester issue. Hon. Members who represent northern constituencies recognise the very great importance of investing in Manchester airport.

This campaign has continued for three years. It can be said unstintingly that hon. Members of all parties readily recognise that if Britain has very limited resources at least some of its investment ought to be directed towards the north. Manchester is a most successful airport. We ought to pay tribute to the pioneers of the past who had the foresight in a new venture to invest in the early 1930s. The airport is now highly successful and operates at a profit. We are not asking for a handout. We want common justice; the Government's resources should be spent in a different area and not always in the southern counties.

Non-political bodies strongly support Manchester's case. Chambers of trade and chambers of commerce—hard-headed business men—recognise the advantages for Britain of redirecting money to the north. They urge strongly that money should be invested in Manchester airport. We are not considering only the future of Manchester airport. The European Community recognises that some of this country's gravest problems occur in the northern areas. The Community would have sympathy with those who press that investment should be directed to the north. No Government can ignore the problem of the regions. Yorkshire, Newcastle, Greater Manchester and Liverpool face serious economic difficulties.

The Government continually say that they want to expand the service industries because they have the potential to create wealth and jobs. What better investment could there be than money to attract business to the north, which would help tourism, the hotel trade and the catering and food industries? The north has many cultural attractions which would be interesting to foreign visitors. Too often, tourists fly into London and never visit any other part of the country. London is always complaining that it is becoming overused and overheated because of the strain put on its resources.

The north has some of the finest countryside in the world, yet it is underused. It is a resource that costs nothing and it is there for the taking for tourists who fly into the north. I do not make a case for Manchester alone. People who flew into Manchester would not necessarily stay in the city. They would go to other nearby areas. The Lake District, for example, is one of the most beautiful areas in the world.

People in the north often feel great resentment when their area does not get its share of investment. The Government could do something positive and invest money in the north. I shall be supporting the north when I vote tonight.

9.18 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): I have both a constituency and a personal interest in the debate. My constituency is immediately to the east of Heathrow, under the flight path, and my personal interest is that for six months I appeared at the airport inquiries representing the Greater London council—one of the comparatively few ventures in which the GLC supported declared Government policy.

A strand that has been picked up in many speeches is the case presented by the North of England Regional Consortium. There was a great deal of evidence given at the inquiries, which occupied the time of the inspector for about four years and about 250-odd working days at the inquiries. The evidence was examined in considerable detail by an inspector who declared himself to be basically sympathetic to the case being advanced. I must remind those who have relied upon the evidence that it was rejected by the inspector, who rejected also the criticisms of Government policy that were involved in the evidence. The inspector did not hesitate on many occasions to criticise Governments of both political colours. At page 28 of chapter 10 of the summary the inspector states:

> "Development of further services out of regional airports has not been hindered by any action or inaction on the part of Government which, in so far as it can influence the situation, is actively seeking to encourage the introduction of more services at airports in the regions."

That is a clear finding by the inspector that it is not Government action or inaction that has brought about the present position in respect of regional airports. He says that the solution lies principally in the hands of the air transport industry to recognise when demand appears in sufficient amounts at the airports. It is not that capacity which is lacking — indeed, many regional airports already have excess capacity. What is lacking is the perception of adequate demand on the part of the air transport industry.

One of the matters that has somewhat surprised me about the debate is the little amount of emphasis that has been placed upon runway capacity, which is one of the most important considerations for the Government in choosing between Stansted and a fifth terminal at Heathrow. At Heathrow, irrespective of whether the Government adhere to their intention to impose a limit on the number of air transport movements, the airport is now operating close to its capacity.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burtonwood) *rose*——

Mr. Ground: Approximately 275,000 air transport movements will take place at the airport this year.

Mr. Hayes *rose*——

Mr. Ground: The maximum capacity at present for practical purposes is between 300,000 and 305,000 air transport movements.

Mr. Bill Walker *rose*——

Mr. Ground: Therefore, there is a maximum, for practical purposes, of another 25,000 or 30,000 air transport movements with the present runway capacity. On the other hand, at Stansted—the figures that I have given are confirmed by the British Airports Authority——

Mr. Walker *rose*——

Mr. Ground: —and they are close to the figures put out by the Civil Aviation Authority. Members may have their own calculations and no doubt anyone who is interested in the airport has his own calculation of runway capacity. The 1982 figures tell us that at Stansted, with the

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existing runway, there were about 5,000 air transport movements. The finding of the inspector was that the capacity of the existing runway, with the development proposed of 15 million, would result in a capacity of no fewer than 165,000 movements.

In other words, there is that potential increase with the existing runway of 160,000 air transport movements. That must be a major consideration when contemplating an investment of several hundred million pounds, and the Government must have that important consideration in mind when making up their mind on the report.

Mr. Churchill: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that the CAA's estimate is for 330,000 air transport movements capacity at Heathrow airport?

Mr. Ground: That figure was in the report this summer. The BAA estimate is for between 300,000 and 305,000. But even if my hon. Friend is right to refer to a capacity of 330,000, the extra runway capacity beyond the current use is limited. It is an additional 55,000 movements, which compares unfavourably with the additional capacity available at Stansted.

It is all very well for my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) to refer to special orders to remove the Perry Oaks works, but not many hon. Members would be enthusiastic about the prospect of Perry Oaks being located in their constituencies. Indeed, it would be a draconian step to allow a sewage works on the scale of Perry Oaks, one of the largest in the country, to be relocated in the green belt, in an hon. Member's constituency, without a public inquiry and the normal safeguards.

If hon. Members think it is difficult to find a site for an airport, they will know that it is equally difficult to find a site that is acceptable for a sludge works on this scale. Any hon. Member not aware of that would soon discover it if the proposal affected his area. There was more than a week's evidence on that issue at the inquiry and, having heard it all, I believe that the inspector's estimate—that it would not be completed until the mid-1990s—could be optimistic.

I regard it as fantastic for my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds, after all the evidence has been given, to come forward with a quick solution. The fact that the project will take so long is plainly an important factor in the Secretary of State's eventual decision.

Two recommendations in the report involve a clear departure from Government promises—the proposal to abandon the 275,000 movement limit and the recommendation of the eventual construction of the fifth terminal —though I will not go in detail over the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins) and others who referred to Government promises about both those matters. The Government would commit a major breach of faith if they acccepted either of these recommendations.

A fundamental point behind the inspector's recommendations is the fact that there is a need to maximise existing investment at Heathrow. I remind the Government that the last and largest investment at Heathrow—the construction of terminal 4 — occurred in the full knowledge that there would be a 275,000 limit and that, on completion, no fifth terminal would be permitted. That was the basis on which that major investment occurred. I suggest that those who are responsible cannot in fairness now complain of the need to maximise their investment or previous investment further.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Ground: I must continue, because of the time.

The belief that people living under the flight path could not distinguish between 275,000 movements and 300,000 or more movements is one basis of the inspector's decision. Last week I told a meeting of my constituents that the inspector thought that they could not tell the difference between the 275,000 and 300,000 movements, and they were incredulous. They said, "Where does the inspector live?" When I said that he lived in Sussex, they thought that explained everything.

I assure the Government that the people living around Heathrow are extremely sensitive to changes in the method of operation of the airport and in the number of movements. I entirely support the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel). Further restrictions on night movement and a rail link would be welcomed, but one must emphasise for the people concerned the great importance of the effect of the number of movements. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham that the number of movements is one of the greatest irritants and nuisances to the people living around the airport and under the flight path.

The Government's promise to limit the number of movements and to restrict further development at Heathrow matters greatly to the people living around Heathrow who have relied upon that promise. I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to follow a course of sensible investment by applying the criteria of runway capacity, to which I have referred, by looking at the practicalities of the matter in terms of timing and by respecting the Government's clear unequivocal pledges.

9.33 pm

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): This debate is on one of those rare issues which, though controversial, cut right across party political loyalties. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on the way in which he presented the case not just for Manchester international airport but for the north. His speech was as good and balanced as the speech of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) was bad and unbalanced. To make a partisan political speech on a cross-party issue was an act of crass political ineptitude. The hon. Lady did her case and our case no service.

I declare an interest in this matter. I am one of three hon. Members — certainly the only Conservative Member—who have been members of the Manchester international airport committee. During the years before I became a Member I had the privilege of watching the growth of that airport and the pride of people in the north in that growth. That growth occurred not because of any Government direction or of any assistance from the British Airports Authority, British Airways or the Civil Aviation Authority — all of whom sought to thwart the development — but because of natural market forces. That reason should delight the hearts of Conservative Members.

One voice not yet heard in the debate is the voice of the consumer. The BAA pontificates about future demand and

tells us where the consumer will want to go. British Airways pontificates about where, in its opinion, the consumer wants to go. However, we have evidence of what consumers themselves want. Some consumers want to fly direct to London—to Heathrow. The solution is simple — build a fifth terminal. Many consumers, equally, want to fly to Manchester. That is evidenced by the growth of Manchester international airport. The solution again is simple—allow the airport to develop naturally. Some consumers may wish to fly to Stansted: so be it; allow Stansted to develop naturally. Why should Conservative hon. Members, of all people, be asked to deny natural market forces? That defies the logic upon which we were elected.

I am one of a fairly rare breed of politician. I am a Conservative Member from the north. A rarer politician is the Labour Member from the south. I say that, not to score some dubious or spurious point over Opposition Members, but to emphasise the fact that there is a north-south divide which grows wider and wider. The political and economic division of our country is something of which we in this House should feel ashamed.

We constantly hear, from some hon. Members on these Benches, reference to the philosophy of one nation. If we believe in that philosophy, it is time that we started to practise it. I often look with envy at my colleagues from Scotland and consider how much time they are given in which to fight for their case. I do not begrudge them that time. I look with equal envy upon my colleagues from Wales who can further their causes in a similar manner. All too often, in the early hours of the morning, I look with great annoyance and equal envy at those from Northern Ireland who are able to occupy the time of the House for hour after hour. The real Cinderella of the House is the north of England. Hon. Members representing the north lose out time and time again in the opportunities afforded us to present our case.

The solution to the problems of the airline industry in Great Britain is obvious. We propose to deregulate the bus industry. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Secretary of State for promoting that policy. We deregulate this and deregulate that, but we neglect to deregulate fares, routes and licences in the airline industry.

The international airline passenger traffic is organised in a cosy cartel between national Governments and national airlines. The arrangement is just as much opposed to the interests of the consumer as is the rigging of oil prices by the member countries of OPEC. If we condemn OPEC for operating a cartel against the interests of the consumer, we should be just as vociferous in our criticism of the national airlines, which, to an equal extent, operate against the interests of the consumer. None is more guilty of that than British Airways. Its record is disgraceful.

About four weeks ago, I was abroad with a member of the Government. We travelled on a charter flight from Gatwick to Zurich and the return ticket cost £59·50. Because of urgent Government business, he had to fly back early on a scheduled flight. For a single ticket on a scheduled flight from Zurich to Gatwick he was charged £180. When that Minister complained to me, I could do no more than remind him that he is the Minister responsible for privatisation. Perhaps he will now practise what he preaches.

The House has been given many statistics, and I should like to give two more. One illustrates Manchester airport's natural growth in spite of the obstacles. There were 100 per cent. more charter flight passengers last year than five years ago. For the same period, there was only a 2 per cent. growth in the number of passengers on scheduled flights. Those statistics invite the question: why? The answer is obvious. Charter flights are unfettered by regulations while scheduled flights are at the whim of the CAA. It is virtually impossible for a scheduled airline to fly to Manchester, as is evidenced by British Airways' opposition to Singapore Airlines. United States airlines have met similar opposition because they are not part of the Bermuda agreement.

I give the second statistic to refute the spurious argument that everyone who flies to the United Kingdom wants to go to London. There is no evidence to substantiate that view. According to the British Tourist Board, 2·5 million United States citizens flew to London last year. One third of that number then visited the north. Why could they not fly to the north in the first place? I have not yet heard a sensible answer to that question except that there are vested interests determined not to be broken although that might be in the interests of consumers and the north.

At 12 midnight I shall go into the Division Lobby to register my opposition to the inspector's report. If the Government believe in the free market, let there be a free market and a free vote in the House when we have to make a decision.

9.43 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) was worried on two counts: first, that there are too many flights into Heathrow, and, secondly, that there is a problem associated with getting rid of the sewage works. May I inform him that the people of Greater Manchester are only too willing to have the extra flights but do not want the sewage works. The trouble is that the deal usually works out so that people in the north of England get the sewage works and others get the flights. We want a much better deal.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) might believe firmly in free market forces, but his choice of Manchester airport as an example was unfortunate. He should know from his service on Manchester city council that it was the enterprise of that council and, more recently, the Greater Manchester council that did much to develop the airport. Almost all hon. Members who have spoken in favour of the north-west argued that we need more assistance from the Government if that airport is to develop and become more successful. The case for the north-west has been forcefully presented to the House, and I hope that the Minister will take note of it. I slightly regret the fact that there has not been as much emphasis in favour of pump-priming and development in other regions, such as the north-east, Yorkshire and Scotland.

Developments at Manchester airport have done a great deal to increase job opportunities both in services provided at the airport and in firms, which realise that by setting up offices and service depots in the Greater Manchester area they have access to the whole of western Europe. In my constituency several firms are now able to serve the whole of western Europe from a base in Tameside or Stockport. Such places are probably as efficient as any others in the United Kingdom and, probably, in Europe. I hope that the Government will do all they can to encourage that development.

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

The time spent at an airport is extremely important for firms which are sending out service engineers or spare parts. The speed with which people and equipment can be handled through Manchester airport is impressive. One cannot begin to compare the speed of arriving at Manchester airport, hiring a car and reaching the motorway with the problems at Heathrow. It is much faster via Manchester.

The hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) said that there was no sense in encouraging people to fly from Manchester to Heathrow and then to a European destination, and that the sensible thing was to make it possible for them to fly directly from Manchester to an increasing number of European destinations. The slowness of progress through Heathrow means that most regular travellers to Europe from Manchester prefer to change anywhere but at Heathrow. Therefore, it is in our interests to give people the opportunity to fly directly to their destinations rather than to interline somewhere else in Europe.

Heathrow will not be able to meet the needs of travellers to interline at Heathrow. The more terminals, the longer one will spend moving from one to another. Regular travellers find the time spent moving round an airport particularly frustrating. There are now sufficient people in the north-west who want to fly direct to European destinations. The Government should give every encouragement to getting direct flights from Manchester to those destinations. They should not insist that people take the shuttle to Heathrow.

One of the major problems for Manchester airport is that many people do not appreciate how easy it is to reach it. It annoys me when I wait at the airport to hear people expressing surprise about how easy it was to reach the airport. From most of the northern part of Britain it is easier to reach Manchester than Heathrow. It is sad that so many people still assume that Heathrow is easier to reach than Manchester.

A rail link into Manchester airport would break that psychological barrier and improve communications further. As the railway is within two miles of the airport, it is scandulous that the Government have provided money to develop rail links and improve communications to all the southern airports but not for the rail link to Manchester airport. I say firmly to the Minister that if he wants to convince people in the north of England that he believes in Manchester airport he must make sure that money is available for the rail link.

I have a slight fear that British Rail's heart is not fully in that rail link because it still sees itself in competition with the airlines for travel to London. Certainly the most recent British Rail advertising campaign is an attack on the shuttle service. That is shortsighted of British Rail. If it were to encourage the link by putting up the money or getting the Government to do so, more people would want to use the railway into Manchester and it would gain more passengers than it would lose to the shuttle service.

I hope that the Minister will listen to the voices that have been raised in the House today arguing that money should be spent in the regions rather than in the south-east. In particular, the Government should put up the money quickly for the rail link into Manchester airport.

9.50 pm

Mr. John Whitfield (Dewsbury): We have heard many interesting speeches tonight, many of them expressing sectional interests of one sort or another, but my heart bled when I heard my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) complaining about the likely effects on the quality of life of his constituents of the establishment of a fifth terminal at London airport.

Twickenham has the jobs and the money that the airport provides. The people there are lucky enough to live in the M4 corridor, which is often referred to as the golden triangle of the nation. They have the convenience of a major airport on their doorstep. I understand that the value of houses in Barnes and Richmond is as high as anywhere in London. Yet my hon. Friend comes to the House and says that we must worry about the quality of life of his constituents.

My hon. Friend's constituents are a little naive if, living on the borders of the world's No. 1 international airport, they think that that airport will not be jealous of that position and seek to maintain it. I hope that I may be forgiven for saying that they are also somewhat naive if they believe the solemn and binding undertakings of politicians.

I had intended to say quite a bit this evening about the British Airports Authority, but scorn has been poured on its head from both sides of the House and it ill-behoves me to add to it. However, let me urge on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a point relating to the cross-subsidisation which is practised between Heathrow and Stansted. My right hon. Friend will soon be urging upon the House legislation on buses, which I for one completely support. We shall hear many arguments from the Government Benches about the evils of cross-subsidisation. I see no reason why the same principle should not apply in the aircraft industry as in the bus industry.

Until my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) spoke in his forthright manner, little had been said about tourism. There are many tourists in London. If we are to worry about the qualities of life, one should remember that those qualities are considerably eroded for at least nine months of the year in London. The number of tourists in the city and around about, particularly in the city of Westminster, amount to a public nuisance. The hotels are full and the theatres are packed, often with philistines who do not know the difference between a good play and a bad one. We have already heard that one third of the people who are forced to fly to the south-east have no desire to visit it. If we have to suffer the blue rinse route—I know that there are currency and other advantages to be obtained from it—there is no reason why it should not start at Manchester rather than at Stansted or Heathrow.

The regional tourist boards are well equipped to cope with any number of tourists. My own regional tourist board, Yorkshire and Humberside, has produced a magnificent brochure, which I have just read. It has almost persuaded me to take my holidays in Yorkshire, which I have not done for a long time. If it has that effect on me, surely it could lure tourists from the North American continent to the north of England. Surely they could be persuaded to visit York minster just as easily as they could be persuaded to visit Westminster; the Castle museum in York is just as much of an attraction as the British museum

and the Humber bridge as Tower bridge. Many American tourists have already done London once. Statistics show that they are spending less and less time in London.

I am surprised that so little reference has been made in the debate to the position paper which British Airways issued on 15 January. It is clear from appendices A and B of that document that British Airways itself has many reservations about Stansted. I shall not waste the time of the House by reading quotations from that paper, but I urge my right hon. Friend to study it, if he has not already done so. It is clear from the document that British Airways, our major flag carrier, is reluctant to use Stansted and believes that if the regional airports, Heathrow and Gatwick, were properly utilised, the need for Stansted would be at the very least a buffer, a contingency to fall back on.

As always, it is the convenience of the indigenous air traveller which seems to be the last consideration in matters such as this. I was interested to hear my right hon. Friend say when opening the debate that airports and air travel should serve the public. I urge him to remember that it is the public who live in this country who are to be served. The principal objective of the British Airports Authority should not simply be to launder the international air traffic which passes through London airport. That must be a secondary consideration.

My right hon. Friend should not turn his back on the north. He should resist the self-interested representations of the institutions of the airline industry. Any further concentration of charter air travel in the south-east will be extremely divisive. There is no overwhelming evidence of a need to develop Stansted. The airlines themselves are reluctant to go there. Regional airports can and should take up any excess demand. The fact that Mr. Graham Eyre, about whom many kind things have been said today, says in a rather pompous manner that the regional airports should not help out with the problem in the south-east is abominable. It shows the southern bias of the man, and we have heard that he lives in Sussex. [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful".] It is not disgraceful.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to think very carefully before committing large amounts of unproductive Government expenditure to developing Stansted. If following my advice and the advice of so many other hon. Members means that Mr. Graham Eyre occasionally has to travel to Manchester to take an international flight, so much the better—it may broaden the man's mind.

9.59 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Having been straining at the leash for some time, I am grateful for being released from the starting gate——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister for the Adjournment of the House may be proceeded with, though opposed, until Twelve o'clock. — *[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

Mr. Thompson: I wish to support my hon. Friends the Members for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) and for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) and the many others who have spoken so ably against any significant expansion of Stansted airport. My views on this are coloured by three factors, which do not include my recent experience as a member of the Standing Committee on the Civil Aviation Bill. My boyhood was spent in north Essex, my early career was spent in the north of England, where I also stood as a parliamentary candidate, and I now represent a more northern and remote part of East Anglia.

My experience as a boy in Essex can be summed up very briefly. I was brought up in an area that includes not just Stansted but Thaxted and Finchingfield, which is regarded as the most beautiful village in Essex. It is quite wrong that anyone should ever have considered a major expansion of Stansted airport, because the case against such a development in that area is extremely strong on environmental grounds alone. It is amazing that the matter should have been under debate for so long. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said today that we must make a decision very quickly. Labour Ministers said the same in 1965. Why has no decision been taken in 20 years? It is because Stansted is the wrong place for such an expansion and the wrong place for a third London airport.

I also have strong links with the north of England and am glad to support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) and of Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who rightly pointed out the real and increasing divide between north and south. They should recognise, however, that this serious problem results from wrong decisions by Labour Governments as well as more recent decisions which they seek to criticise. Any opportunity consistent with the Government's economic strategy, which I support, to redress that imbalance between north and south must be grasped eagerly.

I have not tangled very deeply with the inspector's report, but I note that he refers to the North of England Regional Consortium as a leap of faith, but it is clear from the report that any decision to expand Stansted would be an even greater and more suspect leap of faith, especially in view of the environmental implications and the urgent need for improved communications in the area to make such a development possible at all.

Once a week I travel up the Whitechapel road, the M11 and—I hesitate to mention this again in the presence of the Secretary of State for Transport — the A11 to Norfolk. I am being given signals to get off the subject quickly. Those of us who drive up the Whitechapel road, through Leytonstone and up the M11, realise what foolishness it would be to have a large London airport sitting next door to the M11. As the Member of Parliament for Norwich, North—and I have an interest to declare because Norwich airport is situated in my constituency —I have to consider this matter in any judgment that I may wish to make in a debate.

In fairness, I should point out that in Norfolk there are mixed views on the question of Stansted airport. I know that it is the policy of Norwich city council and of Norfolk county council to oppose in principle any large-scale development of Stansted airport. They wish, rightly, to encourage the development of Norwich airport to serve the needs of the region. In my view, this must mean modest development for Norwich airport with a view to encouraging further business and tourism activity in

[Mr. Thompson]

Norfolk and East Anglia generally. This will surely help to preserve and increase job opportunities not only in my constituency but in neighbouring Norfolk constituencies.

To take just one example from my constituency, many people in Norwich are employed by the airline Air U.K. Ltd. I have their interests very much in mind when I come to any judgment in the debate.

I appreciate that the Government and the Secretary of State have in mind the encouragement and development of regional airports such as Norwich. The nub of the case that we are considering surely is that the inspector in his summary says:

"The growth of passenger demand will continue into the foreseeable future. In so far as that demand arises in the south east, it should be met by the provision of additional capacity within the region."

With respect, I regard that as a non sequitur if ever there was one. As an ex-schoolmaster, I know that the demand for entry into Oxford university—or perhaps I should say Cambridge university tonight—is ever-increasing, but it does not follow that everybody will go to that university.

The Stansted question has gone on for far too long. We have all been subjected to an endless flow of statistics, circulars and so on. I believe that we must encourage increased activity and prosperity where there is room and people want it. If we change the rules by defeating the Stansted idea once and for all, the market will adapt and there will be benefit for all the regions.

Today we have a chance to end the pressure for Stansted that has been going on for 30 or more years and the pressure for ever more development in the south-east at the expense of the north. We have the opportunity to end the pressure for any south-east inland airport which will be to the detriment of people who live in these areas. We know, and have heard tonight repeatedly, that the case for Stansted expansion is weak. We know that it is wrong. Let us take this chance to make that clear once and for all.

10.8 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I have great sympathy with the view expressed by the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) and I shall do my best to respond to it briefly because I believe that, especially in his latter remarks, he made an appeal to the House that we should consider carefully.

I believe that any hon. Member who participates in a debate should do his best to listen to the speeches that are made from the Government and Opposition Front Benches at the beginning of the debate. I have followed this rule in almost every debate in the House in which I have participated. It so happens that I did not hear the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) or the Minister, for which I apologise. [*Interruption*]. If hon. Members listened, they would understand why I wish to intervene. I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, would not have called me if I were not entitled to take part. All hon. Members, if they possibly can, should listen to the opening speeches from both sides of the House. I say to Government Members, who apparently are irritated that anyone from the Opposition should speak in such terms, that I have participated in more debates on these matters than—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Foot: We had a debate on Stansted in 1968 or 1969 in which I participated and on which we voted. The Labour Government were proposing to proceed to build an airport at Stansted, although their proposal was tentative. The House was full and the vote was large. There were many differences of opinion and I was dubious about the case put from the Treasury Bench by Anthony Crosland on behalf of the Department of the Environment. As always, he made an extremely powerful case, but a few of us were not convinced by it. I have a strong recollection of the debates in the House on this subject. In that Parliament the Government majority was considerably narrower than it is today and therefore the way in which hon. Members voted was of more decisive consequence.

Not because of the failure of Anthony Crosland to present his case—he always did that well—but because of what I believed to be the de-merits of the case, I was not prepared to support the Labour Government on that occasion. I listened carefully to those who put the case against the extension of the airport at Stansted and I thought that their case was powerful. They have a powerful case today, which is why I intervene now.

I agree with the hon. Member for Norwich, North. I think that it would be valuable for the country as a whole if we could kill off here and now the whole idea of a large extension of Stansted. I shall be happy to vote to achieve that result at the end of our discussions, and I hope that as many hon. Members as possible will help to secure that result. Stan Newens, who knew the area well, would not vote for the Government, who were then supporting the idea of extending Stansted. I took the same view. One of the reasons why even so long ago we were so opposed to the proposition concerned, of what would happen to many towns and villages. If the plan for the expansion of Stansted had been carried through, it would have caused the wrecking of many communities.

Some hon. Members today have put their case strongly and I respect their case. Many towns and villages in Essex and elsewhere will be wrecked if the plan goes ahead. We have to be careful about doing that. I hate to vote for the wreckage of such communities. I only wish that some hon. Members who are so passionate in defending communities around Stansted were equally passionate in defending the communities around Abertillery and Ebbw Vale. Exactly the same kind of community spirit is involved.

I do not suppose that any hon. Member who tries to put the case against the Government's proposals will mock the community spirit of all the towns and villages that are to be found around Stansted. Those people are defending their communities. They cannot bear the idea of their communities being uprooted and wrecked unless it is for an absolutely paramount national purpose. The same community spirit exists in Abertillery, Blaenau, Nantyglo and all the towns and villages that contain mining communities. Perhaps some of those who so strongly defend the rights of the inhabitants of towns and communities in that part of England will also defend the rights of the inhabitants of communities that depend upon the mining industry.

So at least I am consistent. That is why, when the matter was posed some 20 years ago, I found it very difficult to go into the Lobby and say, "Let us vote for it, irrespective of the consequences for all those towns and villages". There is always a difficult and awkward balance to be struck. Some communities have to be uprooted and sacrificed to the national interest, but it ought to be done

with the utmost care and reticence. There have been reports by inspectors, it is true, but I have seen inspectors' reports that do not pay very much regard to these important considerations. I do not say that all of those important considerations are neglected. A balance has to be struck. However, if many communities around Stansted would be wrecked by this proposal, we ought to be very careful before we vote for it. I shall not vote for it. Communities around Heathrow could make claims, too, but not quite the same claims.

The reason for the disturbance in the House tonight is the different balance of community representation. If anybody jeered at me at the beginning of my speech for getting up to speak on the matter, I would say to them that I have spoken before on the matter and that I shall always examine the possibilities for preserving communities that are fighting for their rights. Those hon. Members who have spoken on behalf of such communities are doing just that. I do not believe that the hopes and the rights of those communities should be killed off by one vote tonight. That cannot be done. Indeed, so strong is the case against the extension of Stansted that if sufficient Conservative Members were to vote in the Aye Lobby with the Opposition the proposal would be killed off. That would be a good day not only for Stansted but for the House of Commons.

However, I read in the newspapers that the Government propose to deal with the matter in a very different way. A report in today's *Financial Times*—I am sure that all hon. Members agree that the *Financial Times* reporter is a most reliable political correspondent who tells the Government exactly what they are up to and what is going on—says:

"The Government has ducked the threat of a Tory revolt and a probable defeat in the establishment of a third London airport at Stansted. It has instructed Ministers and their parliamentary private secretaries not to vote when the issue is debated in the Commons tonight; and has put its back-benchers on a one-line whip—a tacit encouragement to abstain."

To deal with the matter in such a fashion is to demean the House of Commons. The Government must face up to these questions sooner or later. Why do they not face up to them now? Many Opposition Members have for many years conducted a campaign for the north-west in order to sustain the claims of Manchester, and, as we have seen tonight, many Conservative Members have put that case strongly.

The Government submitted to the demands for a debate and underlined its importance by agreeing that we should have an extra two hours so that more hon. Members could participate. For the Government then to say, "We shall make a mockery of the vote" is an insult not only to hon. Members who are interested in the subject but to the House. Adjournment debates are an important instrument for the House. Some of Parliament's most important debates have taken place on Adjournment motions. The Government have no right to say that they will not regard an Adjournment debate as a matter of importance and that Ministers will be told to stay away.

If the newspaper story is not true, I hope that it will be repudiated. The Minister who is to reply may tell us to wait and see how many Ministers vote. We shall count them. If all the Ministers vote—we know how obediently they turn up when they are required to do so—we shall know that the story is not true. However, if Ministers stay away, it will be a shameful treatment of the House by the Government and a special insult to hon. Members who have participated in the debate and pressed the case of their constituents with all the strength that they can.

It seems that some Conservative Members are irritated that I should be speaking in the debate. Apparently, they would rather debate the matter than win the issue. We would rather win the issue. We want to kill off Stansted. I was against it 20 years ago and I am against it now. If Conservative Members wish to assist us in killing off Stansted, they can vote with us, and if we achieve a substantial majority the Government will have to take account of what has been said.

If the Government try to pretend that the vote, which ever way it goes, is of no consequence, they will insult some Conservative Members, infringe the rules of the House and injure our possible ways of proceeding in the future. How can we have Adjournment debates if it is said that it does not matter which way they go?

Perhaps the most important parliamentary debate this century—the overthrow of the Chamberlain Government in 1940 — took place on an Adjournment motion. *[Interruption.]* I know that some hon. Members want to trivialise the debate and none more so than the Secretary of State for Transport, who will not last very long anyway. Any attempt by the Government to trivialise Adjournment debates will be injurious to the House. I invite all hon. Members who do not want to see the development of Stansted and want to uphold the rights of the House to vote with the official Opposition. That is the way to uphold the rights of the House.

10.23 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): It is a great pleasure to be called to participate in the debate after the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who is one of Parliament's great orators. I am sorry to say that on this occasion, as on others, the right hon. Gentleman allowed his emotions to overrun his appraisal of the mood of the House. I have great respect for the right hon. Gentleman and I happen to think that he is one of our distinguished parliamentarians. I am merely making the observation that, not for the first time, he has misjudged the mood of the House.

It is clear that the Eyre report is an important document. I believe that Mr. Graham Eyre has done Parliament and the country a great service by producing it. We have been given the opportunity to debate important and essential issues. There has been imput to the debate from almost every part of the country and I am delighted that I have been given the opportunity to make an imput to it from the most northern constituency that has featured in it.

No one can accuse me of having a direct interest in what is going on at Heathrow other than as a commuter from Scotland at least twice a week. However, I have an interest in aviation which I must declare at the outset. I have an interest in an airline company.

Airline companies respond to the needs of the market within operating restrictions, and it is the regulations that often present the problem. We have heard of the difficulties at Manchester airport, and I have intervened on one or two occasions to elicit some useful information. If we are to talk about free competition and the opportunity for customers to travel, we must examine the opportunities that are available to the airlines to provide a service. Unless the opportunities are open to the airlines, there is no prospect of them using our airports. On the other hand, if there are opportunities for the airlines because the regulations are so framed, we must consider why airlines do not want to operate out of certain airports. The usual reason is that the airlines are not convinced that it will be commercially viable for them to do so.

Observations have been made about charter operations and an attempt has been made to confuse them with scheduled operations. Scheduled flights have to be flown irrepective of whether the aircraft are full, whereas charter operators will not fly unless they have fully booked aircraft. That is the general pattern.

As a regular user of Heathrow airport, I recognise that Heathrow is the jewel in the crown of civil aviation in the United Kingdom. If we do not maximise the use of Heathrow airport, we are being foolish and doing a disservice to many of those who have spoken against development at Heathrow this evening. Unless Heathrow continues to meet the demands of the world's airlines and customers—that calls for giving them adequate facilities when they land because there is no point in having aircraft land there if the terminal facilities are inadequate and do not meet the needs of the customers — it will not prosper. I have believed for a long time that those who argue against the fifth terminal development have not taken on board the needs of the customers, and it is their needs that matter.

It is unfortunate that we have become bogged down in the air traffic movement limit, which I happen to believe is nonsensical. All the airlines would say that it is nonsensical as would the Civil Aviation Authority. There is plenty of scope for additional movements at Heathrow. It is true that at certain hours of the day the airfield is fully utilised, but at other times it is very much under-utilised. The answer lies in the slotting arrangements, which are made by the airlines. It is not known by many who debate these matters that it is the airlines which agree on which slot a particular airline will occupy.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the view of the airlines and the Heathrow scheduling committee that the airport's capacity is considerably more than 330,000 ATMs—nobody knows exactly—and that we should leave the airlines to come to a decision?

Mr. Walker: I agree. There is no doubt that the airlines and the national air traffic services which are responsible for the safe movement of aircraft agree that there is scope for additional ATMs at Heathrow. Of course, the prime consideration must be safety. That must be the only real consideration. Provided that it is safe to operate within certain limits, the maximum use should be made of Heathrow, the jewel in the crown.

There is scope at Gatwick for further development. It is wrong that we should be using the major runway there for commuter aircraft; there should be a commuter runway at Gatwick. I have been in small aircraft which have been stacked, waiting to come into Gatwick after heavier aircraft have landed, and that has been a frustrating experience. Let us develop Gatwick.

The whole Stansted issue must be considered sensibly and objectively. The runway and facilities are there and the terminal is coping with present demand. Stansted should be allowed to develop and evolve naturally, remembering that a substantial number of airlines want to go there. Hon. Members should note that the demand to use Stansted, particularly for charter operations, is increasing. That particularly applies to airlines from the eastern seaboard of the United States and elsewhere, and that interest should be allowed to develop.

Much has been said about Manchester airport, and I intervened earlier to refer to airlines which had authority to fly there but had not done so. At a given time in airline evolution, the economics may not make it practicable to use a licence to fly to an airport. We have lived through a period of intense difficulty when airlines, like everyone else, have had to face the economic problems resulting from the activities of the OPEC countries in the last 10 years.

As a result, there were times when airlines with licences did not use them because it would have stretched their liquidity to do so. That did not mean that scope did not exist for airlines to operate at those airports; simply that, at that time in their evolution, they did not have the capital to do so.

We are now entering a new era in airline and aviation activity and we should not look at the future in a blinkered way. Manchester airport has a great future and it should be a gateway to the north Atlantic and elsewhere.

It will not come as a surprise to hon. Members when I say that I am a great supporter of Prestwick. However, I shall not spend time tonight on that subject, other than to say that it is already a gateway. Those who ask why it is now coming back into use as a gateway should realise that that is happening because of the changing fortunes of the airlines. Things are improving, and I see opportunities ahead for them.

The Government must not muff this one. Never again must we be in the position of not being able to see a realistic future for the British airline and aviation industry. The Government should make the maximum use of Heathrow and Gatwick and allow Stansted to develop as the demand increases. That could mean an additional 5 million rather than 15 million passengers. Either way, there will be a demand to use Stansted because the runway and facilities are there and the airlines will want to use it.

Those who think that if we do not allow the development of Heathrow, including terminal 5, to take place—the commuter airlines will have access to that major airport — are kidding themselves. Unless we guarantee an increase in movements and increased facilities to meet that increase, airports throughout the country with commuter services going into Heathrow will face problems.

I therefore counsel those who have been discussing the issue from the narrow aspect of their local airports to remember that, whatever happens in the future, Heathrow will continue to be the jewel in the crown and the magnet and that we shall want our commuter aircraft to use that airport.

10.34 pm

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): One of the great mysteries to me has been the fact that during the past 20 years the most consistent piece of Government policy—no matter which party has been in power—has been the desire to undertake the major expansion of Stansted airport. Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry, for the Environment or for Transport, after collecting their seals, after the kissing of hands ceremony and after leaving Buckingham palace, go back to the great white Lubianka in Marsham street and go through the secret, simple and moving ceremony of being given the documents dealing with a major expansion of Stansted airport.

It is right and proper that there should be passion in this debate from hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and, if he gets the opportunity, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), because they live in the area and have their constituents' interests at heart. I commend my hon. Friends for that. There are, however, many people in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) who have fought against the major expansion of that airport for 21 years. Promises have been made and broken by successive Governments. It is right that Stansted airport's expansion, which seems to behave like some great unslaked vampire, should finally be laid to rest this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths), in a forceful and perceptive speech, made it clear——

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I just want to explain the mystery to the hon. Gentleman. Does he not realise that there are civil servants who have these plans in little cubby holes and, when they find a Minister stupid enough to take them out and make them his own, they are presented to the House of Commons as Government policy?

Mr. Hayes: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I shall say no more on that matter. I understand what he says.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds rightly said that long-term passenger predictions had been horribly wrong. There is no reason why the figures put forward by the inspector will be wrong as well. It would be foolish to deny that there will be an increase in passenger demand in the next few years, but we should not forget that it would be a grave mistake to expand Stansted airport, to the detriment of the environment and of the people. We are talking about investment in the infrastructure worth about £716 million, about the British Airports Authority spending £1 billion in extending a terminal, and about extending a rail link at a cost of £170 million. All the time our Chancellor and our Government are telling us that we should be particularly worried and careful about the public sector borrowing requirement.

It is about time the Government grasped the nettle of understanding that we must have a consistent and coherent airport strategy and policy that will bring us fairly and squarely into the 21st century and beat off foreign competition. We should accept wholeheartedly the inspector's recommendation to expand terminal 5 immediately. Let it be expanded to take 53 million passengers, but at the same time let Stansted be allowed to expand naturally from 5 million to perhaps 6 million or 7 million passengers.

Ours is the Government of free competition. Where is the free competition at Stansted at the moment? The airport is heavily subsidised, but still loses £4 million a year. We are the party of free competition and market forces. Let us give the north a fair slice of the cake. We have not done so over the years. That is one of the reasons why I shall not vote with the Government this evening.

British Airways has made it clear that a major expansion of Stansted airport would be an economic disaster. The split-site operation would increase BA's operating costs by about 5 per cent. It would add £150 million a year to those operating costs.

Mr. Tim Smith: That is British Airways' problem.

Mr. Hayes: It is the taxpayers' problem, and it will be an even greater problem for the taxpayer because it will be a further shadow cast over the privatisation of the airline.

How will my constituency be affected in terms of jobs? The effect will be devastating. One of my largest electrical employers, who employs several thousand people, made it clear to the public inquiry that it would consider pulling out of the constituency. There would be a net loss of jobs, though we have heard about the mass migration of thousands of people into my constituency. The inspector talked about the urbanisation of Harlow. There are already only 14 acres of development land left. The housing list grows longer every day, yet the inspector talked of the possible substantial urbanisation of Harlow. He said that about 17,000 dwellings would have to be built in the area.

I understand the real fears of those hon. Members who have a constituency interest in terminal 5. However, what does the inspector say about noise? He says:

> "I am wholly satisfied that the development and operation of a fifth terminal would not have a perceptible effect on the noise climate in the Heathrow area. The development would not delay the improvement or rate of improvement in any way that would be discernible to those affected by Heathrow air noise."

The first message that should be brought home to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is one that was made to him forcefully in the CAA debate. The limitation

[Mr. Hayes]

on air traffic movements of 275,000 which the Government intend to impose at Heathrow is nonsense. It will make nonsense of terminal 4, and it will make terminal 5 utterly impossible. I am sure that many of my hon. Friends accept that, with the new microwave techniques, it is possible to have more than the 330 air traffic movements suggested in the CAA's revised figures.

As the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) said in a speech with which I wholeheartedly agreed, we must make it clear to the Government and the country that the House will not be ridden over roughshod. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction must realise that a number of hon. Members are dissatisfied with the present proposals and that a number of us will not allow our constituencies and our communities to be devastated.

10.43 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Because of the great importance of Manchester international airport, the Opposition's contribution to the debate has been dominated by my hon. Friends from the north-west of England. However, we do not mean to imply that the debate is about Manchester airport. It is about airport strategy and policy for the country as a whole.

We all accept that—as the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) rightly said — Heathrow will continue to be the centre of the United Kingdom's airports policy. Although we are defending our communities and their interests, we have a common cause with other northern airports such as Newcastle and Leeds-Bradford, Scottish airports such as Prestwick. The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes), he spoke with a clear constituency interest, but that is not incompatible with a national airports policy. We must have such a policy. That is what is so disappointing with the inspector's report. It is not an objective report about a national airports policy but one that is premised and predicated by pressure from the airline establishment, the CAA and the BAA, which have a strong vested interest in the development of Stansted.

The CAA was not designed as anything other than a regulatory body. That it should have chosen, 48 hours before the debate, to weigh in on the side of the inspector's report and Stansted calls into question its future and reputation. The report is premised by acceptance of the orthodoxies of the airline establishment. I pay tribute to the North of England Regional Consortium, which has made information freely available to all hon. Members. It is one of the few groups that has given us the opportunity to examine arguments that run counter to the report, the airline establishment and, it seems, the Secretary of State.

The report does not tackle some basic facts. There is no adequate discussion of the costs of developing Stansted. That should be compared with the Roskill report, which made a detailed examination of the cost structures then available. As to the evidence on which the inspector bases his report, I should like to quote from Colin Buchanan's pamphlet "Deadlock at Stansted". He writes:

> "The result of the Inspector's approach is strikingly illustrated by his own estimates of the future distribution of air travel. By 1995 the passenger through-put in London airports will be twice that of all the other UK airports put together. With a mere 17 million people living in the South East and 37 million elsewhere it sounds like forecasting gone mad".

He is right, because the inspector talks of 75 million movements in the south-east and only 36 million in the rest of the country. He is effectively telling people in the north, Scotland and Wales that they will either be denied the opportunity to travel through airports or will have to go through airports in the south-east. That is ridiculous and an insult to my constituents and those of many other right hon. and hon. Members.

The amount of capital required to develop Stansted is also unacceptable to those of us who do not represent the south-east. Even the minimal estimates of the inspector are for perhaps £500 million. The more realistic estimates of the North of England Regional Consortium reach £1·3 billion. We simply cannot accept so much investment going to the south-east. I do not want to deny the south-east of its share of public investment, but it would not be acceptable for such a massive development to go ahead in one region at a time of public expenditure restraint and directly at the expense of other regions. In Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow we need investment in housing, schools and the infrastructure. Such cities have housing crises and decaying sewers. They have a manifest need for investment both to create employment and facilities that are decaying. We could not, therefore, accept that investment.

Moreover, such investment would deny other airports their place in the airport structure of the United Kingdom. If Stansted is developed, it will guarantee that Manchester airport cannot be the gateway airport, about which even the Government Front Bench will refer to in glowing terms. Given massive airport development in the south-east, airlines will not allow their aircraft to fly into and out of the north of England.

We were willing to co-operate with British Airways recently about the CAA report. But British Airways has not been a friend to Manchester airport in the past. It has taken a defensive strategy and has known that it is safer to operate from the south-east. It was not prepared to experiment and to move to Manchester, where the commercial gain exists, but at a higher risk.

The north-east has passengers. Our catchment area represents 20 million people. I should be delighted to know what the Minister finds so amusing about the plight of Manchester airport. If he is listening, perhaps he would like to leap to his feet and explain. In the absence of any comment from him, I repeat that Manchester airport has a catchment area of 20 million people. That is as large as that in the south-east. The area deserves the third international airport, but not at the exclusion of developments in Leeds-Bradford, Speke or other regional airports. That would not be the case with the development of Stansted. If Stansted is developed, Manchester and all other regional airports would not have the necessary capital made available to expand.

The issue is important for the north-west, and it unites hon. Members from all regions. Hon. Members representing the south-east recognise the need for an airports policy, which will maintain the supremacy of the south-east as the centre of the air industry. But they recognise, as we do, the importance of allowing people who do not live within an hour of London the opportunity of an airport structure which serves their interests as consumers and in developing the economies of those areas.

10.53 pm

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I speak as the authentic voice of Heathrow airport because the entire

airport, including terminals 4 and 5, lie within my constituency. The development is vital to the well-being of my constituents because T4 will create about 20,000 jobs. Like my colleagues from the north on both sides of the House, I find it amazing that some of my hon. Friends, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), should be unconcerned about the creation of so many jobs and more concerned about the problems of noise.

As I understand it, all airlines want T5. Travellers coming to London want to arrive at Heathrow. I remind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of a comment he made to me when I suggested that some domestic movements could be moved from Heathrow elsewhere. He said:

"When people fly to London, they want to come to Heathrow, not Gatwick or Stansted."

I hope that he will bear that in mind when he comes to make some decisions.

Regional airports have an important part to play in the future of civil aviation. Being in favour of terminal 5 does not mean being opposed to regional expansion. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have rightly made the point about the need for the Government to take into consideration the north and its problems of unemployment and so on. I fully support a scheme that would allow for the expansion of Manchester and other northern airports alongside the development of terminal 5.

A third major airport at Stansted is not wanted. The Government should bear in mind that that strong view has been put forward during the seven hours of this debate. However, a marginal increase in traffic movements would be accepted by those who live in and around the area, but nothing more at this stage.

Terminal 5 is seen as providing the best solution for future additional airport capacity. The inspector saw terminal 5 as providing an opportunity on the best site anywhere in the United Kingdom for airport expansion to modernise and improve Heathrow's facilities. There will also be the increased prosperity throughout the area to which I have referred.

The inspector dealt fully and comprehensively with noise. He dismissed the arguments of the well organised and articulate anti-Heathrow noise lobby. One wonders how many of those people who complain about noise have moved into the area since Heathrow has developed at reduced house prices and now want to maintain the value of their properties. The inspector said that terminal 5 would not make a perceptible difference on either the level of noise or the rate of noise reduction in future. I fully agree with that.

The inspector also said that the 275,000 ATM limit was misconceived and ill-advised, and he produced substantial evidence to justify that view. Approximately 20,000 general ATMs at Heathrow could be moved immediately and I should like to see that happen straight away.

One wonders why the Government tried to introduce the Civil Aviation Bill to bring those movements in. My guess is that it had something to do with civil servants who seem to be controlling civil aviation and its policy developments in Britain. At times Sir Norman Payne could be substituted for the permanent secretary in the Department of Transport and nobody would notice the difference in the work done.

Infrastructure improvements are necessary in the Heathrow area whether or not terminal 5 is built and prior to the coming on line of terminal 4. The inspector supports the view of the Hillingdon borough council that the Hayes bypass should be built. He felt that it had a strategic role to play and should be given trunk road status or 100 per cent. funding from the Department of Transport. He went on to say that the Department's view as to why it should not be a trunk road or 100 per cent. funded was wholly unacceptable and he could not understand the reasoning or the lack of it.

The expansion of the Piccadilly line would make a real contribution to the access to Heathrow, and that was also supported by the inspector. As we have heard, British Rail is developing a junction at Iver station and a link from there to Heathrow is a possibility which could also make some contribution to solving the potential access problems of the airport.

Terminal 5 has the advantage that it could be financed by the airlines and would provide an attractive rate of return if Heathrow were to be privatised. That is also important in the context of the public expenditure aspects of the capital investment. Government capital investment would be modest but long overdue in the successful part of south-east England where public investment has not kept pace with the increase in economic development. The Government must bear that in mind when they make their decision.

I am pleased that the British Airports Authority has suddenly come round to being in favour of terminal 5. If or when terminal 5 comes on line, we must ensure that the dirty hands of the BAA are kept away from it. It created chaos when it organised the operation of terminal 4. The people who want to use terminal 4 have not been consulted about the layout. The concessionaires on the car hire side have been told that they will have small kiosks where only one person will be able to work and where they will not be able to use their computers.

The British Airports Authority is not interested in the problems. When I wrote to my hon. Friend the Minister of State about some of the problems, I am sure that the reply I received was written by civil servants. It defended the British Airports Authority's view and suggested that the authority was doing a damn fine job. It is an appalling organisation and it is about time someone investigated its operation. I understand that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission will be doing so in the not-too-distant future; it is long overdue. There has been very little consultation between it and anyone else about any airport that it controls anywhere.

The development of terminal 5 must be put in train immediately. That means giving all the planning consents necessary to get it off the ground. Regional airports can be expanded along with terminal 5. Neither is mutually exclusive. The south-east does not need a major third airport. The development of terminal 5 calls for infrastructure improvements along the lines I have suggested.

11 pm

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): Those of us who are in favour of regional airport development are delighted because nobody has been against their development. We were delighted to hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say in his opening remarks that it is the Government's desire to bring air travel within the reach of

[Mr. Malcolm Thornton]

more people. The most effective way of doing so is to bring it within their reach literally by letting us have the option to expand the regional airports.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) referred to those who are opposing regional airports. I do not believe that anybody is. What we are concerned about is that many decisions that have been taken seem to frustrate actively the growth of regional airports. That is what a fundamental part of the debate is about.

There is a chicken and egg situation. We say that there is a demand for the development of regional airports. How can we test the demand if policies seem to work against regional airports going out and capturing the market that they say exists? In its press release of 17 January British Airways said:

> "We are committed to introducing international services from regional airports whenever there is enough customer demand to make them viable. We know from our surveys that Manchester is the main candidate for our second international hub, and now that Government aviation policy has been finalised, we are pressing ahead as fast as possible."

That airline, which has actually tested the market, is saying to the Government, "Give us the opportunities; we will provide the services because we believe that the demand exists." We are asking for a fair deal so that we can test the market for regional development.

I want to refer to the frustration that we have experienced at Liverpool airport. I do not pretend that it can ever be the sort of airport that we hope Manchester airport will become. It will play a complementary role. One of the areas for expansion has to be the charter market. An important part of the package is the duty-free facility. Whenever we have asked Government for a duty-free facility to enable us to market Liverpool, they have moved the goal posts. They said we should have 50,000 passengers; we got 50,000. They upped it to 70,000; we got 70,000. Then they upped it yet again to 100,000. What price the encouragement of regional airports policy? If my right hon. Friend wants to encourage regional airports to expand, the Government must give them the means to test the market and attract customers.

The debate is about more than airport policy; it is about the north-south tilt. It is about the effect of a massive development at Stansted on regional development, on investment and on the commitment of Government resources. It is about the damage that will be done to the chances of the regional economies picking up in what will be a difficult period for us all in attracting investment.

The Government must strike a balance between a viable future policy for airports and airlines and the right economic balance for the regions. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State not to disregard those two important elements of the equation. We in the north-west and the north will not lightly forgive a Government who make a decision which will make it difficult if not impossible for us to attract the investment which we believe would be diverted if the expansion of Stansted were to go ahead. That message is coming to us loud and clear from chambers of commerce and business men in our areas. I urge my right hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Cabinet to take that message on board. This is perhaps the most important decision that we as north-west Members will be called upon to take in our lifetimes. I urge the Government not to ignore our message.

11.7 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I am grateful for this opportunity to express the views of the north-east group of Members. I intend to be brief, and I apologise for the fact that other parliamentary duties prevented me from attending the whole debate.

I should first point out an inconsistency in the discussion. Many hon. Members, on both sides, have stressed the need for regional development and the importance of airport facilities in that context. Others have claimed that the expansion of Stansted would demolish the surrounding countryside and interfere with the rural quietness. Frankly, the north-east would welcome some noise in the current silence of industries no longer in use while so many people are on the cobbles, suffering enforced indolence due to lack of investment. We badly need the injection that regional airport development would provide.

Newcastle is not the only important factor. I wish to make a special plea for the Teesside airport, which has a record for all-weather access unequalled by any other airport in the country. When all other airports have been closed, it has been able to take the largest craft. It also has excellent road and rail facilities at its boundary fence, and British Rail, for all the ineptitude of which some people complain, has put on inter-city 125 trains at the drop of a hat to get people to London almost as quickly as they would have got there from Heathrow.

I shall not go into detail now, but I hope that hon. Members will go into the points that I have made. I believe that the whole structure of airport authorities and management in this country is so crazy that it needs to be thoroughly examined and completely reconstituted.

11.9 pm

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I shall be brief. The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) is fortunate because he and his hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) have not been present during the debate. Some hon. Members have been present since half past three. It was all very well for the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) to say "Get on with it". We listened to a very boring speech from her at the beginning of the debate which lowered the tone and started the debate in a bad way. If the hon. Lady has something to say, I hope that she will get up and say it.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I shall be delighted to do so.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That will take time out of the debate, will it not?

Sir Fergus Montgomery: The debate revolves round airport policy, and I make no apology for putting the case for the north. Many hon. Members representing northern constituencies have tried desperately hard to make clear to the Government how anxious we are to have further development of the regional airports. The Government must heed the message of the two nations and recognise that, if there is to be a massive investment for a third major airport in the south-east, there will be an almighty explosion in the north of England. We badly need that investment in the north, which we believe will produce jobs and assist the region.

All Members of Parliament have been swamped with circulars in the last few days. I had to laugh at one which I received from a group which said that it would oppose

the situation whereby passengers who had an origin or destination in south-east England were forced to fly from a regional airport. That point was taken up by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel).

I get a little sick of the fact that the north of England always seems to be treated as the poor relation. It is the people from the north who have to come down to Heathrow or Gatwick to make flights out of the country.

I disagree with the inspector's estimates of future London demand. Thousands of passengers from the north would be only too delighted if they could make their journeys direct from a northern airport instead of having to travel through London. Many figures and statistics have been given, but, in order to allow some of my hon. Friends to speak, I shall omit them. I cannot help feeling that the forecasts used by the inspector have given a false picture.

I am sorry that the inspector seems to have paid so little attention to the case that was put forward by the North of England Regional Consortium. I hope that my right hon. Friend will pay more attention to its case than was paid by the inspector.

Manchester international airport is a successful airport. It is Britain's third largest airport and already services 40 British and foreign airlines. However, I believe that under successive Governments — Labour and Conservative — the interests of Manchester airport have been subordinated to south-east England. I wonder how much thought has been given to the loss of time by business men who have to fly abroad on business and make the journey from Manchester or the north to Heathrow or Gatwick. How much more convenient and time-saving it would be if they could make their international flights from Manchester airport. If there were more international flights from Manchester it would be a great boon to businessmen in the north, it would improve trade links and it would generate much-needed jobs. Until such time as those services are provided, the northern business man must continue to waste time and money in travelling via London, Amsterdam or Frankfurt.

That brings me to the case of Singapore Airlines, which has already been touched on in the debate. This airline wanted to fly direct three times a week each way between Singapore and Manchester. It was perfectly happy to have straightforward competition with the British airline, which wanted to fly the same route. This was a tremendous opportunity for Manchester airport. Somebody in the Department of Transport refused the application on the grounds that there were not enough potential passengers to justify more flights. That smacks of the old adage of the man in Whitehall knowing best. If Singapore Airlines, which is one of the most efficient airlines in the world, believes that it makes commercial sense to fly from Singapore to Manchester, who is it in the Department of Transport who would argue on that score? I remind my right hon. Friend that when the Glasgow to London monopoly route of British Airways was opened to competition from British Midland, the number of passengers increased by 30 per cent., prices fell and the service improved. That pattern should be encouraged.

I make no secret of the fact that so far as airport policy is concerned I want to know what is in it for Manchester. Every hon. Member will be fighting his own corner for the area that he represents.

I question some of the recommendations of the inspector, for example, that Stansted should be expanded to take 15 million passengers per year by 1990 with a further growth thereafter to 25 million, with no second runway to be allowed. Heathrow's capacity is to be increased from 28 million passengers to 38 million when terminal 4 is completed next year and to 53 million by 1995 with the addition of the fifth terminal. I am still unconvinced that we need three major airports in the southern corner of England. I query whether a boost to the economy of more than £1 billion should be applied to the Stansted area where unemployment is not a major problem. Such an investment would be welcome in the north.

Massive development at Stansted would undermine the regional airports. They have an important part in the economies of the regions. They could play an even more important part by encouraging new industrial investment and the development of tourism. It should never be forgotten that they could have an enormous effect on relieving pressure on the London airports. However, I realise that regional airports would have to face much greater difficulties if they are competing with a massive subsidised airport at Stansted.

There is an answer to my right hon. Friend's dilemma. If he gives regional airports real encouragement they could release capacity at Heathrow and Gatwick and make a large-scale expansion at Stansted unnecessary. It would also make the best use of national airfield resources.

I realise that the purpose of the debate is for Ministers to listen. I beg my right hon. and hon. Friends not to dismiss the case for the north as contemptuously as the inspector did. It makes great sense to utilise to the full the airport capacity that we have, rather than to spend enormous sums on Stansted.

Sir Colin Buchanan has just published a pamphlet, at the end of which he states:

> "To give regional airports greater scope would make sense in relation to the spread of the population and would aid economic recovery."

I hope that that phrase will be heeded when the decision is finally taken.

11.17 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I am opposed to the construction of a fifth terminal at Heathrow because of the damaging effect that it will have on my constituency. It will result in increased noise and affect the roads and the environment.

As the chairman of the South Bucks district council, Mr. Peter Janes, recently said:

> "If Heathrow is expanded it will again be the long suffering population of the Heathrow hinterland who will endure the consequences of more aircraft overhead, more traffic on local roads and major erosion of the green belt."

Aircraft noise is of particular concern to my constituents in Colnbrook, Dorney, Burnham and Taplow. They wish the 275,000 limit on air traffic movements to be imposed and kept. So do I.

The M4 is already overloaded. The M25 will be at capacity when it is opened. Further pressure will be put on local roads and the whole point of the M25, which for my constituents is the relief of local congestion, will be lost.

The green belt in south Bucks is already severely damaged. Only last Monday I had an Adjournment debate on the situation in Iver. I said:

> "Iver is under attack from every quarter". — [*Official Report*, 21 January 1985; Vol. 71, c. 834]

If the fifth terminal is allowed, the Perry Oaks sewage works will have to be moved either to south Iver or to

[Mr. Tim Smith]

Dorney. Both villages are in my constituency and both propositions would be totally unacceptable to my constituents.

Both the M4 and the M25 pass through Iver, and now the Department of Transport wants to build a motorway service area in Iver and British Rail wants to build a park-and-ride there. If the fifth terminal goes ahead, Slough might as well become part of Greater London, along with Iver and Colnbrook. We might as well give up the pretence that it is in a green belt and accept that we are the unwilling victims of urban sprawl.

Each time a motorway has been built, gravel has been extracted locally. Now the inspector suggests that more gravel should be extracted to build a fifth terminal. Therefore, any remaining part of the green belt will become a giant rubbish tip.

When I gave evidence to the inquiry, I dealt in detail with the effect on south Iver and on Dorney. Because of the shortage of time I shall not deal with that again. All I would say is that because it would severely damage the quality of life in south Buckinghamshire I am totally opposed to the inspector's recommendation that a fifth terminal should eventually be built at Heathrow.

11.21 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): An advertisement in today's copy of *The Times* from the North of England Regional Consortium begins:

"This is the third time that the British Airports Authority have tried to foist Stansted upon the public. On two previous occasions they have failed. But at the third attempt, and after the expenditure of millions of pounds and even more millions of words, their persistence has brought them a favourable report from the Public Inquiry Inspector."

In this debate we have heard a great deal, much of it disparaging, about the British Airports Authority. If its persistence has borne the truth of the national interest in upon the inspector, then all power to it. If what this advertisement says and really means is that its millions of pounds have bought it the inspector, then that advertisement is scurrilous.

We have heard in this debate a great deal about the north and about Heathrow, but very little about Stansted. There are lies, damned lies, and statistics. Hon. Members do not, of course, use the former, but we have heard a great deal about the latter. I do not believe that many hon. Members are unconvinced of the need for airport expansion in this country, so the question is not "what" but "where".

Hours ago I was asked by the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) what my interest in the matter is. I hold no brief for the British Airports Authority. My constituency is unlikely particularly to benefit, any more than is any other constituency in the country, from an airport at Stansted or anywhere else outside my constituency. I recognise the regional needs of the north and I recognise also the need for the expansion of regional airports, but we are debating a third London airport.

The case against another terminal at Heathrow has been made very forcefully by my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins), and by my hon. Friends the Members for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn) and for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and, will I hope, be made by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who is yet to speak. The nub of that argument is, "Yes, we do need more capacity, but," as my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne said, "land somewhere else."

The prime case against Stansted was made by the hon. Member in whose constituency that airfield is situated, my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), who claimed to be speaking for the general good. My hon. Friend went on to criticise a MORI poll which showed that people in the area would welcome an expansion of that airfield because that poll was conducted within a 30-mile radius. It does not seem to me that 30 miles constitutes "the national good", the subject that we ought to be debating tonight. My hon. Friend went on to say that people have an insatiable appetite for air travel. I would ask hon. Members to consider that both I and my colleagues who sit on the tourism committee seek to attract new visitors to this country and the business and money that they will bring. If there is an insatiable appetite for air travel, and if it is bringing people to this country, that is all to the good.

I come to the case for the north, about which we have heard so much. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), at the beginning of this debate, when many hon. Members who are now chipping in were not present, said that not to locate this new and much needed airfield in the north would be "a crime against the north." I recognise the case for the north. I understand what unemployment means — it is 19 per cent. in my constituency.

However, we are talking, not about regional aid, but about the need for a new airport. I believe that the airport must be situated at Stansted. We have failed in the debate to consider what my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) described as "the interests of the customers" —the visitor and the international airlines. They wish to visit London and the continent. If we ignore that fact, we shall miss out.

If we do not adopt the report, 20,000 jobs will go to Schipol, Frankfurt and Paris. That will be because the House has not seized the opportunity to build the airport that is needed, where it is needed, now.

11.26 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): In the few minutes that remain, I wish to express with all the vehemence that I can and with all the weight that I can muster the passion felt by my constituents about the airport inquiries and the misery that they suffer from living under the Heathrow flight path.

Noise is the most important consideration for my constituents and for nearly 3 million people who live in the vicinity of Heathrow. I resent the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Whitfield), who said that I should not complain about the quality of life for my constituents in wealthy Richmond. Noise is noise. Whether a person is employed or unemployed, old or young, noise at the levels around Heathrow is unacceptable.

Whatever minor reductions may come from new technology, an increase in aircraft movements would provide a prospect of even greater horror. An unlimited hell is already unbearable for many of my constituents. A small drop of water is harmless, but the constant unremitting repetition of that drop—the Chinese water torture — drives its victims mad in terrifying agony. Heathrow is Richmond's water torture.

In a statement made to Mr. Eyre during his inquiry, and kindly repeated by him in the report, it was said:

"Modern technology has reduced aircraft noise from the totally unacceptable to the merely unbearable."

The report stated:

"Air noise is a modern curse from which the unfortunate inhabitants of the Heathrow area have been required to suffer over a long period."

The report went on:

"The present noise climate in some areas around Heathrow is worse than people should be required to accept."

The inspector said that double glazing might help, but double glazing does not help in Kew gardens or Richmond park or when people are trying to sleep with the windows open on hot summer evenings.

Aircraft noise and the horrendous levels of traffic, both in the air and on the roads in my constituency, are the blights of the area. There is no doubt that the development of a fifth terminal at Heathrow will increase aircraft movements beyond the unacceptable. Indeed, the level is already unacceptable.

British Airways has said that it proposes to increase the number of movements to 400,000 a year by modern technology and by using two parallel runways. The Government's position is what my constituents believe and what I have always told them. I hope that the Government will confirm that Heathrow will not be expanded beyond four terminals, air transport movements at Heathrow will be limited to 275,000 a year, for environmental reasons, Gatwick will remain a single-runway airport, regional airports will be developed to their full potential and that it is in the national interest to provide adequate facilities for future demand for air transport in London and the south-east. As Sir John Nott said, Stansted has chosen itself.

In summary, my constituents and I look for a realistic and viable development at Stansted, encouragement for regional airports as demand is created, an environmental limit at Heathrow, continuing noise reduction orders and, above all, no T5.

11.29 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): This has been a parliamentary rather than a political occasion. I pay tribute to hon. Members on both sides of the House for the commitment that they have expressed to a regional airports policy.

I regret that time prevents me from listing one by one individual Members and their comments, but I pay tribute to the outstanding speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), which graphically set out the argument. He left no one in any doubt about the justice of his case. I pay tribute also to the speech of the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst). As we expect on these occasions, he was fluent, coherent and impassioned in some instances, and rightly so. He has demonstrated over the years his determination to protect his constituency from what he sees, understandably enough, as the likely ravages of Stansted.

It has been suggested that, because the debate is being held on a motion for the Adjournment of the House, its importance is not particularly substantial. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) has demonstrated that that is not so. He observed that various important debates have taken place over the years on such a motion. It has been suggested in the newspapers that as the payroll vote, as it is somewhat disrespectfully known —Ministers and their Parliamentary Private Secretaries — has been instructed to stay well away from the Government Lobby this evening, the result of a Division will not matter. It is argued that the Government will have shown that it is not significant by keeping the payroll vote away and thereby downgrading its importance. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent has adequately disposed of that assertion, I hope that the House will reject it.

We have heard individual Members making out a case on behalf of their region or constituency regardless of party affiliation. They can best make out their case, and dispose of the Stansted argument once and for all, by using their votes in a Division. I understand that the Secretary of State claims that he has a quasi judicial role as he and the Minister of State, Department of the Environment is responsible for making the decision. I accept that. But to claim that the same quasi judicial role extends to every Minister stretches constitutional credulity, to say the least. I am sure that it provides a convenient excuse for the Government to explain away tonight's defeat, if defeated they are to be, but that will not make it any less relevant.

The Secretary of State said in opening the debate that the Government felt that this was an unprecedented opportunity for the House to debate a planning matter before a decision had been reached. The House should be suitably grateful for that. Of course, in the circumstances, it is understandable enough that the right hon. Gentleman glossed over the fact that the only reason why we are having the debate is that he has failed twice to get a sittings motion for the Civil Aviation Bill in Committee. The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but when he tried to explain away yet another disaster for which he had been responsible he said that there would have to be a debate on this issue because of the Committee's failure to approve its sittings motion.

Unless we dispose of this matter this evening, the House can be sure that it will come back to haunt us. In December 1984 there was an article in the London *Evening Standard* by Mr. Max Hastings in which he left readers in no doubt that the first proposal to build Stansted airport was brought forward in 1967, when the then chairman of the British Airports Authority made it plain that unless Stansted went ahead the prospects of aeroplane landings and take-offs at London's airports would be diabolical to say the least by the mid-1970s. However, Sir Peter's worst fears were not realised in the mid-1970s and there is no sign and no evidence in the mid-1980s that his fears are more realistic 10 years on.

However, I may have some good news for the House. Regardless of what the civil servants dust down in the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment, the track record of the Secretary of State for Transport suggests that he will be with us on the question of Stansted, for he is a long and consistent opponent of the construction of London's third airport. I do not often get the chance to praise him, but I am delighted to think that I shall be able to praise him on this occasion for what I hope will be his consistency. As a long-standing opponent of London's third airport, I hope that the House can rely on the right hon. Gentleman to make the right decision when the appropriate time comes.

On 13 June 1973 we debated the question of London's third airport when we discussed what was then the Maplin Development Bill. Indeed, one could easily delete

[Mr. Peter Snape]

"Maplin" and insert "Stansted" because the same arguments apply in both cases. The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) was the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment at the time. Earlier tonight he said, bravely if cavalierly, "One cannot rely on Ministers' promises." He should know because he was responsible in those days.

When the Maplin Development Bill was being debated, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) moved new clause 2, which read:

"It shall be the duty of the Civil Aviation Authority, in consultation with the Maplin Development Authority and appropriate Minister, to keep under constant review technical developments of new, quieter aero-engines, short take-off capability or other relevant factors affecting the operations of civil aircraft, and it shall take such action as may be appropriate to delay, vary or desist from the construction of an airport on land to be reclaimed as a result of the passage of this Act."

The hon. Gentleman moved the new clause in such a persuasive manner that the then Conservative Government suffered a dramatic defeat. No fewer than 15 Tory Members bravely demonstrated their principles by going into the Lobby with Labour Members. They thereby defeated the Government and wrote that important new clause into the Maplin Development Bill.

I am glad to remind the House that among those 15 good brave men and true was the present Secretary of State for Transport. As I said, praise for the right hon. Gentleman does not fall easily from my lips, but praise him I shall—it will probably do his career even more damage than he has done to it himself — if he demonstrates that virtue of consistency tonight and reaffirms his bravery of 13 June 1973.

In those days the Conservative party was led by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). He and the present Secretary of State for Transport were hardly the best of friends, for the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup had had the temerity to fire his right hon. Friend from his then post at the Treasury.

However, there has been no such occurrence under the present Government. Bearing in mind the close relationship that obviously exists between the right hon. Gentleman and the Prime Minister, one can only hope that he adopts that consistency for which I have praised him so as to impress on the Prime Minister the fact that objection to the construction of London's third airport is as great now as it was in 1973, when he made that stand.

Mr. Soames *rose——*

Mr. Snape: I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman took more than 20 minutes, which is more than I have to wind up the debate. He did not say a great deal, though, to be fair to him, he said it prettily.

No case has been made for London's third airport. The statistical evidence is conflicting, to say the least, and the fact that the BAA has demonstrated its belief in London's third airport should impress nobody. The BAA has been a consistent supporter of the third London airport since the idea was first mooted. That is hardly surprising, because the effect on its finances is like winning the jackpot. No hon. Member needs to be reminded that, if the British Airports Authority is privatised in the Government's passion for privatisation and the third London airport is a going concern, BAA will be even more valuable when it comes on the market.

I agreed with a great deal of the speech by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks), who spoke with passion and commitment. I know that, as he comes from the Manchester area, he would wish to defend the future of Manchester airport. He said that the free market economy should dictate what happens in these matters, but I point out to the hon. Gentleman that that is not true anywhere else in the world, and there is no reason why it should be true in this country. The hon. Gentleman would leave it to the operators to decide where to fly, but I believe that the prospects of regional airports booming and developing are grim. All around the world it has been necessary for Governments to direct airlines as to which airports they should use. *[Interruption.]* It is not rubbish. A Right-wing Government in France had to direct French airlines and other airlines to use Charles de Gaulle airport, because when that airport was built all the airlines said that they would not use it. The Japanese Government, who were hardly a Left-wing Government, had to coerce the world's airlines to use the new Marita airport because it was so far from the centre of Tokyo. So market forces will not do the job.

Mr. Franks: It is the consumer who determines the free market.

Mr. Snape: It is not the consumer. Despite my praise for the hon. Gentleman's speech, I have to say that part of his speech was somewhat simplistic. He argues, as we do, that the consumers do not have a choice and are not allowed to dictate the market forces as they affect British regional airports. The arrogance of some hon. Members from the south of England who seem to believe that the only people who wish to buy tickets for international flights are based in and around London has to be heard to be believed. Are there no business men in Manchester or Birmingham who may wish to fly to, for example, the United States?

The Secretary of State—I am afraid that my praise for him is over; we are now back to our normal relationship—who professes a deep and undying belief in private enterprise, has prevented airlines from flying into our regional airports as a deliberate act of policy. Where is the free enterprise and consumer choice in that? This whole argument is riddled with inconsistencies.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Ridleyed.

Mr. Snape: And he is my Whip!

There is a fairly modern and prosperous airport in Birmingham.

I was astonished to hear the silly intervention of the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills), who, having intervened, headed for the door in mortification. He has not been seen since. I was astonished to hear him say that the capacity at Birmingham airport should not be increased. Despite spending £63 million on a brand new terminal, no more aeroplanes than at present should be allowed to take off and land there, because it would disturb the hon. Gentleman's constituents. I cannot understand an hon. Member who pleads such a case on behalf of his constituents. People living by an airfield should expect aircraft to take off and land. If any hon. Member took that attitude to a railway station, he would be laughed out of the Chamber. However, the hon. Member for Meriden

said that, despite all the public expenditure on Birmingham airport, no other aeroplanes should be permitted to take off and land there.

An overwhelming case has been made for the regional airports. Every hon. Member, with the exception of three Conservative Members, has condemned the Government's proposals. For goodness sake, let the House of Commons speak out tonight. Let us kill off once and for all the myth that Stansted is necessary by casting all our votes in the same Division Lobby this evening. Only in that way can we plan the way forward. Only in that way can the country have a sensible aviation policy—a policy that, under successive Governments, it has long lacked.

11.46 pm

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): The debate has lasted for nearly eight hours. It will come as no surprise to the House to learn that not a single member of the Social Democratic party has spoken and that only one Liberal Member has made a contribution. Although, excluding the Front Bench spokesman, 11 Labour Members have made speeches, it is the Tory party that has made the most massive contribution—*[Laughter.]* Oh yes. There have been 26 —*[Interruption.]*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am anxious to hear the rest.

Mr. Gow: I am anxious to hear it myself. No fewer than 26 of my right hon. and hon. Friends have contributed to the debate.

It is not always wise to believe all that one is told, but I am told that the Opposition Whips were deeply concerned about the imbalance between those speaking from this side and those speaking from the Opposition side. They went out into the highways and byways and found the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who had not even heard my right hon. Friend's opening speech.

No one who has listened to the debate can doubt the importance of the decisions that have to be taken or the strength of feeling in all parts of the House. Today's debate has underlined the wide range of interests that will be affected by those decisions. Although the planning applications relate to Stansted and Heathrow, the whole House accepts that the decisions that will have to be taken will be of deep relevance to the future of airports policy and to every part of the United Kingdom.

My right hon. Friend and I have listened to the debate with the greatest care, but the House will understand that, as my right hon. Friend explained at the beginning, we cannot comment on the arguments that have been deployed. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) acknowledged that fact.

I also remind the House that the procedures under which we are operating were not fashioned by my right hon. Friend or by the present Government. The procedures were laid down by the Labour Government in 1974. Scarcely had the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent got his feet under the desk at the Department of Employment in 1974 when the order was laid on 11 March 1974. It was one of the first measures of the Labour Government. The time for my right hon. Friend and the Government to explain the reasons for our decision and the time to comment on the arguments that have been advanced in the House and elsewhere will be in the later debate that was promised by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House last Thursday and which was reaffirmed by my right hon. Friend today. I cannot prejudge or be seen to be prejudging issues that are before my right hon. Friend and me for decision.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gow: I have little time.

Hon. Members: "Give way."

Mr. Speaker: Order. In fairness to the Minister, his time has been cut.

Mr. Gow: The inspector's report ranged widely. He has expressed conclusions on the present Stansted and Heathrow proposals——

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is rather inappropriate to raise points of order at this stage.

Mr. McWilliam: I must raise this point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Minister seems to be claiming the protection of the sub judice rule. Could you make it clear to the House that the sub judice rule does not apply to this debate?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister is a lawyer—I am not. I thought that I heard him say that he could not prejudge the issue.

Mr. Snape: He is a divorce lawyer.

Mr. Gow: The inspector has expressed conclusions on the Stansted and Heathrow proposals and on broader and longer-term issues of airport policy. Some hon. Members have paid tribute to the massive work that the inspector and the two assessors have done. I should like to join in paying tribute to them.

It might be helpful for me to explain the matters that are before my right hon. Friend and me and the procedures that we are required to follow. There are two principal matters for determination. The first is an outline planning application dated 25 July 1980 by the British Airports Authority for the expansion of Stansted airport to a capacity of about 15 million passengers a year. The second is an outline planning application dated 18 June 1981 by the Uttlesford district council for the extension of Heathrow airport by the provision of a fifth terminal and associated facilities and works.

Dependent upon the Stansted application are a number of other applications, including an application for planning permission for the carrying out of road works to give improved access to the airport, seven applications for listed building consent, an application for planning permission to re-erect three of the listed buildings on a site at Burton End; and a compulsory purchase order made by the BAA relating to land at Stansted.

The House will remember that, on 3 December 1980, the then Secretary of State for the Environment announced, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), that he had called in the British Airports Authority's application for the expansion of Stansted. He announced that he was appointing Mr. Graham Eyre QC to hold a public local inquiry into the proposals. Mr. Eyre was appointed subsequently to hold concurrent inquiries into the other matters to which I have referred.

On 12 February 1981 Mr. Philip Maynard was appointed as assessor to assist the inspector on planning

[Mr. Gow]

and environmental matters, and on 8 April 1981 Mr. William Woodruff was appointed as assessor to assist on aviation matters. The inquiries opened on 19 September 1981 at Quendon park, near Stansted.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gow: No, I have little time. The inquiries were adjourned on 28 October 1982. They were resumed on 11 January 1983 at the Crest hotel, Heathrow airport, and were closed after a total of 258 sitting days. The inspector's report was delivered on 28 November 1984, and published on 10 December 1984. It was made clear to the inspector that the inquiries were to be wide-ranging and that the Government intended the fullest opportunity to be given for objectors to express their views on the proposals both about Stansted and Heathrow, and for alternatives to be considered.

During the inquiry the inspector sought and was given the express assurance that he was not precluded from considering matters which ran counter to Government policy. The inspector took full advantage of those assurances and his inquiries were conducted, as his report has been framed, to take account of such matters.

The answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) is that in this case planning applications have been made, have been subject to long inquiries and are now awaiting decisions under the normal procedures laid down in the planning Acts. Despite the suggestion made by my hon. Friend, the question of a special development order cannot arise at this stage.

I remind the House that if my right hon. Friend and I should be disposed to disagree with any recommendation made by the inspector as a result of taking account of new evidence or a new issue of fact not being a matter of Government policy, we are under a statutory duty to inform the parties to the inquiry and to afford them an opportunity of making representations on the new evidence or new issue of fact. Initially it is for Ministers, and ultimately for the courts, to decide whether any material received after the inquiry constitutes new evidence or a new issue of fact that should be referred to the parties for comment. The fact that others may claim that certain material is new evidence or a new issue of fact does not make it so automatically, nor does it follow necessarily that it will influence Ministers' decisions or lead them to agree or disagree with any of the inspector's recommendations.

It is obvious to the House and clear to the Government that it is most desirable that my right hon. Friend and I should reach our decision on these applications as soon as possible, consistent with that thorough examination and consideration of the inspector's report that a matter of such great importance requires.

We shall follow strictly the rules which have been laid down by Parliament provided in the statutory instrument which was approved in 1974. We consider that we have now reached the time when final decisions need to be taken about the future of policy for airports. To every hon. Member who spoke, I say that his contribution will receive proper consideration. My right hon. Friend and I will come back to the House with our decisions at the earliest possible date.

Question put, That this House do now adjourn:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West) *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the inevitable defeat of the Government in this Division can you tell the House when the Prime Minister will be going to the Palace to offer her resignation?

Mr. Speaker: I think that that is hypothetical.

Mr. Canavan: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Presumably once the vote is announced the House will adjourn and there will be no further opportunity to raise points of order or for any other Member to speak. It is therefore important that you, as Speaker of the House of Commons, give a ruling as to what will happen as a result of the defeat of the Government. I suggest that following that defeat you should summon the Prime Minister to make a statement as to when she intends to offer her resignation.

Mr. Speaker: All this is hypothetical. None of us knows what will happen. But if the House votes to adjourn that is what we shall do.

Mr. Canavan: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the House votes in favour of the Adjournment, that will be tantamount to a defeat of the Government, but there will presumably be no opportunity to raise points of order after the result is announced.

Mr. Speaker: I can do nothing about that. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Adjournment is in the hands of the House. If the House votes to adjourn, we shall adjourn, and I shall not be here. If the House votes not to adjourn, we shall proceed in the normal way.

Mr. Canavan: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to give notice that if the Government are defeated in the Division I shall seek to raise a point of order afterwards to say that the Prime Minister should go to the Palace and offer her resignation and that there should be a general election.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call upon the Tellers.

The House having divided: Ayes 247, Noes 0.

Division No. 84] **[11.58 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Adley, Robert
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Batiste, Spencer
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Sir Antony
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clegg, Sir Walter
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry

Craigen, J. M.
Cranborne, Viscount
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Farr, Sir John
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Favell, Anthony
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freud, Clement
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heddle, John
Heffer, Eric S.
Hicks, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jackson, Robert
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclean, David John
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Madel, David
Malone, Gerald
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mates, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Silvester, Fred
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Welsh, Michael
Wheeler, John
White, James
Whitfield, John
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Don Dixon.

NOES
Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Browne and
Mr. John Nicholson.

Mr. Canavan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Government have been defeated——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House now stands adjourned.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 31 January 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 7 February.

Mr. Speaker: In the interest of time, as Bills Nos. 2 8 have blocking motions, I shall put them together.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

C-POULTRY COMPANY LIMITED BILL *(By Order)*

FELIXSTOWE DOCK AND RAILWAY BILL *(By Order)*

GOSPORT BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

GREATER LONDON COUNCIL (GENERAL POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*

HARROGATE STRAY BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 7 February.

HASTINGS PIER BILL *(By Order)*
Read a Second time and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.

LINCOLN CITY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

LLOYDS BANK (MERGER) BILL *(By Order)*

NATIONAL BANK OF NEW ZEALAND LIMITED BILL *(By Order)*

PLYMOUTH MARINE EVENTS BASE BILL *(By Order)*

ROYAL BANK OF SCOTLAND BILL *(By Order)*

SCARBOROUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 7 February.

SOUTH YORKSHIRE PASSENGER TRANSPORT BILL *(By Order)*
Read a Second time, and committed.

STREATHAM PARK CEMETERY BILL *(By Order)*

YORKSHIRE WATER AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 7 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Television Licence Fee

1. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about the television licence fee; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Leon Brittan): Some 200 hon. Members and 900 members of the public have written during the current Session about the level of licence fees. In reaching my decision on the BBC's licence fee application I shall also take account of the review by independent consultants which the BBC has commissioned at my request.

Mr. Canavan: If the Government cannot see their way to abolish the licence fee completely and to fund the BBC from the Treasury, will the Home Secretary at least recognise that thousands of pensioners, who are dependent upon television as a source of information and entertainment, simply cannot afford the £65 fee being demanded by the BBC? Will the Government therefore consider the introduction of a concessionary rate or, better still, a completely free television licence for old age pensioners?

Mr. Brittan: The cost to the Exchequer of a free television licence for pensioners would be £250 million a year. I do not think that I can anticipate doing that. The cost of financing the BBC generally from the Exchequer would be over £700 million, and I do not fancy increasing taxation by that amount.

Mr. Mark Carlisle: Many Conservative Members believe that the BBC should continue to be funded by means of a licence fee rather than by advertising or any other method. However, we are concerned about some aspects of the areas now covered by the BBC. What consideration has been given to the possibility of holding a general inquiry into the role of the BBC in national and local television and radio, while accepting the need for an increase in the licence fee?

Mr. Brittan: I am sure that the debate about the financing of the BBC will continue, but I reaffirm that, as the Prime Minister has made clear, changes in the method of financing will not arise during consideration of the current licence fee.

On the question of inquiries, I should point out that the Annan inquiry took place comparatively recently. My right hon. and hon. Friends will understand that general inquiries into the role of the BBC or of broadcasting as a whole inevitably take a long time.

Mr. Madden: What would be the cost of giving free television licences to pensioner households? Does the Home Secretary agree that, unless there is a substantial reduction in the cost of television licences, especially to elderly people, many will be forced to stop watching television or, like one of my constituents, face a prison sentence for non-payment of the licence fee?

Mr. Brittan: It would cost £160 million to provide free television for households comprising only pensioners. I understand the difficulties facing many pensioners. That is why I should like, once again, to draw attention to licence savings stamps, which are a convenient way by which to pay. There is also a scheme which enables people to pay monthly cash instalments at post offices towards their next licence. That scheme has been introduced recently.

Mr. Yeo: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that most people are more anxious about the quality of the service provided by the BBC than about the price, although that is an important consideration? Does he agree that that policy might seriously be undermined if advertising were to be introduced?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Brittan: I suspect that people are anxious about quality and cost. As to the impact of advertising on quality, it appears from the response to my hon. Friend's question that opinions differ.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: Cannot the Home Secretary for once show a little care and compassion for the more vulnerable and poor members of society? As the television licence fee represents such a high proportion of pensioners' income, and as so many pensioners are housebound, disabled or sick, can the Home Secretary not dredge up a particle of compassion from his cold soul and introduce free television licences for them?

Mr. Brittan: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that those who have the greatest compassion do not necessarily wear it on their sleeve.

Crime Prevention

2. **Mr. Heffer** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take regarding crime prevention as result of the recent survey of crime patterns in Merseyside.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Giles Shaw): The report of the survey is being studied by the chief constable and other agencies in Merseyside. The Home Office crime prevention unit is available to assist them with any initiatives they may take.

Mr. Heffer: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the survey clearly shows that the poor people of Merseyside suffer most from crime and that police services in poorer areas are inferior to those in better-off areas? Will he tell his colleagues in the Department of the Environment that the proposed cuts in grants and the suggestion that there should be 700 fewer police officers on Merseyside is nonsense? Does he agree that we need more foot patrols so that people in working-class areas can have a much better service than they are getting at the moment?

Mr. Shaw: I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument. He will be the first to understand that there is no barrier between classes in regard to crime.

There has been a substantial growth in police strength on Merseyside since the Government came to office in 1979. I accept that, on Merseyside, as in other urban areas, the people who are most at risk live in inner urban areas. That is one reason why substantial sums of money are being made available to assist inner urban areas. There is no truth in the suggestion that the Department of the Environment, or any other Department, wants to reduce policing levels on Merseyside.

Mr. Thornton: Does my hon. Friend agree that many of my constituents would be extremely worried if there were any likelihood of the number of Merseyside police being reduced? There are major problems in the city of Liverpool, but my constituents, who live on the outskirts, think that there are insufficient foot patrols in their area and they are worried about the possibility of any cut in the police force.

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is right to express anxiety about any threat to the numbers of police, but there is no such threat. The strength of the Merseyside police force, at 4,607, remains at a high levels and the establishment has been increased by 156 since 1979.

Mr. Alton: Is the Minister aware that the Merseyside crime survey shows that there are three times more burglaries on Merseyside than anywhere else in the country and that it is very much a burglars' paradise? Will he consider having more neighbourhood police stations, more policemen on the beat, more alarms for elderly people and more effective neighbourhood watch schemes?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that neighbourhood watch and crime prevention is a matter of great concern to the Home Office and to the chief constable of Merseyside. The MCS, compared with the national pattern, not the pattern for equivalent metropolitan districts, showed that the figure was about one and a half times as great, not three times, as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Mr. Soley: If the Government go ahead with their plans to abolish the metropolitan county councils, surveys of this type will no longer be possible and, therefore, there will be no such recommendations on which to act. Is not the truth of the matter that the Government have abandoned all financial support for crime prevention schemes almost everywhere in the country?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman's statement in the last part of his supplementary question is outrageously wrong. The Government play a great part in trying to create conditions in which crime prevention surveys can be undertaken. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Home Office helped to fund the Merseyside crime study. Under the new procedures, policing arrangements will be similar to those which are currently undertaken.

Civil Defence

3. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will encourage local authorities to allow their civil defence volunteers to organise themselves into self-regulating bodies, appointing their own officers and responsible for their own training under proper supervision.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I do not think that such encouragement would be appropriate at present, but the optimum form of local organisation will be kept under review, and changes may be made in the light of the experience and views of local authorities and the advice of the co-ordinator of volunteer effort.

Mr. Thompson: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that it is urgently necessary to provide more help and guidance for training civil service volunteers, with better advice on organisation and administration? Does he further agree that we should encourage our civil service volunteers in the worthwhile public service that they undertake?

Mr. Shaw: I suspect that my hon. Friend is referring to civil defence volunteers, though improved training for civil servants may be an appropriate topic for conversation.

The Government have asked local authorities to take into consideration the role of volunteers in the plans that they should now be making to implement their statutory duties under the 1983 regulations. Increased training for civil defence volunteers will certainly be made available.

Mr. Weetch: Has the Department taken note of the way in which civil defence is organised in other countries? In a nuclear exchange, presumably the United States and the Soviet Union would be seriously at risk from each other. Has the Department made any examination of how civil defence is organised in those countries?

Mr. Shaw: I assure the hon. Gentleman that my department is well aware of the manifold differences in civil defence preparation in many countries; but in particular we look to western Europe for comparability, and we see a great deal of it.

Auld Report

5. **Mr. John Hunt** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he now expects to make a further statement on the Auld report.

11. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is yet able to make a statement about the Auld report.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): My right hon. and learned Friend proposes to make a statement in the near future setting out the Government's position.

Mr. Hunt: In the meantime, has my hon. Friend seen the results of the survey commissioned by the National Consumer Council, which show that a substantial majority of our fellow citizens, particularly the younger generation, are in favour of a reform of the Shops Act? May we have an assurance that the Government intend to sweep away the anomalies and absurdities which at present surround our Sunday trading laws?

Mr. Mellor: I cannot at this stage give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks, as these matters are now under very active consideration. Concern about the anomalies in the law led to the appointment of the Auld committee, the report of which we are digesting with care.

Mr. Galley: In view of the considerable job creation potential of the relaxation in the Sunday trading laws and the fact that the majority of the population consider that the current law brings the law in general into disrepute, is my hon. Friend prepared to give the House a further assurance that he will put considerable "umph" behind the legislative programme and give priority to it at a very early stage?

Mr. Mellor: I am glad that my hon. Friend has once again called for "umph". I have commended him before on that phrase. The Government's intentions will be announced very soon. My hon. Friend will not have long to wait for some "umph".

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister recognise that many in the country would prefer the Government and Parliament to pay attention to the principles of the "Auld Book" rather than the Auld report?

Mr. Mellor: That is too well turned a question for me to make an adequate response to it.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister give an assurance that in any proposals that are made the Government will not only try to meet the requirements of consumers but will take adequate steps to protect those employees who will have to work on Sundays if there is to be a major extension in that direction?

Mr. Mellor: Yes. The position of the staff is a matter of considerable interest to the Government. The hon. Gentleman will know that a senior official of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers was an assessor for the Auld committee. We shall have regard to the views of workers' representatives before we make our final decision.

Sir Edward Gardner: Does my hon. Friend agree that the law is so asinine that it invites contempt? Does he further agree that a law that is so irrational and silly that it tempts people to break it is dangerous and ought to be removed as soon as possible by sensible reform?

Mr. Mellor: I certainly find it hard to disagree with that description of the law, since I used very similar words in the debate on the Bill proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) in February 1983. Certainly the law has not become any better in those two years.

Immigration Procedures (CRE Report)

6. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the Commission for Racial Equality report on immigration procedures.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): I understand that the Commission for Racial Equality is arranging for publication of the report on 12 February.

Dr. Marek: When the Minister receives the report, will he look carefully at that part of it which deals with the treatment of immigrants at airports and other points of entry? Can he assure the House that in our civilised country all visitors and immigrants will at all times be treated with civility and courtesy by the authorities?

Mr. Waddington: I remind the House that the report has not yet been published, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman, from what I know of the report, that it does not contain criticisms of the conduct of individual immigration officers. What is suggested is that there is something wrong with the system as a whole because there is more pressure to emigrate from one country than from another. I should have thought that that was patently obvious. Plainly, people are more likely to want to get into this country from poverty-striken countries than, for instance, from New Zealand. As a result, it is obvious to everybody that it is more likely that people from Ghana will be refused admission than will people from New Zealand.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Does the Minister accept that a fundamental principle in the report is that there should be no discrimination on grounds of sex and that those who wish to come to this country to join female fiancées ought to be treated in the same manner as those who wish to join male fiancés?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that that matter is at present before the European Court and that we shall have to wait and see what the court says. I believe it is well known that if we allow young men to come here as husbands and fiancés who would have been unable to come here under the work permit system, we are really allowing primary immigration, which we are continually telling people we have stopped.

Ms. Clare Short: Does the Minister agree that one of the things that is wrong with the immigration system is that its massive delays deprive people of rights to which in theory and in law they are entitled? Will the Minister apply his mind to this gross inefficiency in his Department?

Mr. Waddington: Obviously we are concerned to ensure that the system of entry clearance operates as efficiently as possible, but the hon. Lady is being very unfair if she is suggesting that in the last few years the position has worsened. In fact, the position has improved. In 1979 the waiting time for entry clearance in Pakistan was 22 months; in 1983 it had dropped to nine and a quarter months. In 1979 the waiting time for entry clearance in Bombay was seven months; in 1983 it had dropped to six months. In 1979 the waiting time in Delhi was 10 months; in 1983 it was seven and a half months. In 1979 the waiting time in Bangladesh was 24 months; in 1983 it had fallen to 20 months.

Mr. Dubs: The Minister will be aware that Parliament has recently decided to make racism by police officers a disciplinary offence. Will he make the same provision for racism by immigration officers?

Mr. Waddington: That is a nonsensical and thoroughly irresponsible question, because the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the first rule in the immigration rules enjoins immigration officers to carry out their duties without regard to race.

Coal Industry Dispute

7. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for reports from the chief constables concerned as to what measures the police are taking to deal with intimidation during the miners' dispute.

Mr. Brittan: I have received a number of such reports. Significant police resources have been deployed to deal with the problem of intimidation, and substantial numbers of prosecutions have been brought.

Mr. Forsyth: I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to establish the facts of the matter. Is it not an outrage and a disgrace that the European Assembly should have announced its own inquiry into the policing of the dispute, which is aiding and abetting those Opposition Members who have been carrying out their back-stabbing campaign against the police? Will he give an undertaking to the House that he will refuse to co-operate with that inquiry?

Mr. Brittan: The policing of the dispute is outside the competence of the European Assembly, and the Government will make no facilities available for the inquiry.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Home Secretay aware that intimidation should always be condemned, even by the European Assembly, but that to suggest that the police are always right and that miners are always wrong is crucially misleading and is an oversimplification of what is happening in coal areas today?

Mr. Brittan: It would be, but it is not a suggestion that the questioner or anyone else has made.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Has not the burden on our police forces been made much more irksome by the conduct of Her Majesty's Opposition?

Mr. Brittan: They have not helped.

Mr. Barron: When the Home Secretary asks the chief constables for reports, will he also report on the intimidation of members of the NUM by some police officers? I say that because 75 per cent. of the cases in my local magistrates' court that have been brought against pickets from my area are now being dropped because there were no grounds for them going there in the first place.

Mr. Brittan: That does not prove what the hon. Gentleman has said. If the hon. Gentleman has evidence of cases of the kind that he describes, I am sure he will want to pursue them through the complaints procedure, which has been substantially strengthened by the Government under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Will my right hon. and learned Friend congratulate the chief constables on making it possible for so many courageous miners to go back to work, realising that there are jobs for them? Will he also ensure that there is no intimidation by the European Assembly in denying the rights of those working miners to go to work?

Mr. Brittan: I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that he last sought. I agree with him that in the past 11 months there has been a major threat to one of the most fundamental civil liberties that we enjoy—the right to go to our workplace. The fact that that threat has not been successful is due in large measure to the courage and success of the police force.

Mr. Mason: Is the Home Secretary aware that I wrote to him on 10 December 1984 asking him to give me an assurance that all those mineworkers who have been arrested and since acquitted should have their photographs and fingerprints erased from the record? The right hon. and learned Gentleman's private secretary sent me an interim reply on 28 December informing me that he was contacting the chief constable of Nottinghamshire and asking for a report. Since then, silence. The Home Secretary is supposed to be in charge. Is he not big enough and has he not the responsibility to assure all those chaps who I described who have been acquitted of all charges that their photographs and fingerprints will be expunged from the record?

Mr. Brittan: I shall look into the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes, and respond to him as quickly as possible.

Mr. Holt: When my right hon. and Learned Friend asks chief constables for a report, will he also ask for a report on a case in Cleveland where an ex-miner, who had been on strike, was to be brought before the Crown court but the judge refused to hear the case on the ground that he would not be able to put together a jury which would not be influenced or intimidated?

Mr. Brittan: I regard that report as a matter of considerable concern.

Mr. Kaufman: Is not the worst intimidation that has taken place during the strike the intimidation of the crime victim and the taxpayer? Is it not a fact that policing the coal strike has cost £200 million and has in addition resulted in a huge increase in crime, as frankly stated by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis? Is it not a fact that the Prime Minister's policy of provocation and confrontation has produced an exacerbation of the worst crime wave on record, and cost taxpayers and ratepayers far more than the Prime Minister ever hoped to save through the butchery of the coal industry?

Mr. Brittan: I do not think that anyone will be impressed by that sort of rhetoric. As the right hon. Gentleman talks about provocation, he should address himself to those who have assembled in hugh numbers to frighten their fellow workmen and prevent them from going to work. If he is genuinely concerned about the cost of the dispute and its impact on crime generally, he should have been at the forefront of those urging the National Union of Mineworkers not to condone or support in any way violence on picket lines or anywhere. He has been singularly absent from any such activity.

Mr. Kaufman *rose*——

Mr. Mason: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the inadequate nature of the reply by the Home Secretary, I shall raise this matter on the Adjournment at the earliest possible opportunity.

Non-payment of Fines

8. **Mr. Freud** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were serving sentences of under one month for non-payment of fines in each of the last three years for which he has records.

Mr. Mellor: In 1981 about 12,700 persons were received into prison having been committed for less than one month in default of payment of fines, costs or compensation. About 15,200 such persons were received in 1982, and about 14,600 in 1983.

Mr. Freud: Does the Minister agree that custodial sentences for fine defaulters should be used only as a very last resort? Will he look at some of the imaginative community service schemes that are being carried out in other countries, such as Australia, to see whether he can learn something from them?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman is right. Indeed, we have acted on that advice. Last year a circular was sent out to magistrates' courts reminding them that the use of imprisonment was a last resourt in fine enforcement, and suggesting other ways to improve the position. We are actively investigating the prospect of the use of community service as an alternative to imprisonment for failure to pay fines, and have issued a document for consultation to interested organisations. We shall make a final decision based on their response.

Mr. Spencer: Does my hon. Friend agree that a period of imprisonment in default of payment is an important sanction, which results in payment in the majority of cases?

Mr. Mellor: Yes, Sir. As my hon. and learned Friend is right to say, we are talking about a final way of enforcing payment, which works remarkably well. In 1983, 1·5 million fines were imposed on males, and there were only 22,000 admissions to prison. That is a small proportion. However, we still believe that those admissions to prison are too many and that more effective administration could reduce that number further. That would be in the interests of good management of the prisons.

Deportation Statistics

10. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been deported or removed during the last 12 months who are parents of British-born children.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Mr. Eastham: Does the Minister agree that the media tell us increasingly about parents being separated from their children and sent back to their own countries? May I draw to his attention the case of my constituent, Mr. Kamul Kumar, who has lived in Britain since 1978 and who has been served with a deportation order? He has appealed to the tribunal. He has a three-year-old child, who he will probably never see again if he is deported. Will the Minister have some compassion in such cases?

Mr. Waddington: Many cases are mentioned in the media. Unfortunately, all too often, the reports of those cases are one-sided. I do my best to redress the balance. As to the case mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, he will know perfectly well that no one is deported from Britain without first being able to take his case to appeal and have his case heard by an adjudicator, and often also by the immigration appeals tribunal, which can have regard to all the compassionate circumstances.

Clearly, the existence of children is a relevant factor in deciding whether to exercise discretion in a deportation case, but neither the Government nor their predecessors have allowed people to believe that they can use their children to avoid the consequences of their own behaviour. The spectacle of people threatening the Home Office that if the law is enforced they will leave their children behind is thoroughly unedifying. When such threats are carried out, it is parents who split families, not the Home Office.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. and learned Friend confirm that many of the parents of British-born children were illegal immigrants when those children were born?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend is right. We often deal with cases of children born to poeple who were illegal immigrants before the British Nationality Act 1981 came into force. The parents say, "I dare you to deport me. If you do, I will leave my child here as a charge on the state". There is nothing honourable in that.

Mr. Janner: Does the Mininster recognise the agonising choice of parents who, if they are returned to their countries, are likely to starve? They must decide whether to leave their children here, where they will at least eat, or to take them home, where they may well die?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. and learned Gentleman poses the dilemma, and that is precisely why we have an appeals system and why our law allows an independent tribunal to consider all the circumstances. I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman is not inviting me to tell the House that, in every case where a person is liable to deportation, he should not be deported because of the existence of a child. That would be nonsense, and it was certainly not the policy of the Labour Government.

Licensing Law

13. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Govenment's current policy on the licensing law.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has no immediate plans for legislation on the licensing law. He is, however, keeping the matter under review, and will consider carefully the result of a survey, commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, into the working of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976.

Mr. Leigh: Does my hon. Friend agree that the experience of Scotland is that the liberalisation of its licensing laws has led to less drunkeness and crime and more employment? Is it not about time that the Government rid England of this resrictive hangover from the first world war, followed Scotland's example, and liberalised the licensing laws?

Mr. Mellor: The Scottish experience is being analysed by the Secretary of State for Scotland. We shall be in a better position to know whether my hon. Friend's confident assertions are correct when we have that evidence.

Mr. Mark Carlisle: Does my hon. Friend agree that the sooner the licensing laws are changed to take account of many of the proposals of the Errol committee, which are over 12 years old, the better?

Mr. Mellor: I regret that I cannot agree entirely with my right hon. and learned Friend. There were a number of proposals of the committee which successive Administrations, including, may I say, some of those of which my right hon. and learned Friend was a member, did not feel able to accept. We are in the same position.

Mr. Lawrence: Is my hon. Friend aware that a change to improve the licensing laws would revolutionise the tourist industry, substantially improve the brewing industry and do a great deal to reduce crime?

Mr. Mellor: All of that depends on the impact that increased opening hours would have on alcohol abuse, because we also have a serious problem of alcohol abuse. What the Government say — and I believe it to be responsible — is that we should await the evidence before we reach a conclusion. We shall not have the evidence until the research by the Secretary of State for Scotland has been completed and published.

Mr. Ryman: I am sure the Minister appreciates that most sensible people would welcome a reform of the licensing laws on the Scottish model. Does he appreciate

also that among the most vociferous opponents of such a reform would be the brewers, who are the paymasters of the Tory party today as they have always been?

Mr. Mellor: Not for the first time, I am sorry to say that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. In fact, the Brewers Society is one of the prime proponents of the change. I do not know where that leaves the hon. Gentleman's point, but it is not quite as he made it, I suspect.

Civil Defence

15. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which authorities will be consulted before he reaches a conclusion about the report on the standardisation of training of civil defence volunteers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We have formally consulted the Association of County Councils, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of District Councils, the London Boroughs Association, and the Greater London council. Copies of the report have also been made available for information to the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives; the County Emergency Planning Officers' Society; and the Association of Civil Defence and Emergency Planning Officers.

Mr. Bowden: Does my hon. Friend not believe that the working party on the standardisation of training for civil defence volunteers should have been given an indication of the number of volunteers who should be trained?

Mr. Shaw: I accept my hon. Friend's point. It is a question of how far local authorities might wish to alter the way in which they perceive the need for training for the volunteer movement. My hon. Friend will be aware that there are about 17,000 members in the volunteer movement and that the distribution of the movement is very different between one area and another.

Mr. Ashton: Why will the Minister not give way to the great demand on the Government Benches to bring back Dad's Army? Is he not aware that Dad's Army was popular and funny and that we would welcome it because it would show what nonsense civil defence is?

Mr. Shaw: I note the hon. Gentleman's robust defence of the position that he would wish to see, which would be that of no preparation whatsoever, so that the maximum number of people, presumably, would be put at risk.

Mr. Nell Thorne: I know how keen my hon. Friend is to ensure that civil defence is provided for the benefit of the population as a whole. Can he say what he would expect by way of training for these volunteers in numbers of hours per year?

Mr. Shaw: This is one of the matters on which we shall be consulting in the light of the working party's report. My hon. Friend will be aware that the college at Easingwold runs courses which so far have a capacity of the order of 700 per year.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is there not an overwhelming case for advice on civil defence to be reviewed radically in the light of recent scientific evidence that any nuclear conflict would probably be followed by a nuclear winter?

Mr. Shaw: Advice at any given time is taken in the light of informed opinion. The hon. Gentleman should be aware that there are differing views about some of the surveys to which he has referred obliquely.

Coal Industry Dispute

16. **Mr. Squire** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest figure for numbers of police hurt in policing the coal mining dispute.

Mr. Brittan: Between 13 March last year and 30 January this year inclusive 1,333 police officers were injured in incidents connected with the policing of the miners' dispute.

Mr. Squire: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that these figures are disgraceful and that in almost any year other than the last one they would have met with universal condemnation by every hon. Member? It is sad they do not now.

Mr. Brittan: They are disgraceful and I believe that they do meet with virtually universal condemnation.

17. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been disciplined as a result of actions in relation to the policing of the miners' strike.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information is not yet available centrally. I understand however, that the Police Complaints Board will include in its annual report for 1984 statistics on the number of investigation reports received by it which it has identified as dealing with complaints arising from the policing of the miners' strike and on the outcome of the investigation.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister agree that while an investigation against a police officer is taking place that officer should not be allowed back on the picket lines, since investigations tend to take months rather than weeks? May we have that assurance?

Mr. Shaw: I understand the hon. Lady's point, but that is a matter for the individual chief constables. I shall consider the matter if the hon. Lady writes to me.

Heroin and Cocaine

18. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority the Government give to dealing with the misuse of heroin and cocaine.

Mr. Mellor: The Government continue to give the highest priority to combating the trafficking and misuse of drugs, including heroin and cocaine. The ministerial group on the misuse of drugs is co-ordinating action right across the board to tackle both the supply of, and demand for, these and other dangerous drugs.

Mr. Bellingham: In the light of that helpful reply, does my hon. Friend agree that the present number of customs officers should remain and not be allowed to fall any further?

Mr. Mellor: The number of customs officers dealing with drugs matters has been increased this year. The number of customs officers making specialist investigations into heroin traffic has doubled since 1979. We continue to keep under review the operational numbers of customs officers needed to combat the menace.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 31 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Clarke: What explanation, excuse or apology does the Prime Minister have to offer for the appalling increase in unemployment figures announced this morning? Is this what the Foreign Secretary had in mind when, in a speech on Friday, he said that the Tory record on jobs was "second to none"?

The Prime Minister: This month's figures are, of course, disappointing, although there is always a substantial increase in unemployment in January. For example, in 1975 the increase was 118,000 and in 1976, 102,000. These figures emphasise all the more the need to control unit wage costs. Over the year to the second quarter of 1984 our wage costs rose by over 5 per cent. compared with between 2 and 3 per cent. in France and Italy, 0 per cent. in Germany, minus 0·5 per cent. in the United States and minus 5 per cent. in Japan.

Q2. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does my right hon. Friend agree that since many of the problems with which the nation is now grappling were caused by some of the policies followed by some of the Prime Ministers who have been honoured by Oxford university, it might be a vindication of her policies that she has not been so honoured?

The Prime Minister: I understand and appreciate the concern which prompts my hon. Friend to ask that question. I think he will agree that many distinguishing people have been honoured by Oxford and been given honourary degrees. Whether those degrees are offered is wholly a matter for Oxford university and it must remain that way.

Mr. Kinnock: In view of the appalling rise of 150,000 in unemployment over the last year and the remorselessly rising trend, will the Prime Minister tell us at what point she will change her policies and take the wise counsel of the Earl of Stockton and others of her elders and betters?

The Prime Minister: I noted what my noble Friend the Earl of Stockton said in the other place. May I point out that when he was in power there was one part of his policy which I would be absolutely delighted to adopt——

Mr. Winnick: One?

The Prime Minister: Many. I was a member of the same Government — he honoured me in that way. Indeed, my noble Friend was careful to keep the proportion of the national income which was taken by public spending down to 33 per cent. Today it is 42 per cent. The Leader of the Opposition should join me in trying to get the proportion of public expenditure reduced.

Mr. Kinnock: Has the Prime Minister just made a policy statement, or is she going to continue with the vast decrease in public expenditure which has come about under her Government simply and solely because of her insistence on sustaining high unemployment? If she will reduce the levels of unemployment to those of the years when Mr. Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister, we will talk about a reduction in public spending.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend had a low percentage of public spending and a low level of unemployment. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that the difference between then and now in unemployment and spending can in fact account for 10 percentage points he really should study his figures. What he is trying to do is to increase the amount of public spending, which does not help to create an enterprising society. In the meantime, may I point out to him that the number of new jobs is still rising, the number of unemployed school leavers is lower than last year, and I am sure he will be pleased to know that the proportion of population of working age in work is higher than in West Germany, higher than in France, higher than in Italy and equal to that in the United States of America.

Mr. Tracey: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that never in her term of office has she had to cause her car to make a U-turn at Heathrow airport, following the example of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) during the sterling crisis?

The Prime Minister: I am glad to confirm that. That is where the Opposition's policies landed them and that is where their policies would land the country again if ever they were implemented.

Dr. Owen: Now that the Governor of the Bank of England has said that it would have been easier to check the slide in the pound if we had been a member of the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system, will the Prime Minister stop shilly-shallying and join the EMS within the next few days?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have always said that we shall join the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS when we believe that the time is appropriate. It is kept under review from time to time, but I must make one thing clear. Joining the EMS would not obviate increases in interest rates, it would not obviate the need for financial discipline and, indeed, it might increase it.

Q3. **Mr. Strang** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Strang: Will the Prime Minister again explain to the House why she is opposed to the resumption of negotiations without preconditions between the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Coal Board? Is it because she is intent on trying to humiliate the executive of the NUM — [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not"?] — no matter how long that prolongs the strike and how much further damage it inflicts on our national economy?

The Prime Minister: I am anxious that, if talks are to be entered into, following seven rounds which have not been successful, they should be successful. The hon. Gentleman talks of humiliation. If the miners have been

humiliated, they have been humiliated by the executive, which did not allow them a ballot, by the executive which has prevented them from accepting the best offer since nationalisation, by the executive which has lost them an average of £8,000 per miner and has made their families suffer great privation and some intimidation and violence. That is the humiliation that they have suffered.

Q4. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the serious concern among those who gave generously to assist Ethiopia that aid ships are being held up by Soviet weapon ships and that free aid food is openly being sold on the black market while starvation continues? Will she and other Western leaders take an initiative to impress upon the Ethiopian Government that the aid must get through to those who need it?

The Prime Minister: We make every effort to ensure that the aid gets through to those who need it and the Hercules are very material in ensuring that. So far as I know, most aid gets through and very little goes on to the black market. A number of ships have been unloaded recently. I understand that on 24 January one Soviet ship unloaded arms at Assab but that this was not to the detriment of the unloading of grain, which takes priority.

Mr. Heffer: Will the Prime Minister take a few minutes out of her time today to re-read the prayer of peace of St. Francis of Assisi, which she read on the steps of No. 10 when she was elected? Will she relate it to her attitude to heating allowances for the old, the position of the unemployed and in particular her vindictive attitude towards the National Union of Mineworkers?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's question contains its own contradictions. I understand that he is fully behind a strike which attempts to deprive people of power for industry and heat for their houses. His intention and that of others who support the miners' strike is to deprive people of heating in their houses. He attempts to masquerade as their protecter, but he is in fact depriving them of heat.

Q5. **Mr. John M. Taylor** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend comment on the overwhelming vote by which the engineering union has chosen to accept finance for ballots? Would not the Labour party and other trade unions do well to take note of that?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, we passed that legislation to ensure that ordinary members of trade unions would have the right to vote on certain occasions, always for the officers of their unions and sometimes before strikes. It is very good that main, big unions are taking advantage of that legislation, which was passed by this Government.

Q6. **Mr. Terry Davis** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Davis: How many more people must lose their jobs before the Chancellor of the Exchequer loses his?

The Prime Minister: The policy being run by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exhequer is the one that will restore enterprise to this country. If we do not get more businesses and expansion of businesses we shall never have a rising standard of living. My right hon. Friend's policies are the right ones. The Opposition would finish up at the IMF again.

Q7. **Mr. Squire** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Squire: May I remind my right hon. Friend that next Tuesday is the 25th anniversary of her maiden speech, in which she introduced legislation to make council meetings open? May I assure her that many right hon. and hon. Members hope that her campaigning zeal in that area of accountability has in no way been reduced?

The Prime Minister: I am well aware of the significance of my hon. Friend's question. I shall look at the Bill very closely.

Mr. Robert C. Brown: Does the Prime Minister believe that confession is good for the soul? [HON. MEMBERS: "What soul?"] If so, when can we expect a penitent Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box to confess to the nation that her economic policies have been generally a monumental disaster for the whole of the country and a crucifixion for the north-east of England?

The Prime Minister: I note that the hon. Gentleman regards the lowest level of inflation for 16 years and the highest standard of living as something that he does not like. We think it is rather good.

Q9. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Short: Will the Prime Minister admit that everything she promised in 1979 from her economic policies has failed to come about, that the economy has been gravely damaged, that people are suffering from unemployment and that she owes it to the country to change her economic policies?

The Prime Minister: The fact is that, far from those policies not having come about, inflation is at its lowest level, we have the highest standard of living this country has ever known, some 1·7 more million people are owner-occupiers, since 1979 there has been an increase of 20 per cent. in real terms in expenditure on the Health Service, pensioners have received increases in their pensions in excess of the rate of inflation and we have the highest amount of heating allowance that we have ever had. That is good, even if the hon. Lady does not recognise it.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (7th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion on the coal mining dispute.

Motion relating to the Immigration Appeals (Procedure) Rules.

TUESDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Films Bill, the Shipbuilding Bill and of the Milk (Cessation of Production) Bill.

Proceedings on the Town and Country Planning (Compensation) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 6 FEBRUARY — Motion on the Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Precepts) Order.

Remaining stages of the Hong Kong Bill.

THURSDAY 7 FEBRUARY—Motions relating to the Water Authorities (Return on Assets) Orders 1984 and 1985.

Ways and Means resolution relating to the GLC grant to London Regional Transport.

Motion on the London Regional Transport (Levy) Order.

FRIDAY 8 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 11 FEBRUARY — Private Members motions until seven o'clock. Afterwards, remaining stages of the Social Security Bill.

Mr. Kinnock: The Government have made no arrangements for a debate next week on the public expenditure White Paper, and the delay since its publication last week is starting to become a little suspicious. May we look forward to this important debate in the near future, and certainly long before the Budget?

Although these are early days, there is already evidence of the success of the televising of proceedings in the House of Lords. When will the right hon. Gentleman provide an opportunity to discuss the televising of this House?

On the motions relating to the Water Authorities (Return on Assets) Orders to be debated on Thursday, will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House what the Government will do in view of the fact that a large number of Conservative Members are opposed to the completely unjustifiable rise in water rates in the Thames valley area, and especially in the wake of the extraordinary policy of non-intervention in the Division Lobbies which was established last night?

Mr. Biffen: I recognise the importance of holding a debate on the public expenditure White Paper. I hope that we can agree through the usual channels to hold it in the near future.

On the question of a debate on the televised recording of the proceedings of the House, I should like to share with the right hon. Gentleman the answer I gave to the leader of the Social Democrats. I know that it is difficult for the Leader of the Opposition to share anything with the leader of the Social Democrats. I believe that I have met the point of anxiety.

As to the business on Thursday, the Water Authorities (Return on Assets) Orders will be presented to the House. Their case will be argued convincingly by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction, and doubtless we shall have a thoroughly satisfactory result.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Will my right hon. Friend take the earliest opportunity to make time for a debate on the bias in the television news media as evidenced by the research of Stirling university which shows that during the first eight months of the miners' dispute threequarters of the time was allocated to comrade Arthur Scargill and his crew and not to the obviously unbiased views of the chairman and board of the National Coal Board?

Mr. Biffen: I have made no provision in Government time for a debate of the type that my hon. Friend requests, but if he uses the utmost ingenuity he will find that there is to be a debate on the media on the Adjournment on Monday next week. He might see what he can do then.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Will the Leader of the House reflect upon the reply that he gave me some weeks ago during business questions about the desirability of a debate on youth, given that the International Year of Youth is now well underway? It is in the interests of the whole House to develop an interest in the political process among young people in this country.

Mr. Biffen: I have already said to one of my hon. Friends that I accepted that it was desirable that we should have a debate upon that topic. I only regret that I cannot give any guarantee as to how soon it will be held.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the business for Thursday goes far wider than water in the Thames valley? If that is not the case, will he please urge his hon. Friend to consider the matter again, as many of us would have the greatest difficulty in supporting the Government.

Mr. Biffen: There is no more convincing advocate than my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction and, therefore, I still travel hopefully about the result.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Ought we not to have an early statement on the Government's reaction to the outcome of last night's debate on the inquiry inspector's report on Stansted and, in particular, on the withering criticisms in one speech after another from the Conservative Benches?

Mr. Biffen: The right hon. Gentleman, who is a fair combatant in these matters, will recognise that my right hon. Friend explained that after the debate he would proceed to carry out his quasi-judicial functions in considering the recommendations of the inspector's report. We must wait for that process to be completed.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend agree that now is the proper time to have a debate on the disgraceful campaign that many of the pharmaceutical companies, and some dentists and doctors, are leading against the admirable sense that is to be brought into the dispensing of medicines? Some of the letters that I have had from my constituents, as have many hon. Members, show that some of those companies are more interested in their profits than in the people whom they are there to help. Has not the time come for such a debate to be held and for that type of disgraceful campaign to be put to rest?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Biffen: I understand the point made by my hon. Friend, and the reception that it received shows that it goes far wider than himself. The House might like to know that the policy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services will be the subject of regulations and therefore will be debated in the House.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Why did not the Leader of the House mention my People's Right to Fuel Bill, which is coming up on Wednesday of next week, bearing in mind that over 120,000 households have had their fuel supplies disconnected because they cannot afford to pay their bills? Pensioners in Scotland and the north of England are, in some cases, literally freezing to death because the Department of Health and Social Security is mean and is disqualifying those people from receiving the severe weather allowance. Will the Leader of the House consider my invitation to him to add his name to the list of sponsors of my Bill which is a comprehensive charter to eradicate fuel poverty from this country for ever?

Mr. Biffen: I did not mention the hon. Gentleman for the very good reason that, as he has just demonstrated, no one other than himself can adequately represent his particular strand of view. If invited to join my name to his, I will give the matter serious consideration.

Sir Anthony Kershaw (Stroud): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a certain confusion has arisen about parliamentary pensions, perhaps because of the change in the basis upon which they are to be paid, and perhaps for some other reason? Will my right hon. Friend contemplate issuing a statement on the matter in the near future to clear up the confusion?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly consider that point.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): How can the Leader of the House hold forth the olive branch of a debate on youth in International Year of Youth at a time when the Secretary of State for Social Services is preparing to deprive 234,000 16 and 17-year-olds of the right to supplementary benefit? How can the Leader of the House express support for a debate on youth while school leavers are being attacked in such a way?

Mr. Biffen: That is a spurious point, and the reason why I shall offer a debate is that it will provide an opportunity for that to be demonstrated.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Before we have the debate suggested by my right hon. Friend as a result of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark), may we have an even more urgent debate to refute the allegations of the small number of doctors who are debasing their profession and the Hippocratic oath by terrifying the elderly and infirm with wildly inaccurate stories about the Government's proposals for the listing of medicines? If people have cases to fight, is it not more effective and better for them to fight them themselves rather than to use the elderly, the infirm, the defenceless and all the more vulnerable members of society as their proxies?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Biffen: The reaction in the House demonstrates that my hon. Friend's view is widely shared. I have already explained the point about the regulations. This topic is also listed for the Adjournment debate on 7 February.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the importance of the question of disconnection? In the recent past, the supply of an 83-year-old woman — a chronic invalid — was disconnected under the present arrangements and she was deprived of the right to heat. Is not such a case a sufficient reason for the House to debate the present arrangement and to seek to introduce legislation to stop such inhuman acts?

Mr. Biffen: I do not deny that that is a major issue. The best course that I can take, at least initially, is to refer the hon. Gentleman's point to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Ian Lloyd (Havant): My right hon. Friend will be aware how strenuously and successfully he and his predecessors have resisted the pressure brought to bear on them by hon. Members on both sides of the House, particularly those with young families, to publish a provisional parliamentary timetable for the year. I have in my hand what I am told is a completely accurate provisional timetable extending to the time of the Queen's Speech in November and including the Chancellor's Budget statement. If such information can be made public —and I am told that it is authentic—can it not be made available to hon. Members?

Mr. Biffen: I should very much like to have a copy of the document, especially the Chancellor's Budget statement.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): For the past three weeks the Leader of the House has made sympathetic, though platitudinous, noises about the prospect of a debate about the Housing Benefits Amendment (No. 4) Regulations 1984. Is he aware that the order has only 14 or 15 unexpired days left? May we be assured that if the debate does not take place next week it will be held in the following week?

Mr. Biffen: When the hon. Gentleman has been here a little longer, he will realise that platitudinous statements are the stock-in-trade of the occupant of this post. I will consider what can be done about that point.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Because of the censure motion this afternoon, the important debate on the Royal Air Force will have to be postponed. In view of the significant decisions that have to be taken on the European fighter aircraft and the new basic trainer, can my right hon. Friend assure the House that that debate will be reinstated as soon as possible?

Mr. Biffen: I can give my hon. Friend that undertaking.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Did my right hon. Friend see the horrifying pictures of starvation in Eritrea and Tigré — the rebel areas of Ethiopia — on television last night? The Government have an excellent record on giving aid to Ethiopia, but as that aid is not getting through to areas such as Tigré, although it is urgently needed, could he arrange for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development to make an early statement on the matter with a view to establishing what can be done?

Mr. Biffen: I shall convey to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development my hon. Friend's request on a matter that touches all parts of the House.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are to be at least two marches in Leicester on Sunday 3 February? One is effectively in favour of the IRA—it is on "troops out of Northern Ireland"—and the other is by the National Front. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend is aware that there is a problem in that the chief constable cannot get a ban for those marches without applying——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member should ask a question about business for next week.

Mr. Bruinvels: Could my right hon. Friend provide time for the House to amend section 3(2) of the Public Order Act 1936 to allow the chief constable to go directly to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for an immediate ban to protect the citizens of Leicester?

Mr. Biffen: I am sorry that my hon. Friend was unable to ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that question during Question Time. I shall refer what he said to my right hon. and learned Friend so that he may assess the situation.

BILL PRESENTED

Transport

Mr. Secretary Ridley, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Sir Keith Joseph, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. Secretary Jenkin, Mr. Secretary Tebbit, Mr. David Mitchell, and Mr. Michael Spicer, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to road passenger transport; to make provision for the transfer of the operations of the National Bus Company to the private sector; to provide for the reorganisation of passenger transport in the public sector; to provide for local and central government financial support for certain passenger transport services and travel concessions; to make new provision with respect to the constitution, powers and proceedings of the Transport Tribunal; to make provision with respect to grants payable under section 92 of the Finance Act 1965; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 68.]

The Economy

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Leader of the Opposition to move the motion, I should say that today's debate is not one of those in which I am empowered to use my discretion to impose a time limit of 10 minutes on speeches during the early evening. However, it is clear that many right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak and I appeal once again for reasonably short speeches. I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.46 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I beg to move,

That this House censures Her Majesty's Government for its gross mismanagement of the British economy which has led to the highest real interest rates, the worst manufacturing trade deficit and the highest level of unemployment in the history of Great Britain.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise to the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) for bringing forward the point of order at this stage, but he will appreciate the necessity for doing so. The motion that the right hon. Gentleman has just moved in terms excludes part of the United Kingdom, whether the intention is to inhibit right hon. and hon. Members on this Bench from taking part in the debate, or whether it is that the Labour party does not care about the economy and employment in Northern Ireland. The ruling that I am seeking from you, Mr. Speaker, which I hope you will be able to give, is that the debate may extend generally over the economy of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Speaker: I can give the right hon. Gentleman that assurance.

Mr. Kinnock *rose — —[Laughter.]* Conservative Members obviously think that the appalling levels of unemployment and destitution in Northern Ireland are a great joke. It is clear that the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), who has just raised a point of order, perfectly properly and aptly in my view, does not share their view. That might be one of the reasons why he is on these Benches, having left the Conservative party.

In moving the motion that relates, naturally, to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, my party is bringing the Government to account for their complete mismanagement of our country's affairs. It is also holding the Government to account for the way in which their policies have brought us to the turmoil of recent weeks and inflicted on our country the dreadful uncertainty of future months. That recent turmoil and those uncertainties provide only the background to today's censure debate, as the real question that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer must answer today is this: how did their regime turn a modern, industrialised country, with a wealth of energy resources and revenues that are denied to many of our competitors, into the punchbag of the world's currency speculators?

How did they let Britain's affairs get into the state where a wobble in international oil prices or the strength of the dollar could knock our economy sprawling, bring a 40 per cent. increase in interest rates in the period of a fortnight and impose massive extra costs on industries and households in Britain? That question must be answered today.

In asking that question, we are not talking the pound down, for we could not in a whole week —

[Interruption.] I am glad to see the Chancellor in his place. I thought for a moment that the Prime Minister had sacked him.

In asking those questions about how the Government have got us into this state, we are not talking the pound down, for we could not in a whole week of censure debates do a fraction of the damage that is done in the average press briefing by the Prime Minister's press secretary, Mr. Bernard Ingham.

Neither are we in this debate selling Britain short. Our complaint is that we have a Government who are selling Britain out and selling Britain off. We do not delight, as we debate these matters, in the misfortunes that afflict our country because of the actions of this Government. We see too much suffering among our constituents, the people whom we represent, to take any joy in the present condition of our country.

Bad news for Britain is bad news for us all—for all in this House and for all our people throughout the country—but, of course, the news is worse for some than it is for others. It is much worse for the small business that must borrow than it is for the great corporation with massive private assets. The news is much worse for the young home buyer than it is for the property magnate. The news is much worse for those who will lose their living because of speculators and interest rate rises than it is for those who make their living by speculation and from interest rate rises.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire) *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: I did not refer to the hon. Gentleman by name, but if the cap fits, I suppose he wants to wear it.

I was talking about people—parasites on our society—who contribute nothing and inflict dreadful harm on our country. Those in that group, those speculators, we are told when it suits the Prime Minister, are the people of enterprise and audacity, the people of the market, the people whom the Prime Minister admires for their boldness, adventure, sense of commitment and risk-taking.

That is what the Prime Minister repeatedly tells us about the enterprise climate that she wants to create. Indeed, she admires them so much that she wants to run the country for their benefit. She wants a land fit for speculators, and that has been the whole tale of the right hon. Lady's policies — *[Interruption.]* — and her dependence during the last five years on people and institutions of that kind. Or, at least, the right hon. Lady likes those speculators, those pirates, some of the time. When they are making a killing out of buying and selling British Telecom shares, or British Aerospace, Amersham International or Cable and Wireless, they are, in the view of the Prime Minister, to be admired.

Mr. Richard Ryder (Mid-Norfolk) *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: But when they turn their sterling gains from that buying and selling into dollar purchases and take their money out of our currency, the Prime Minister starts to agree with us and to think of them as irrational and irresponsible. That is the schizophrenia of the Prime Minister.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is obvious that the right hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Mr. Kinnock: That, as I was saying, is the schizophrenia of the Prime Minister, which I suppose is something of a euphemism for hypocrisy, although I know that I am not allowed to use that word in the House. All of the resulting confusion because of how the Prime Minister feels about the operations of the market has been manifest in recent weeks. Faced with a fresh attack on the currency by their soulmates in the market, the Government have had to resort to the pathetic process of offering conflicting press briefings—so much so that yesterday the *Financial Times* was moved to describe their activities as "secretive dithering". This secret dithering over the past few weeks has sent the money market into a spin and lenders and borrowers into a positive whirl. It has even got *The Times* into a tizzy. Yesterday the paper provided probably the shortest and clearest evidence of the confusion generated by the Government's vacillation and giddiness in past weeks. It had to print the following correction:

> "Mr. Lawson"
> said *The Times* yesterday
> "said on Monday that it would 'now' be appropriate for sterling to rise against the dollar, and not 'not' as printed yesterday".

If the self-proclaimed "paper of record" cannot get it right and cannot understand it, what chance have others?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): Pathetic!

Mr. Kinnock: That is exactly what the *Daily Mail* said about the right hon. Gentleman—pathetic.

Mr. Forth: As he develops his theme, will the right hon. Gentleman please tell the House whether he will get to the stage of recommending that we should resort to the International Monetary Fund in the same way as his Government were forced to do because of their mismanagement?

Mr. Kinnock: I shall certainly get to that stage and also to the Government's borrowing record and their financial position. What the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) will discover, and will have to apologise to his constituents for, is that instead of this Government following the recommendation of a former Prime Minister, the Earl of Stockton, to borrow to produce, and instead of using their debts for the purpose of generating wealth in our economy, they have been using their increasing debts for the purpose of paying the bills arising out of slump in our economy. Perhaps the hon. Member could explain that to his constituents. Then they might see that there is a preferable alternative. During recent weeks the record of the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been pathetic.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South) *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: I shall not give way unless the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir William Clark) is rising to defend the Earl of Stockton.

Sir William Clark: Will the right hon. Gentleman remind the House that in 1979, because of the overseas borrowing of the Labour Government, we owed 22 billion dollars but that this Government have now repaid over half of that debt?

Mr. Kinnock: I shall most definitely and eagerly come to that point. I shall relate to the hon. Member for Croydon, South the precise record of this Government during the last five years and the comparison that can be made with the previous five years. I believe that the hon.

[Mr. Kinnock]

Member will find the exercise very illuminating. Even somebody as innumerate as the hon. Member might be able to understand it. We have against the background of recent weeks and the turmoil and tension set up in our economy called on a few occasions for the sacking of the Chancellor. That would be a fitting fate for a man with his record. Other people's jobs should not depend upon a man who does his own job so badly.

We know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer wants a high growth rate. We know that he wants a low inflation rate and we know that he wants everybody to go busily about their business. But given his record, that is not really on. If I may coin a phrase from the Prime Minister—he has very good taste, but we do not think that he is really up to it.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is a particular friend of the Prime Minister. We know that she would not like to sack him. It is a brutal old business for someone with such a gentle spirit. We know that. We also know from her previous record when she has dismissed other members of her Cabinet that she is, in her own words, a "reluctant butcher." So we should ask her to make it easy on herself and on the Chancellor. She need not go through all that brutal old business of sacking. She can call the Chancellor in one fine morning—let us say, tomorrow morning—and simply say, "Nigel dear, I think the time has come for you to grow a beard."

The trouble is—*[Interruption.]* I am very much in favour of the broadcasting of this House, but it is liable to widespread abuse by Conservative Members. The plan that Conservative Whips have laid down to mutter and murmur throughout the speeches of Opposition Members is so clear as to be pathetic.

Mr. Ryder *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: I give way to the junior hon. Member.

Mr. Ryder: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has at last said that the pound has reached its right level. Does the Leader of the Opposition agree?

Mr. Kinnock: The hon. Gentleman — [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] The hon. Member for Croydon, South, who intervened previously, is innumerate and the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), who has just intervened, obviously has a worse affliction. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) did not say that the pound has reached the right level; he said that it may have reached the right level. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition wishes to continue.

Mr. Kinnock: Then my right hon. Friend went on to say——

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not intolerable that the Leader of the Opposition should be so anxious not to give way that he seeks to wave you back into your Chair?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that we can hear the debate in reasonable silence. I am the first to appreciate that there are strong feelings on both sides of the House, but we should give each other a fair hearing.

Mr. Kinnock: It is worth pointing out that that last intervention was from the elected leader of Conservative Back Benchers—the chairman of the 1922 Committee. It is a direct demonstration of how short they are of arguments or any sensible response.

I was saying that my right hon. Friend had said that the pound may be at the right level but that it was

"up to the Government to say what the level should be".

Perhaps later in the debate the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk will address that question to his Front Bench rather than that we should have to wait until we hear from the Prime Minister on "Woman's Hour" to find out the Government's view on the standing of the pound.

If we were to see the departure of the Chancellor, even if the Prime Minister were to resort to that expedient, it would not be enough. What we want is not just a change of personalities in the Government; we want a change of policies in the Government.

Throughout the Chancellor's oscillations between crisis and coma in recent weeks we have been seeing the way in which a harvest of insecurity, instability, interest rate rises and record unemployment rises has been garnered from the seeds that were laid when the Prime Minister first went into 10 Downing street. Her Chancellors have been nurturing those weeds ever since that awful day.

It is not just policies that need changing; it is the whole attitude and approach of the Government to the problems of our nation. That is the truth behind today's conditions.

Faced with that fact, I hope that the Prime Minister will not simply resort to that litany of doctored statistics, half-truths and misrepresentations which has become her stock in trade when she switches to autopilot at Question Time on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

I hope that we shall not hear from the right hon. Lady today that we have the highest gross national product ever, as if it were a cause for great historic celebration. Until she achieved power, that was a commonplace occurrence just about every year.

I hope that the right hon. Lady is not going to say that we have the highest investment ever, at least, not without admitting that manufacturing investment is still, in 1985, 30 per cent. lower than in was in 1979.

I hope that the right hon. Lady will not talk about the highest retail sales ever without admitting that that has been achieved by a £70,000 million increase in household debt—a record level in Britain's history—and a 53 per cent. increase in manufactured imports.

We want the whole truth from the Prime Minister this afternoon. We look for that truth, as we look for the answers and descriptions of what the Government are to do in the future to make sure that we do not have a repetition of the farcical turmoil, the secret dithering, that we have seen from the Government in recent weeks.

I hope that this afternoon the Prime Minister will not tell us about her record on borrowing——

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South) *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: I am responding to a point raised by two hon. Members and I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman afterwards.

I hope that we shall not hear, as we have heard so often before, about the way in which the Prime Minister has kept control of borrowing. She tells us that she has maintained that control, that she has been a prudent and thrifty housekeeper to the nation's resources over the past five

years. But the truth is that, although the Government came to power planning to borrow £30 billion in cash terms, over the past five years they have borrowed £50 billion. If that is not enough from a Government who are supposed to be committed against borrowng, that figure of £50 billion is £10,000 million more than the figure during the five years of the Labour Government, who were supposed to be so profligate and careless of the country's welfare. That is the truth.

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

That is the truth and the Prime Minister should be wise enough to admit it. While she is in the confessional she should also acknowledge that while the Labour Government were undertaking their lower level of borrowing in order, as the Earl of Stockton, whom I have quoted before and will do so again, says——

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): Grasping at a straw.

Mr. Kinnock: Is that what the Earl of Stockton is in the hon. Gentleman's view—a straw? History will not record the hon. Gentleman's view that his past Prime Minister was a straw. It will compare his past Prime Minister with the plastic lady who leads the country now. He was a man of real steel and was prepared to stand up for the country, unlike the right hon. Lady.

The Labour Government borrowed to produce, not to pay the bills of slump, as this Government are doing. Moreover, the Labour Government had smaller oil revenues during their entire five years of office than this Government receive in one month. That is a massive difference between the records of those two Governments.

Today the right hon. Lady should acknowledge all of that and explain what she and her Chancellors have been doing with those massive oil revenues and that massive borrowing. She should also explain what they will do now. She should explain it here in the House, and not on radio and television chat shows. The Government should be telling us here what their policies are. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are extremely sensitive about the way in which the Prime Minister chooses to communicate with them, let alone with the rest of the nation.

As the instability of recent weeks will not be the last scare about oil prices, as it will not be the last worry about Britain's oil production and revenues, and as those events under this Government will cause lurches in the exchange rate, what will the Government do about it next time? Have they started to plan for that eventuality, which is guaranteed under their present policies? Will the Prime Minister give us a repeat performance and communicate over the airwaves? Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer go to a newspaper proprietors' meeting, as he did last night, and say to them, "A storm may have blown up largely because of events beyond these shores and outwith our control, but in due course the storm will blow itself out. Meanwhile, we have battened down the hatches and the ship remains on course."? When Chancellors choose nautical analogies we know that they are extremely close to the rocks. I suppose that the ship in this case is that majestic vessel which last week the Earl of Stockton said was sinking. That is the ship on which the Chancellor appears to be the chief engineer.

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: The danger is that the Government will not listen to those in their party or elsewhere who counsel the course of new policies but will listen to the voices that tell them that their problems come from their laxity, softness and lack of toughness, and that they should toughen up their policies. That is the danger for our country. Those voices are coming from the markets.

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: If the Government take that advice it will make matters even worse. The Chancellor may say to the market, "You've got us in a spot. Speculation has made us put up interest rates. That's added to our burdens, especially those of debt interest and costs in industry. All right, I undertake not to cut taxes, as I promised last November." The speculators will say, "All right, but that's not enough. It won't do the trick. It won't go far enough for what we want." The Chancellor will say, "All right, we'll reduce our spending targets." "Ah," say the speculators, "You promised to do that before, but you always overshoot." As *The Times* stated yesterday, that will not convince anyone. Those markets are less interested in targets than in achievements. *[Interruption.]* The markets then say——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): If they were Labour Members who were rising, they would be out of here by now.

Mr. Kinnock: My hon. Friend is wrong. If Conservative Members had any answers, they would want to listen to the questions. Their fooling and childish behaviour is entirely due to the absence of any policies, direction or convincing answers.

The Chancellor does not convince the speculators with his undertaking to reduce spending targets, because he has always overshot those targets, and so they look for real cuts in public expenditure. What are real cuts—2 per cent., 3 per cent., or 5 per cent., of public expenditure totals? If a 2 per cent. cut were made, and £3 billion were acquired to reassure the markets and buy confidence in the Chancellor and the Prime Minister, between 250,000 and 500,000 more people would be unemployed. In the short term that might interest the markets, but only until they came to realise that by cutting £3 billion, the Government created so much extra unemployment that they had to spend a further £3 billion on that unemployment.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to Conservative Members who seek to intervene, that the Leader of the Opposition is not giving way. The more interruptions there are the less opportunity there is for Back Bench Members to participate in the debate.

Mr. Kinnock: I hope that these disruptive tactics get the same coverage as other disruptive tactics have had in the past.

That system of cutting and then having to take the consequences of higher costs is exactly the policy that the Prime Minister and her Government have followed during the past five years. That is what I meant when I told her at Question Time today, that she had been increasing public expenditure, but only through paying the bills of rising unemployment. The Government have cut public expenditure on everything except nuclear weapons,

[Mr. Kinnock]

fortress Falklands and unemployment. They have doubled VAT and increased the level of the tax burden from 31 per cent. to 36 per cent. of—*[Interruption.]*—the gross domestic product. They have given us the highest real interest rates—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat to both sides of the House that the more interruptions there are —*[Interruption.]* Will the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) not shout at me from a sedentary position. I say to hon. Members on both sides of the House that if the Leader of the Opposition is not giving way, and clearly he is not giving way, they should not seek to interrupt.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As it is clear that there is a deliberate plot by Conservative Members not to listen to the Leader of the Opposition, will it not make debate quite impossible because there will inevitably be a return at some time if they do not listen and if they keep interrupting the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an important debate. I hope that we can listen to each other with civility and in silence.

Mr. Kinnock: The United Kingdom has record interest rates, record unemployment, the lowest number of housing starts for years and all the problems of poverty and deprivation from five and a half years under the Prime Minister. Yet all that Conservative Members, who were elected to the House to represent their constituents, can do is demonstrate their paucity of argument and intelligence by acting like a bunch of yobbos.

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: I hope that the time will never come when Labour Members are so impressed by the broadcasting of proceedings as to show how shamefully badly half of Parliament can react when it is given a chance.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Leader of the Opposition, speaking with the full weight of a senior ex-Parliamentary Private Secretary, to refuse to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack)? If he gave way to my hon. Friend, would that not stop the noise?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has not been a Member of the House for very long, but he should know that if the Leader of the Opposition, or any other hon. Member, refuses to give way, the hon. Member concerned must desist.

Mr. Kinnock: Every intervention demonstrates how much further Conservative Members stoop into numskullery.

Under this Government, we have had record interest rates, unemployment and taxation. The Government have undertaken all those policies, but those who operate the Prime Minister's beloved markets insist that they want more. They are unsatiated by the policies of the past five years. They continue to demonstrate their irrationality, irresponsibility, and their complete lack of patriotism.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman, because at least he did not try to interrupt in such a yobbish way.

Mr. Amery: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Earlier in his speech he prayed in aid the remarks of Lord Stockton. May I remind him that when Lord Stockton was in office, inflation was about 2·5 per cent. and the bank rate was about 3·5 per cent. If we were to adopt Reagan economics today, our interest rates would have to be higher than those in America. Is that what the right hon. Gentleman is advocating?

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Gentleman should take up those matters in private with his father-in-law. The answer to his question is that Britain has its highest real interest rate for 50 years—the gap between the inflation rate and interest rates—for 50 years during which his father-in-law, the Earl of Stockton, pursued particular policies. The previous time that Britain was in such a position with its real interest rates, the Earl of Stockton had the honour to be a rebel on his Benches, demanding different policies, and eventually campaigning successfully to obtain those different policies. I wish only that that attitude ran in the right hon. Gentleman's family.

The markets are a fact of life; we recognise that and we shall deal with it. We do not worship at those markets as the Government do. But the Labour party, in common with all post-war Governments of every colour, believes that, because of the irrationality, selfishness and influence of the markets, the Government—indeed, any Government —have a basic duty to take and keep powers to ensure that they can protect their citizens against the capriciousness and the moods of the people and institutions in the markets, who have no sense of public obligation and no sense of national duty. I speak of the people who, as Upton Sinclair said many years ago, "do not need to use armies to crush countries" when they can "pick up Mr. Bell's telephone instrument."

In recent weeks, the most advanced forms of electronic communications have been used for the purposes of speculation and destabilisation. In those circumstances, more than ever before, modern Governments should retain the powers that would protect their people against those vagaries. They should take the powers that were taken and kept by other Governments. As the Labour party and many Conservative Members maintain, they should take and keep powers to control the flow of money abroad. They should take and keep powers to establish minimum lending rates. They should take and keep powers to control the production of a vital asset such as North sea oil. They should retain some convertible currency reserves to enable them to intervene, if necessary, to meet contingencies. They should use the Government's finances as a way of stimulating and developing the economy instead of using the Government's power to depress and deprive the economy. They should work actively for international economic co-operation to promote the essential well-being of the country.

In doing those things, a Government would not be over-centralised or over-powerful and would not be creating an overweening state. They would be fulfilling their responsibilities, not creating a subordinated control

economy. Those are the bounden responsibilities of a modern Government which, in the name of the welfare and security of their people, a Government must accept.

Of course, the Government have a responsibility to work for price stability and cost reduction. They have an equal responsibility—as the Prime Minister is so fond of selectively quoting the 1944 White Paper, I shall do so—to seek,

"a high and stable level of employment."

They are responsibilities that Governments of all parties should accept. However, those duties of protection, support and opportunity have been abdicated by the Government. They have wilfully abandoned every other objective and instrument for safeguarding the people of Britain, especially in times of economic storm. They got rid of exchange controls, minimum lending rates and authority over oil production. Their commitment to international co-operation is nothing more than grandiose verbiage intended to help the Prime Minister's political reputation. Millions of people know — 4 million and more unemployed know to their terrible cost—that the Government feel no obligation to introduce policies for generating employment. They are a Government of column dodgers and deserters from the national interest.

The Government scorn the history of their party and of Governments of the Labour party since the war. They are contemptuous of everything that went before the Prime Minister's reign—everything that came before what the Chancellor of the Exchequer called, "the British experiment." We have endured five years of that experiment: five years in which our trade in manufactured goods has plunged from a surplus five years ago of £1·5 billion to a deficit now of £4 billion; five years during which Britain has lost £35 billion worth of investment and £40 billion of output compared with 1979 standards; five years during which 2 million people have been thrown out of work; and five years during which industrial relations have been reduced to nothing more than conflict by policies like the one under which the Government will spend £2·4 billion to sustain a strike and to keep 20,000 miners out of work, when for that money they could have created 500,000 jobs and tried to change our economy.

Those failures of investment, output, employment, currency, interest rates, and of opportunity and justice in society, caused us to table a censure motion against the Government. The experience of the past five years has been dignified by the name "experiment", but there is nothing scientific or objective about it. If there had been, the Government would have amended or abandoned the experiment long ago. It has not been a scientific process, but dogmatic incompetence that has plunged our country into crisis and that will do so again unless there is a radical change in the Government's policy.

The Government and the Prime Minister set out to make history. They have made history in our time. They have created a historic manufacturing trade deficit. They have created historic levels of unemployment. They have created historic levels of conflict, bitterness and division. That is why we censure them. That is why the country must be rid of them.

4.29 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof,

'supports Her Majesty's Government in its firm action to maintain the sound financial conditions and medium-term strategy which have brought about the lowest level of inflation since the 1960s, nearly four years of sustained economic growth, record output, sound exports, record investment and record living standards, and which provide the best long-term prospects for a fundamental improvement in the performance of the British economy and for the creation of new jobs.'.

We have heard from the Leader of the Opposition his customary speech. It was distinguised by a paucity of argument. I noted a number of the things that he said. He began with some comments about British Telecom, home owners and privatisation. In regard to privatisation, I would rather listen to the millions of our citizens who bought shares in British Telecom, to the many employees of the British Freight Corporation who made such a success when that was privatised and to the millions of council house tenants who, under this Government, had an opportunity, that they never would have had under Labour, to purchase their houses.

The right hon. Gentleman went on at length about my right hon. and noble Friend the Earl of Stockton. I remember his policies vividly. He kept public expenditure down; he kept income tax rates world competitive; he turned back the tide of nationalisation; he began the process of leading Britain into Europe; and all in the teeth of the then Labour Opposition. In his maiden speech in another place, he pointed out that President Mitterrand, who had started off with a Labour policy, had had to turn to ours. I noted what the right hon. Gentleman said about exchange control.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Can the Prime Minister explain to the House why, if privatisation and giving shares to millions of people has been so successful, unemployment has continued to rise?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows that the two are not connected. I am amazed that he would deny working people shares in their own industry and not let them have independence. Socialism is the doctrine not of independence but of dependence of people under the control of Socialist Governments.

The right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) also spoke about exchange control. I remind him that, even under the most rigid exchange control, there were currency speculators moving around the world because no amount of exchange control can prevent many billions of currency from moving around the world. Not even he can stop the telephones or the computers, about which ridiculous comments have been made.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to strikes. I remind him that when in power a Labour Government complain about strikes, but when in opposition, the Labour party does its level best to support every one of them.

The right hon. Gentleman's speech was empty of any serious analysis of recent events or of any convincing alternative policies which his party would pursue. I shall deal with both analysis and policies. First, I should like to spend a moment looking at the Labour party's credentials for bringing the motion before the House. *[Interruption.]* Of course, Opposition Members will not want it. It exposes what happened when they put their policies into practice.

The Labour Government's first act on taking office in 1974 was to introduce the same quack remedies as the Opposition advocate today. In their first year they increased public spending by £15 billion in today's money.

[The Prime Minister]

By August 1975 inflation reached the record level of 26·9 per cent. Record inflation — the record held by the Socialist Government. Did that extra expenditure and extra inflation cause unemployment to fall? Of course not. One year later they had more than doubled the unemployment level that they had inherited. What they have to prove now is why, if those policies had that effect then, they would not have a similar effect if put into execution today.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall give way when I have finished this point; as the hon. Gentleman knows, I customarily do.

By the autumn of 1976 the Labour Government's credit was exhausted. No one would lend them money and they had to go to the International Monetary Fund for help. That was their policy in practice. Record inflation, and it doubled unemployment.

Mr. Straw: The Prime Minister must know that, compared with the other six major industrial nations in the world, unemployment under the Labour Government was the average for those seven and that our inflation was also average. The Prime Minister must know that that was the reality in 1974 and in 1979. She must also know that inflation today is still only the average of the OECD seven, but that unemployment is the worst of any of those countries. Will she explain that difference?

The Prime Minister: Twenty seven per cent. was never the average of European inflation. That was the Socialist record.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned unemployment. Unemployment has again doubled in Britain, but, according to the European Commission—I do not use my own figures—unemployment has also doubled in Europe. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members request me to answer questions I shall, of course, answer them. If I am to give way, there is no point in doing so unless I answer the questions. The hon. Gentleman cannot stand the answers because they are right. That is his trouble.

What happened when the Labour Government followed that policy? After they had gone to the IMF, the next year they had to cut spending by £10 billion in today's money — the biggest single cut ever known. Those are the credentials of the party which now brings this censure motion on our economic management.

The House deserves a more serious analysis of the causes of recent increases in interest rates than it received from the Leader of the Opposition. Let me say at the outset that it is no use the right hon. Gentleman deriding the operation of the markets. The markets are part of the world we live in and we cannot escape their operation any more that his Socialist predecessors could. As a major trading nation it would be disastrous for this country, of all countries, to turn its back on the markets of the world.

The right hon. Gentleman scarcely mentioned the real reasons for the recent speculation against the pound and upward pressure on interest rates. Incidentally, he urged us to bring back the minimum lending rate. I thought part of his complaint earlier in the week was that we acutally used it. It clearly did not suit the right hon. Gentleman's purpose to examine the real reasons for recent speculation, for none of them substantiates either his speech or his motion.

There have been three reason for the recent speculation against the pound and the upward pressure on interest rates. First, the dollar has been very strong against every other major currency. Since May 1979 the dollar has risen against the Swiss franc by 36 per cent., against the deutschmark by 40 per cent., against the French franc and the Italian lira by 55 per cent. and against sterling by 46 per cent.

That process cannot go on indefinitely. It is distorting the pattern of world trade, making it more difficult for debtor countries to service their loans, and rekindling protectionist pressure in the United States. It is perhaps for those reasons that the G5 countries in Washington reaffirmed their commitment, made at Williamsburg, to undertake co-ordinated intervention as necessary. That agreement has already helped to check the rise of the dollar against the rest of the world. That was very largely the initiative of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The second reason has been uncertainty over oil prices, and particularly the Geneva meeting of OPEC.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Prime Minister aware that there is one central weakness in her argument about the pound being affected by dollar domination and oil? During the course of previous Governments, including those of Mr. Macmillan and her other predecessors and Labour Governments, at all times the Italian lira traded at a discount against the pound. This week, for the first time since the end of the war—ever since the right hon. Member or most Members in the Chamber have been in politics — the Italian lira was trading at a premium against the pound. As the man on the Clapham omnibus said to me this morning, "What a load of wallies!"

The Prime Minister: I think that "What a load of wallop" would describe the hon. Gentleman's intervention about the state of the dollar. What he said does not accord with the facts in my speech about the strength of the dollar, when I explained the way in which the dollar has risen against the Italian lira by 55 per cent. and against sterling by 46 per cent.

The second reason is the uncertainty about oil prices, and particularly the Geneva meeting of OPEC. That was certainly a major factor affecting sterling in the last week or two, but it is hardly rational, because oil represents only 5 per cent. of our GDP. The effect of a $1 fall in the oil price would in itself reduce Government revenue by less than half of 1 per cent. So oil remains a major asset to the British economy.

If we were to exercise powers for depletion of oil in the North sea—the Leader of the Opposition will remember the Varley assurances that he would not do so and the assurances from us that we would not do so — investment and exploration in the North sea would not take place. Investment and exploration is vital for jobs in that part of Scotland. If we used that power, we should put down the possibility of creating more jobs in that part of Scotland. That would be the result of the right hon. Gentleman's policy.

The third factor which has affected the recent fall in sterling was the fear that the Government were weakening

in their resolve on inflation and sound finance. That fear, however unreasonable, could not be dispelled by words of reassurance alone. If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor had resisted the upward movement in market interest rates, it would have given a totally wrong signal to the markets and would, indeed, have led them to believe that their fears were justified.

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can tell us, since he has made criticisms, what he would have done. *[Interruption.]* He has specifically refused to do that. When the Opposition criticise, they are supposed to put forward an alternative. The right hon. Gentleman does not have one. So far as we can deduce from previous policies, he would do everything possible to damage confidence in the country's future direction.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) recently commented on the sterling exchange rate. I gather that he did not say that he thought that it was right, but that it "may" be right. One thing is clear. If an element in the speculation against sterling has been market fears about the Government's resolve to contain inflation, the Opposition have no remedy whatever to offer. Their policies would make the prospects for inflation infinitely worse.

Of course we do not wish interest rates to be high, even for a short period; but, if they are necessary to protect the long-term strategy, we shall not hesitate. These high interest rates emphasise just how important it is to exercise the tightest control on Government spending and borrowing. Had we not done so, interest rates would have had to be even higher.

What the right hon. Member for Islwyn is complaining about is that the Government have had the guts to take the measures necessary to maintain our strategy. The response of the market has shown that. The Opposition, by contrast, have lost no opportunity to talk inflation up.

Does the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook recall saying during the last election:

> "Despite all claims that inflation has been conquered, there is no doubt that inflation will be in double figures by the end of the year if this Government remains in office."?

That is what the right hon. Gentleman said in May 1983. In December 1983, inflation was 5·3 per cent.

The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) is no doubt similarly disgruntled. Does he recall that on 24 July last year he predicted that inflation would be 7·5 per cent. by the end of 1984? The outcome, of course, was 4·6 per cent.

This Government believe that a prosperous and competitive economy requires both a clear financial framework and a Government with the resolve to stick to it.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): How many times over the last four years has the right hon. Lady and her Ministers predicted that unemployment would start coming down immediately?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can find one prediction—*[Interruption.]* I do not think that he can find one prediction from me about unemployment. I challenge him to find one from me. He will not be able to find one, because for years when I stood at the Opposition Dispatch Box I watched Ministers in the Labour Government refusing to predict, and I thought, "How wise." Do not blame me for being wise.

Mr. Chris Smith *rose*——

The Prime Minister: For many years the financial discipline required for a stable economy came from the system of fixed exchange rates under the Bretton Woods agreement, but rising inflation throughout the world brought about the collapse of the Bretton Woods system.

Today it is recognised, not only in Britain but throughout the industrial world, that the only foundation is the discipline that the Government impose upon themselves—unless, like Labour, they yield their very sovereignty to international bailiffs.

It has been suggested many times that Britain should join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. We have on many occasions said that we are ready to join when the circumstances are right, and I said that again this afternoon. Of course the position is reviewed regularly, but I should make it clear that joining the EMS is not a way of avoiding a rise in interest rates. It is a mechanism which yields benefits only if the Government are ready to accept the financial discipline that it entails, including a rise in interest rates, if necessary, to maintain the agreed parity, reductions in public expenditure, if necessary, and all the other things that discipline involves and to which other countries have had to agree.

The EMS is not a way of escaping discipline or rises in interest rates. It is a way of saying that if certain relationships obtain, one must put into effect rises in interest rates or changes in public expenditure.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): No one is arguing with the Prime Minister's thesis. We are arguing that, because there is no exchange rate policy, she has given sovereignty on the exchange rate to the market, to OPEC in Geneva, and to the next crank who comes along.

The Prime Minister: I do not know how the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) would stop large sums of money moving around the world. He cannot do so. It is a ridiculous argument. No Government can stop large amounts of money moving around the world. When there are fixed exchange rates, we have to change the exchange rate in very sharp steps. Even in the EMS there are times when there has to be a realignment. Indeed, Socialist France has already had them.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall gladly give way. I enjoy it. However, I give notice that my speech will take longer if I do, because I have certain things which I wish to say. On that understanding, of course I give way.

Dr. Owen: Everybody in the country is pleased that inflation has been kept to the low levels that the Prime Minister mentioned. But will the Prime Minister admit that if the exchange rate during her period in office had not oscillated up to $2.40 and down to $1.10, many more people would now be in employment? One of the arguments for exchange rate stability and entering the EMS is that it will allow us to have higher levels of stable employment.

The Prime Minister: The EMS has nothing to do with the dollar rate, as the right hon. Gentleman ought to know. When the dollar was very weak, he said that deprived us of jobs because we got a lot of American imports. If he takes the reverse of that argument, when the dollar is

[The Prime Minister]

strong we should have the opportunity of creating jobs and making a lot of exports. But the right hon. Gentleman seems to be wrong all along the line.

The Government have set their own disciplines, for that is the only basis for the creation of wealth, prosperity and jobs.

Although Governments — and I want to make this very clear — can create the financial framework, they alone cannot create jobs. Jobs come when enterprise has the freedom and vigour to meet the demands of the market, to produce the goods and services that people want and are prepared to pay for. The right hon. Gentleman does not like that.

I shall read what the Opposition said when they were in government, because they said almost the same thing. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said:

"The only answer to the economic problems which have dogged Britain ever since the war is to improve the performance of our manufacturing industry. That means higher productivity, better design, more vigorous salesmanship, more reliable delivery and servicing. That means good management, good relations and co-operation with trade unions and management, and fewer strikes and better delivery dates."

That, of course, was what the then Chancellor said when Labour was in power.

We have to compete in the markets of the world, not on the basis of national self-esteem but in the eyes of people making hard-headed decisions about the design and the value of the products that we offer. The problems of the economy lie not in insufficient demand, for every category of spending is at record levels. Nor is it a lack of public spending which now takes 10 per cent. more of GDP than it did 20 years ago when unemployment was a fraction of what it is now. Nor is it a neglect of the infrastructure, since spending on major roads has increased by 25 per cent. in real terms under this Government and investment in water is increasing by 9 per cent. next year. Infrastructure investment must, however, like all other investment, be justified by its return. It is not a cheap route to more jobs.

Those who genuinely want more jobs must address the deep-seated problems of the economy, such as the amount that we pay ourselves in relation to the amount that we produce. If we pay ourselves more in relation to what we produce than our competitors, the jobs go elsewhere. When we resist change by restrictive practices while others get ahead, they get the jobs. One does not build an enterprising economy by imposing high taxation, as the Opposition wish to do.

The message of today's unemployment figures is that we have not yet resolved those three problems, and until we do we shall not create the jobs that we need.

If there were easy choices, we can be sure that other nations with governing parties of different political persuasions would be pursuing them. Although unemployment in Britain has more than doubled since 1978, it has also doubled across Europe. In the Netherlands and Belgium the rate is higher even than here. Of the major economies, Japan and the United States have done best in holding down unemployment. It is no coincidence that those economies have an excellent record on unit wage costs, because unit wage costs in Japan have actually fallen by 5 per cent. over the past year while our unit labour costs have risen by 5 per cent.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: Unless right hon. and hon. Gentleman pay attention to these things, they will not help to get more jobs in the country.

We are often urged to adopt one particular policy from abroad, but one cannot pick and choose one policy and leave out the others.

Those who urge us to follow United States fiscal policy forget that the size of the deficit is causing great concern in America. In December Mr. Donald Regan, the United States Treasury Secretary, said:

"Deficit reduction is by far the most serious problem facing the United States, the Administration and the Congress. Reducing the deficit is the number one priority."

Those who urge us to follow that path forget that in the United States the state and local authorities run a surplus, not a deficit, as mostly happens in our local authorities. They forget that the United States accepts the discipline of monetary targets and has experienced high real interest rates—even higher than our present rates. They forget that public expenditure takes 10 per cent. less of national output than it does here.

What about Germany, France or the Netherlands? They have taken some tough decisions which I wonder whether the House would be prepared to face. Between them, those countries have seen cuts in social services, delays in pensions increases, boarding charges for hospital patients and cuts in public sector pay.

Germany has kept its interest rates half our own, despite the rising dollar. One reason is that it has kept its inflation rate at about half of ours. It is no good yearning for the advantages of other countries and ignoring the strict disciplines by which they have been achieved.

The Opposition motion conveniently ignores all the good things about the performance of the British economy. They will not want me to state them, so I shall do so. Despite the coal strike and the most determined attempt since the war to inflict damage on the economy by denying power and light to our homes and industries and despite all that Opposition Members could do, output is at an all time high. The proportion of people of working age in employment in Britain exceeds that of nearly all other industrial countries, and employment is growing. Profits have recovered dramatically and in consequence total investment is at record levels and still growing. Despite the heavy cost of the miners' strike and all that Opposition Members could do, our current account has remained in surplus for the fifth year in a row.

The terms of the Opposition motion single out the deficit on manufactured trade. What matters, of course, is not a surplus or deficit on any particular part of our trade, but the overall balance, and that is what the Opposition cannot get away from.

Our oil surplus has enabled us to import more manufactures and invest more overseas. But Opposition Members are against both. Yet again, they wish to repeal the laws of arithmetic. What would they do to improve the balance of trade in manufactures — impose import controls? I can think of nothing more guaranteed to damage efficiency and close export markets.

What of their attitude to overseas investment? Since 1979, Britain's net foreign assets have risen from £13 billion to £70 billion. These will provide a stream of income to the country for years to come because of the policies of the Government. As domestic capital expenditure is at a record high, this has clearly not been at the expense of domestic investment at home.

Why does the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook wish to penalise companies which invest abroad to earn profits for Britain or the financial institutions which invest abroad to improve the retirement incomes of millions of pensioners? I will tell the House why. It is because the more wealth that the right hon. Gentleman can bring under the power of politicians and bureaucrats, the happier he will be. He wants to invest not where the return is highest, nor where it meets the needs of consumers, but where it furthers the political ambitions of Socialism — a Socialism that the people reject.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): The right hon. Lady has devoted a great deal of time and attention to interest rates and money. Would she care to say a little about the plight of the ordinary people in the country, particularly the unemployed?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman was listening, he would have observed that I pointed out that the only way in which we can increase the number of jobs in the country is by pursuing policies which will increase enterprise. Otherwise, the only way is to distribute what there is, and that would not help to further enterprise in the country.

The Leader of the Opposition scarcely mentioned the coal strike. Never in this country has a strike been so unjustified. Never has a strike been called by such blatant manipulation of trade union rules. Never has a strike been pursued by such tactics of violence and intimidation. In 1978-79, when the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) was Prime Minister, democracy and the rule of law were under attack by trade union extremists in the winter of discontent. The then Conservative Opposition offered the Labour Government the necessary support to take whatever measures were required. Contrast that with the Labour party today: today it supports political strikes which totally disregard democratic values and the rule of law.

By encouraging the leadership of the NUM to believe that the Government and the National Coal Board could and would concede its impossible demands, the Opposition have helped to prolong the strike and the suffering that it has caused for miners and their families. By prolonging the strike and the suffering, they have seen to it that on average, each miner has suffered an £8,000 loss of wages, the industry has lost 52 coal faces and the union is now divided against itself. Which half does the Labour party support? It supports not the working miners, but those on strike against democracy and the rule of law.

Throughout the strike, the right hon. Gentleman has had the choice between standing up to the NUM leadership and keeping silent. He has kept silent. When the leadership of the NUM called a strike without a ballot, in defiance of union rules, the right hon. Gentleman stayed silent. When pickets tried by violence to close down pits in Nottinghamshire and elsewhere, against the democratically expressed wishes of the local miners, the right hon. Gentleman stayed silent. When the NUM tried to impose mob rule at Orgreave, the right hon. Gentleman stayed silent. Only when the general secretary of the TUC had the courage to tell the leadership of the NUM that its tactics were unacceptable did the right hon. Gentleman take on the role of Little Sir Echo.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Will the Prime Minister give way?

Mrs. Thatcher: I shall give way when I come to the end of this section.

The Leader of the Opposition knows that the demand made by the NUM leadership, that no pit shall ever close on economic grounds, is an impossible demand and that it has never been accepted by any Labour Government. The last two Labour Governments enshrined in their own Acts of Parliament grants to assist the "elimination" of uneconomic colliery capacity. That is what the Labour party put into law when it was in power. The right hon. Gentleman knows that three independent inquiries—by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and by Select Committees of both Houses — have endorsed the principle that uneconomic pits should be closed.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Prime Minister give way?

Mrs. Thatcher: The Leader of the Opposition knows that the offer to the miners is the best since nationalisation.

Mr. Lofthouse *rose*——

Mrs. Thatcher: I shall give way in a moment.

The offer to the miners is the best since nationalisation. It offers the best pay, the best investment, the best guarantee against compulsory redundancy, the best early retirement terms and the best colliery review procedure. Yet never once has the right hon. Gentleman urged the NUM to accept that offer. Never once has he urged it to accept the agreement negotiated by NACODS. An agreement on exactly the same terms is available to the NUM. If the right hon. Gentleman really wants an end to the strike, as I do, I challenge him to urge the NUM to accept the NACODS agreement.

Mr. Lofthouse: Is the Prime Minister aware that we have heard all this before? Is she further aware that it is unprecedented in industrial relations for one side to demand the terms in writing before the talks begin? Does she admit that it is she and her Government who are insisting on those terms and that they do not want a settlement of the strike?

Mrs. Thatcher: It is nonsense to say that we do not want a settlement, because we do. We never wished the strike to begin. That is why the very best terms to be offered by any Government since nationalisation have been offered by this Government. We did not wish the strike to start. It started because the NUM refused to observe democratic values, and it has been maintained by violence and intimidation. Seven rounds of talks have foundered on the same points. Unless the NUM is prepared to discuss the closure of uneconomic pits in accordance with the NACODS agreement, the next round of talks will founder as well. I do not wish the talks to founder.

I challenge the Leader of the Opposition. Will he urge the NUM to accept that agreement or will he not? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer!"] He will not answer, because he dare not answer. The right hon. Gentleman spoke today free from the cares of office and from any serious prospect of office. Nothing underlines the irresponsibility of the Labour party more than the way in which it has abandoned in opposition so many of the lessons that reality and circumstances forced it to learn in government. In office, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East said that it was

"the responsibility of unions not to throw the members of other unions out of work in pursuit of a dispute".

The Labour party and the NUM have no such qualms now. In office, the Labour party recognised that uneconomic pits must close, put that principle into legislation and

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implemented closures on economic grounds. In opposition, Labour Members pretend that that never happened.

The Leader of the Opposition attacks us on monetary policy and calls it a doctrine, but the right hon. Member for Leeds, East boasted that the last Labour Government had

"really given monetary policy the importance it deserves".

Labour Members chant about "cuts". They should know, because their party made the biggest cuts ever. The last Labour Government cut public spending in real terms on the education and science budget, on the industry, energy, trade and employment budget, on transport and on housing, in Scotland and in Wales. Now that the Labour party is in opposition, it claims to be the guardian of the National Health Service, but in two of their five years in office the Labour Government actually cut real resources for the National Health Service.

Mr. Nellist *rose——*

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mrs. Thatcher: I will give way in a moment.

Over their whole period of office, the Labour Government cut capital investment in the Health Service by 35 per cent. What has the hon. Gentleman got to say to that? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Nellist: There are 5 million people outside for whom this is no laughing matter. How can the Prime Minister maintain the fiction that at the beginning of the coal strike her intention was to save £275 million worth of uneconomic capacity when in the past 11 months the Government have spent between 20 and 25 times that amount trying to destroy the NUM? If it was really about saving money, the strike could have been over within three weeks of starting.

The Prime Minister: Year by year, the amount of subsidy to the coal industry was increasing. In the last practising year it was £1·3 billion. We are pouring money into new pits. As the three independent reviews said, we cannot go on pouring money into investment in new pits and still retain all the old uneconomic pits. If we do, we shall put up the price of coal and electricity for every other industry and create unemployment. That is my answer to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) *rose——*

The Prime Minister: I shall not give way. I am nearly at the end of my speech. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman wishes to catch your eye later, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition and the Labour party do not have even the beginnings of an alternative economic strategy. That is not just my view. It seems that a Labour party document somehow found its way to the *New Statesman*. I hope that no Opposition Member will complain about that. Tht Labour document apparently says:

"Labour has lost the economic argument."

It went on to say that the Labour party

"has little credibility on policies for dealing with the economy."

And so say all of us.

The purpose of the Leader of the Opposition in tabling this censure motion is not to help the unemployed, because he has nothing to offer them; nor is it to strengthen the economy, because he has no strategy for it; and nor is it to win confidence, because his prescription would destroy it. This censure motion is bogus. It deserves to be, and will be, overwhelmingly defeated.

5.12 pm

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The debate so far has been a futile, noisy, bad-tempered charade. I want to deal first with the issues in the past few days and then with the Government's handling of the economy generally and to propose a change of direction. I suppose that proposal will be as much a waste of time as everything we have heard so far, because we know that the Government will not change direction.

I shall deal first with the points made by the Prime Minister at the beginning of her speech. She denied that she had ever forecast unemployment rates, and I accept that. She cannot, however, deny that she and her Ministers have predicted year in, year out, since they took office that economic recovery was just around the corner. The people want to know: is this it? If this is not the recovery, is there still another corner to go? Are there another two or three corners to go? We cannot continue to have these statements about how wonderful the economy is when people can see with their own eyes that that is untrue.

In less than a fortnight there has been an unprecedented three times increase in interest rates amounting to a 4·5 per cent. increase. The effect on our industrial costs is staggering. The CBI says that the increase will add £1·2 billion to industrial costs. There will be an especially adverse effect on new and small businesses which have no reserves to tide them over. Many of them will go to the wall because of interest rates, and they will join many others. One of the Government's achievements has been a record number of company liquidations. In the year just before the Conservative party took office, there were 4,700 company liquidations; in 1984 that number had increased to 14,000 liquidations. That represents a terrible drain not only of employment but of other resources.

The high interest rates were caused by the Government's incompetence, and the Chancellor's incompetence in particular, in the panic following the Government's earlier refusal to use either United Kingdom reserves or interest rates to ward off the speculators. I do not deny the Prime Minister's reasons for the speculation, but I criticise the Government's lack of action in dealing with it. If I quarrel at all with the Opposition motion it is because the word "mismanagement" is not quite correct —we criticise the "non-management" of the economy.

We saw the Chancellor lolling around lethargically until the last minute and then rushing about hysterically telling everyone to keep calm. There was a sudden and dramatic switch in tactics. No one in his right senses would agree with the *Daily Express* profile of the Chancellor just after he had taken office which described him as

"The Iron Chancellor behind the Iron Lady".

Not even the *Daily Express* would seriously suggest that now.

Mr. Gerald Malone (Aberdeen, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steel: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I had the pleasure of beating him in an election not long ago.

Mr. Malone: The right hon. Gentleman says that the Government did not intervene in the money markets and

used interest rates to stabilise the exchange rate, and he criticises the Government for doing that. What else would the right hon. Gentleman have done?

Mr. Steel: I am not criticising the Government for doing that. I am criticising the Government for letting matters slide. They were forced to intervene sharply and suddenly because of their earlier determination to do nothing.

There are other reasons for the speculation. The Chancellor was wrong — the Prime Minister referred again to this matter — to suggest that part of the speculation was caused by a widespread international belief that somehow the Government would change course and tackle unemployment and that investors had been reading the speeches of the Labour party, the alliance or even Conservative Back Benchers. That is nonsense. Anyone sufficiently sophisticated to take note of our speeches would know that the Government have a three-figure majority in the House.

The truth is that the speculators would have been more likely to be upset by the Chancellor's speeches, his obsessive and single-minded repeated determination to indulge in tax cuts as a priority in his Budget. I do not believe that that has impressed anyone. People are also not impressed by the sheer irrelevance of much of the Chancellor's economic preoccupation—for example, the transfer of capital assets through privatisation into current account expenditure. No company chairman would be able to defend that policy at an annual meeting of his company.

On top of the Government's involvement in the principle, we should consider the loss that the Government have sustained. The Prime Minister mentioned how many millions of people have bought British Telecom shares. They would have been fools not to buy them at the price the Government were giving them away. [HON. MEMBERS: "How many shares did you buy?"] I did not buy any, but that is not the point. [HON. MEMBERS: "You are a fool."] As a matter of fact, I do not own any shares. The taxpayers as a whole have lost £3 billion because the Government gave away the shares below cost.

Yesterday the Chancellor of the Exchequer said at a City lunch that the ship was "on course". Many people would say, "We hope it is not, because if so, it is on the wrong course." The truth is that the ship is not on course at all. For a long time there has been no one at the tiller. The leaks in the ship have not been repaired. We can see the leaks throughout the country. The crew has been busy down below working out which bits of furniture or equipment to sell off to make the ship operate better.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) has referred to the statement made yesterday by the Governor of the Bank of England about Britain joining the European monetary system. We have never made any secret of our belief that there are wider political reasons for joining the EMS. It has been reported that the Governor of the Bank of England accepted that

"it would have been easier to check the pound's slide if it had been in the European 'snake' of currencies whose exchange rates are fixed against each other."

I ask, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Devonport asked: do the Government agree with that statement? If they do not agree, why not? On a previous occasion, the Chancellor said, "The balance of arguments for and against are much the same." The other day he said that the balance of arguments had not changed because of the crisis in the past few days. That contradicts the statements by the Governor of the Bank of England. During an interview yesterday, the Governor of the Bank of England said:

"what has happened has sharpened the interest in this very important and fundamental issue."

He could have fooled me. I do not detect any increase in the Chancellor's or Prime Minister's interest in this matter. It is time they were interested, because I believe it is in our long-term interests to join the EMS without any further delay.

I come now to the long-term management of the economy. The most serious aspect of the Government's record is the deficit in manufacturing trade. The trouble is that the Government and the Chancellor are mainly obsessed with the theoretical economy, the money supply and the PSBR, which is doubly theoretical. It is theoretical anyway and it is more so because the targets are theoretical compared with his actual figures.

The Chancellor is not interested in the real economy, the currency market, jobs, and capital spending. Those are the issues with which we are concerned. If we study the 1984 figures and the real trade deficit we find that it was £4 billion, but the non-oil deficit was £11·5 billion. I do not believe that the Chancellor will reject that figure. That is the extent of the disguise that oil gives us. In other words we have a non-oil deficit in trade of £11·5 billion after five years of this Government. When they came into office there was a £500 million non-oil trade surplus. That is how they have turned the economy round.

When the Chancellor accuses international markets of attaching too much importance to oil when looking at the value of the pound, he quotes oil as a small percentage of our gross domestic product and as a tiny percentage of our tax revenues. Those figures are wholly irrelevant. The rest of the world sees oil as a massive subscriber which disguises our balance of trade deficit. That is why it treats our currency more as a petrocurrency than anything else. The Government cannot deny that.

There has been a serious loss of manufacturing capacity. It has drained away from this country throughout the Government's period of office. That is why we have argued consistently that the Government have a duty to stimulate carefully and cost-effectively the process of employment and revival.

The Prime Minister says that the Government cannot create jobs. That is not the view of the CBI, the Engineering Employers Federation or any of the other bodies that have been producing reports after reports pointing out how much our public infrastructure needs repair. I shall not go into the whole litany again. We have discussed it many times recently and in the unemployment debate.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Has the right hon. Gentleman failed to notice the fact that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) in a speech in the House on 15 January said:

"we may have to reduce the amount of money that we put into capital spending."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1985; Vol. 71, c. 223.]

Does the right hon. Gentleman disagree with—I gather we are to call him this — his right hon. Friend the Member for Devonport?

Mr. Steel: It depends upon what spending we are talking about. We have both argued, and continue to argue, that we can identify projects up and down the

[Mr. Steel]

country on which there should be capital spending as much by the private as the public sector. I shall give one example. What about house improvement grants? They are cost-effective and labour-intensive, but the Government have chosen to axe them. They provide a continuous flow of contracts for the construction industry in the building and in the equipment that goes to make the industry. I give that as an example because it is an area in which the Government have deliberately cut and created more unemployment.

We believe that the benefit of the oil revenues that the Government have had uniquely — they were not available to previous Governments of any colour — should have been used for forward investment in our country in the form of capital expenditure and training and education and not solely to extend indefinitely current expenditure on an ever-lengthening dole queue. Those revenues have been wasted in a literal sense in that way. They have forced upon the country years of determined deprivation, and people are entitled to turn round after five years and say, "What is it all for? When will the promised recovery come? It has all been for nothing."

I wish to go to the heart of what I believe is a fundamental disagreement between us and the Government. The Prime Minister believes that politics is a triumph of the will; that if she wills something to happen, it does. We believe in the politics of persuasion. We do not necessarily believe that what we say ought to happen will happen. She believes in the politics of confrontation as a virtue. We believe in building the politics of consensus.

There is now a growing consensus in the country on a range of economic issues, which is absent from the Floor of the House. The Earl of Stockton talked of building a national approach. He is right. That national approach exists in the country; it does not exist in here.

There is a consensus in the country that there should, in these internationally depressed times, be a sense of shared sacrifice. *[Interruption.]* The Government do not accept that. Last week the report of the pay and benefits bulletin confirmed the evidence of our own eyes—that over the past five years, in the words of the *Daily Mail*, which is not a notably Left-wing journal:

"The rich are getting richer and the poor are becoming poorer".

That cannot be right, and it is not what the country wants.

There is a consensus in the country that the growing division between the wealthy, comfortable south——

Mr. Skinner: They are attacking Owen again.

Mr. Steel: —and an impoverished, resentful north is wrong, but the Government are not interested in that.

Mr. Skinner: He is attacking Owen again.

Mr. Steel: There is a consensus in the country that while there is great merit in the further extension of home ownership and popular capitalism of all kinds, those objectives are no substitute for the creation of necessary public assets and the common benefits of thriving communities. The official Opposition do not accept the first part of that equation, and the Government neglect the second.

There is a consensus in the country that sees a direct link between the rise in unemployment and enforced idleness, and the appalling increase in crime that we have seen, especially theft and robbery. The Prime Minister denies that consensus.

There is a consensus in the country that recognises that the coal industry cannot be immune from everyday reality, and that some uneconomic pits must close. The official Opposition says no, and the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) said in the House the other day: "not a single pit in Britain is uneconomic".—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1985; Vol. 72, c. 154.]

What absolute balderdash.

There is further consensus that more effective plans are needed to help the mining communities that will be hit by that reality. The Government have been grossly insensitive to that and we press them constantly to bring forward more effective schemes.

There is a consensus in the country that before there is any industrial stoppage those being asked to strike should be given the chance to vote in a secret ballot. The official Opposition sold the pass on that one early in this dispute.

Mr. Skinner: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steel: I shall not give way to any hon. Member who has been interrupting constantly from a sedentary position.

There is a consensus in the country that picketing should be confined to the numbers necessary to persuade those going to work of an alternative view. It should not degenerate into mass intimidation, let alone violence. The official Opposition have been utterly spineless on that issue. I do not know how the Leader of the Opposition can talk about conflict in our country today when he has done little, with the great authority that he could have had, to resolve this kind of conflict early.

We know that there are no moderates left in the Labour party, only prisoners posing as moderates. The new general secretary describes himself as from the soft Left. That is an apt description as we see Members of the House giving up the reselection battle against the militants without so much as a fight.

There is a growing consensus in the country that one route back to prosperity is a far more dynamic structure of partnership in our industrial life. When we consider the thrusting economies of Japan, to some extent the United States, and even Taiwan and Korea, we find that they have in common a greater pattern of take-home pay in the form of a share in profits. There is no interest in that approach by the Government or the official Opposition. They are happy to continue the debilitating trench warfare and class struggle that passes for British industrial relations.

There is a consensus in the country, as every opinion poll shows, that the House would be more effective in easing the running of the economy if it properly represented the political views of the country, but we know that neither Government nor Opposition will agree with that. We all know what the result of the vote tonight will be. We know that we cannot win with the rules of this place, but we represent the consensus on those issues in the country and we are winning the argument in the country. We do not need to build a consensus on those issues. It is already there.

Last of all, there is consensus that a resolute approach has its time and place. When it is used properly it is supported both in the House and in the country. However,

on economic policy, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have proved obstinately and resolutely wrong. We shall support the censure motion in the Lobby tonight.

5.30 pm

Mr. Peter Hordern (Horsham): It is difficult to know why so much fuss should have been engendered about this debate. I had understood that it was to be a censure debate. I looked forward eagerly to hearing the Leader of the Opposition describe what, in his view, the Government were doing wrong. I listened to the leader of the Liberal Party with similar expectations. However, as the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) must know, the present crisis does not rate in comparison with crises of the past.

I remember that in 1968 the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins), the then Chancellor, came to the House at 3.20 am and announced that the banks and the stock exchange were to be closed for three days. On the fourth day, he announced that the IMF was to lend us £4 billion, that purchase tax, through the regulator, was to rise by 10 per cent., and that the price of a bottle of whisky was to be increased by four shillings, a pint of beer by a penny, and a packet of cigarettes, I believe, by fivepence.

I cannot understand why the right hon. Member for Islwyn thinks that the present situation rates as a crisis, compared with the position in those days. It does not even begin to do so. So far as I can understand it, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is talking about reducing taxes, not increasing them. It is difficult to understand the basis on which the Opposition have launched their censure motion.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The answer is obvious. Because of oil, for the first time since the war, we do not have a balance of payments problem. That is what has changed the situation.

Mr. Hordern: I do not believe that that is true. I shall take up that point later.

I had always understood that the Labour party thought that the pound was too high, and wanted to devalue it. A paper was produced in November 1982 under the auspices of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) in which it was argued that the pound was too high and should be reduced in two annual dollops of 15 per cent. I have done a few calculations. In November 1982 the exchange rate was $1·65 to the pound. We allow for the 15 per cent. In November 1983, the exchange rate was $1·47 to the pound. If the right hon. Gentleman's policy had been carried out, the rate would now have been $1·09·2 to the pound. I admit that we have not quite reached that situation, but I cannot see why the right hon. Gentleman should complain.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but the position with which he should make his comparison is not that of November 1982, but that of April 1982, which was the position against which those simulations were made. The pound sterling then stood at $1·80. On that basis, the arithmetic is somewhat different.

Mr. Hordern: I am not sure that it would be very different. What is certain is that the exchange rate for sterling has moved in much the same way as the right hon. Gentleman suggested at that time and as the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) suggests it has moved since.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has suggested that there should be a realistic and competitive rate of exchange. What does he call a realistic rate of exchange? He is very reluctant to define it. He says that it may be about right now. The House and the country are entitled to know what the Labour party considers to be a proper exchange rate.

Apart from commenting on the exchange rate, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook also says that the Government should adopt a new policy. They should make overseas investment more difficult and, better still, in the right hon. Gentleman's view, retract some of the very substantial investments which have been taking place in the United States and elsewhere during the past few years.

I wonder whether, if the Prime Minister had not given him a clue, the right hon. Gentleman would have had any idea of the substance of the overseas investment that has taken place during the past four years. I hesitate to correct my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on this matter, but according to the autumn statement, overseas investment has grown from £15 billion in 1979, representing 7·5 per cent. of gross domestic product, to some £70 billion now, which represents 22 per cent. of GDP.

What would the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook do with that investment? He thinks that we should bring back the money. What would be the effect of bringing £70 billion in investment back into this country? Does the right hon. Gentleman have any idea? He wants to make the pound more competitive. What would be the effect of bringing back £7 billion—let alone £70 billion—into this country? It would raise the exchange to such a level as completely to destroy all the manufacturing industry in this country. Is not that an extraordinary policy? It is akin to that of a seedy solicitor in some provincial town making off with other people's goods.

No doubt some of that money was drawn in to finance the American deficit. But, whatever else may be said about investing that vast amount of money overseas, the investment has certainly proved to be a very good one. People ask what is to happen when North sea oil runs out. The answer is that there is substantial investment overseas, both direct and in portfolio form——

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): For some.

Mr. Hordern: —which will stand us in good stead for many years to come. The hon. Gentleman says, "For some." There are 11 million people with shares in pension funds. The Labour party cares nothing for those with shares in pension funds, or in anything else.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in making representations to the Chancellor not to tax pension funds in the Budget, as he proposes to do?

Mr. Hordern: I am lucky that I do not have to anticipate my right hon. Friend's budget. I shall not do so now.

When the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, who produces these solutions, was prices Minister, he was—as a result of the failure of his policies, and of the attentions of Professor Clegg—directly responsible for the most disastrous increase in prices that we have ever had. Everything that the right hon. Gentleman touches seems to turn to dross.

[Mr. Hordern]

What is the truth about the so-called sterling crisis? There is the question of oil. There can be no doubt that we are regarded as an oil country. Oil represents only 5 per cent. of GDP but, when we came to office, the price of sterling rose sharply against the dollar because of the perception that since the price of oil was rising sterling must rise too. It did. It rose to the uncomfortable level of $2·42 to the pound. It was as natural as day following night that when the price of oil fell the price of sterling would fall too, because of how this country is perceived abroad.

The fall in the price of sterling provides business and industry with the best opportunity that they have ever had. Business and industry are taking advantage of that opportunity. In the past two years, company profits have risen by some 35 per cent. and private sector investment is at an all-time high. Provided that business and industry have the confidence that their order books should certainly give them, there is no reason why the economy should not continue to grow—and, ultimately, employment too.

The question of confidence is all-important, particularly in relation to the American deficit. The House should recognise that the perception of how the American economy is being run has also changed. It is a very different affair under President Reagan from what it was under President Carter. There is a good deal more confidence in investment in the United States now than there was in those days. The higher rates of interest are not the only important factor.

The United States statistics are most impressive. Inflation is controlled by firm monetary policies. Wage increases are substantially lower than they are here. There is a free enterprise economy which works, and which has been the engine of growth in world trade for the past two or three years. People are prepared to pay a premium to be in the United States and they are helped in that by high interest rates. The United States provides us with a huge and comparatively open market. Oil, and the United States as an investment haven, are two reasons why sterling is low.

Was my right hon. Friend the Chancellor right to increase interest rates? I do not think that he had any choice. He was right to mention all the good things that are happening, but when every economic commentator of every shade of opinion is poring over the books it is extremely important to present a balanced view of the economy. I do not believe that my right hon. Friend has always done that. When he claims that monetary policy is under control, it is important that all the measures of money should be under control, not just the ones that he mentions such as the narrow measurement of MO or the measurement of M3, which can be adjusted by selling more gilt-edged investment than is strictly necessary for the task.

A more accurate measurement of money at the moment is the wider one of PSL2. Any indication that we might like to draw upon about spending and credit and the level of bank lending, which is at a record level, must leave us with no doubt that credit and spending are extremely easy at the moment. It would be only right for my right hon. Friend to refer to every measure, not just those that suit his argument.

Credit is perceived to be easy at the moment. The combination of that fact and my right hon. Friend saying in the autumn statement that there was £1·5 billion to go in tax cuts gave, quite wrongly, the impression that the Government were going soft about inflation. There is no denying that that is what the markets thought. That was a mistake. Indeed, I think that the autumn statement was a great mistake. I would rather do away with the whole thing, but if it must be done I beg my right hon. Friend not to talk about the giveaways that will be made in the future and to remain as silent as he can about the prospects. It was all his fault in the first place, because if it had not been for the Rooker-Wise-Lawson amendment we should not be in this state.

The public expenditure White Paper is also a rather improbable document. I sometimes think that my right hon. Friend is determined to disprove the old saying that out of every thin man a fat one is trying to escape. Perhaps my right hon. Friend is trying to prove the opposite because he is showing that he has great determination to reduce public expenditure, but it has increased in each of the past three years, as is shown by the public expenditure White Paper. People find it increasingly difficult to envisage public expenditure being reduced to 39·2 per cent. as my right hon. Friend says. There must be a clearer and more forceful examination of public expenditure. It would be of great advantage to do so in the context of bringing public expenditure and revenue together so that the whole country could see what the plans are.

Anyone who looks at the national accounts will be pleased to see that borrowing is taking place solely for profitable investment. The accounts could be presented as they used to be, below the line—only for profitable borrowing—and above the line. Nobody would object to lending for that purpose. The increase in interest rates has put paid to any inflationary fears that there might have been. My advice to my right hon. Friend, for what it is worth, is to ignore the foreign exchange markets, not to give too much away in the Budget and to say as little as possible. When I think of the disasters in the past 20 years that have resulted from Governments spending without counting the cost and the ruin that that has brought to many people, I am astonished that the Opposition should have the nerve to table this motion. I wish my right hon. Friend every success.

5.44 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): This is an important debate, but I have little hope of Conservative Members joining us in the Lobby. Their conduct, which has been described as an organised demonstration against the speech of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, has been deplorable, bearing in mind the problems that face the country. The Opposition motion has not been tabled light-heartedly, although Conservative Members have treated it in that way.

I should like to consider the serious problems caused by social discontent in northern cities. Listening to the hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern), one would think that there is no crisis simply because, as he said, the financial markets are OK. However, there is a human crisis in Britain. In many northern cities suicide rates are increasing, homelessness on a scale such as has not been seen for many years, and an increase in the number of young people glue sniffing and taking drugs. An increasing number of families are breaking up. Earlier this week we discussed corporal punishment in schools. Social discontent caused by the factors that I have outlined is now spreading into schools, making control there extremely

difficult. Many young people's parents, brothers and sisters are unemployed. They go to school and ask, "For what?" It is extremely difficult to keep discipline.

Conservative Members can kid themselves or hide behind the Prime Minister. To corrupt the analogy of the three brass monkeys, they can hear all, see all and, as we say in the north say nowt. They seem able to divorce themselves from the growing chorus of criticism of the Government from every quarter. That criticism comes from industrialists, churches, the academic world and even some Conservatives in the country. Unfortunately, much of that criticism is falling on deaf ears.

I should like to give an example of the criticism that is coming from industry. My local paper, the Sheffield *Morning Telegraph*, produced an industrial survey on 9 January. One of the articles was written by the chief executive of Johnson and Firth Brown, under the heading:

"Leadership has been singularly lacking".

The author mentioned the breakdown of social order because of mass unemployment. To illustrate his case he quoted Michael Howard, professor of modern history at Oxford—not the Prime Minister's favourite academic institution at the moment, but still well qualified. The article said:

"Professor Howard warns of 'the long-term threat' to Britain's social cohesiveness from the volatile masses of unemployed, especially among the young 'who simply do not feel part of society at all and so defiantly turn their backs on it'."

He continued by offering advice on how the energy industry should be run:

"The strategic importance of coal for our economy in both the short and long term is unquestioned. Indeed, it is suggested that the additional oil purchased as a substitute for coal-fired generating stations is costing the CEGB an additional £20 million each week. Whilst this strategic importance lasts there cannot be an absolute 'right to manage' which is divorced from logistic, political, social and occasionallly geo-political realities. The energy industry, per se, has to be an industry that responds to broader criteria than doctrinaire economics, and manages its affairs in the broader national interest by consent within a coherent strategic framework. The 'right to manage' is not obtained by right, or force . . . we are not capitalists and socialists, we are workers and managers who should all share in the legitimate reward of success. The best managers are working all of the time . . . The best workers are managing all of the time."

We should adopt a collective approach to the problems of our industrial framework, rather than make demands and take actions which result in the confrontation that seems to be the order of the day under the present Government.

According to the unemployment figures announced today, the nation has 3·25 million people unemployed—equal to 13·7 per cent of the work force. In Sheffield, my city, 43,918 people are unemployed—an increase of 1,100 since the figures were last announced—representing 15·2 per cent. of the work force. When the Conservatives came to office in 1979, Sheffield had 13,000 unemployed, or 4·5 per cent. I assure the hon. member for Horsham that that is a crisis.

In 1979, in my constituency unemployment stood at 3,900, or 8 per cent. It is now 10,200, or 25·7 per cent. The worst aspects are masked by the figures, because in the centre of Sheffield unemployment is over 50 per cent. The deprivation caused by that must be seen to be believed, as 53 per cent. of the unemployed have not had a job for a year and 30 per cent have been unemployed for over two years. That, too, is a real crisis.

About 10,000 young people in the city of Sheffield have not had a real job since leaving school. That is a crisis for them. More than 40,000 jobs have been lost since 1979 in the steel and associated trades in the proud steel city of Sheffield, and there is a growth industry among the companies producing "For sale" signs.

It goes deeper than that, because what is occurring is a reflection of the Government's approach to industry. The Government's simplistic approach could be likened to the Prime Minister going into a restaurant and looking at two different menus. First, she picks up the a la carte menu and immediately sends that to the Common Market, with a PS saying, "Please look after the CAP."

The right hon. Lady then picks up the second menu—we can liken this situation to British industry—which is a much more limited menu because, for starters, everybody gets the same: free market forces are allowed to run wild, with a touch of trade union control.

We come to the main course. There is a limited choice, although there is a selection of chefs. For the steel industry we are given Ian MacGregor. He is there to dish up phoenix I, II and III. Phoenix I was not a raging success, being denationalisation, to which the Prime Minister referred earlier.

Phoenix III was supposed to represent an important part of our steel industry—steel forging—but industrialists, trade unionists and even some civil servants said that phoenix III was based on rocky financial foundations. A rescue attempt involving more than £10 million had to be devoted to that after only two years of its life; so phoenix III has not been a raging success, either.

Everybody is waiting for the announcement of phoenix II, which has been in the oven of the Department of Trade and Industry for about six months. There were 100,000 job losses in the industry in five years and the chef, Mr. MacGregor, relegated the industry, both the special and bulk steel sectors, to being not even comparable with the steel industries of some Third-world countries.

There will be a crisis when, if the economy is reflated and we are in the aerospace, nuclear power and high technology industries, we need the base materials. They will have to be imported, because the technology, investment and research and development suffered one cut after another. Mr. MacGregor relegated Britain to a position well down the league of major steel manufacturers. The chef, having done that to the steel industry, was moved to the NCB to create havoc there.

The next course is the sweet—which we in the north call pudding—and that involves leaving the mess to the local authorities and local communities to sort out. But the Government add a little vindictiveness, and the local authorities are called irresponsible and Left loonies. To make sure that they cannot respond, they start to remove their rights, and with that step we have an undermining of the democratic basis. "Public expenditure" is made a dirty phrase in the English language—even worse than Oxford university. Democratic rights having been removed, local authorities are unable to govern in the interests of the community.

It may be said that I make somewhat light of the problems of the steel industry. I assure Conservative Members that those working in that and allied industries do not take the situation lightly. The nation will regret the day when Ian MacGregor set foot on the steel industry.

I am privileged to represent Sheffield, Central. I join many others in warning the Government that if they do not

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change course and step aside from the policies of confrontation which are undermining our industrial base, deliberately creating unemployment, along with treading on people and their institutions, the stability which enables the financial institutions to function will itself be undermined.

There exists in society today great anxiety and frustration. Unless there is a change in Government policy, confrontation will be the order of the day and stability will disappear. The Opposition have tabled the motion, not to score points off the Government, but genuinely to bring before the House the concern that is felt not only by the millions who are unemployed but by the British people generally, and especially by those who are living below the poverty line. If the Government do not heed our advice, it will be to their sorrow and detriment in the future.

5.57 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): The central accusation in the censure motion is that the Government have mishandled the economy. I understand why the official Opposition, and some of those who have had the responsibility in the last 30 years of managing the economy, would now like to pretend that all our present industrial problems and our relative industrial weakness are the consequence of the actions of the present Government. For them to do otherwise would be to admit that they have a share in the heavy burden of responsibility for our long-standing problems and for the deep-seated danger signals that have been emerging for many years.

I exclude, in fairness, from that general condemnation the Leader of the Opposition, because he has been responsible for nothing. However, when previous Prime Ministers have trooped up to Oxford to collect their honorary degrees, I wonder how many of them paused to reflect that the academics who were honouring them were the same people who looked on technology transfer as some unworthy activity, beneath their intellectual dignity.

Those same academics would diligently pursue their research at public expense, collect their Nobel prizes and then sit back complacently as the development of their work and the jobs that their ideas generated were taken up in the United States or Japan. We in this country must now re-import goods manufactured overseas for which we did the basic technological work and research.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Has the hon. Gentleman visited the west midlands? Is he aware that in 1979 we had 6 per cent. unemployment and were a manufacturing region, whereas unemployment there is now as high as it is in any other region of the country? That is the type of damage that has been done to the British economy—it is encapsulated in the west midlands—by the Conservatives since 1979.

Mr. Batiste: Many jobs and millions of pounds worth of work would be done in Britain today had we had the foresight in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s to take up the ideas that we generated in our universities. Our traditional areas of industry, such as those in the west midlands and in my area of west Yorkshire, would have been the prime beneficiaries of that foresight. Technology transfer is not an alternative to the adequate funding of higher education. Nor is the adequate funding of higher education an alternative that enables those institutions to ignore the need for technology transfer.

Because of the pressures that this Government have put upon the academic world, it has been prompted for the first time into the surge of technology transfer that has taken place during the past few years. This Government have recognised the importance of new technology and have done something about it. They have fostered, developed and encouraged the Alvey programme in information technology, a field in which we once led but which we have since neglected. This Government set up the National Space Centre to bring together the diverse and complex threads of a vital industry that we once led, but it is a lead that we have squandered. This Government are fighting against the claims of the United States for the extra-territorial application of their law in high technology industries. It is the companies in my area and in the other industrial areas that will be the beneficiaries if the Government stand up robustly against those claims and against American interests and fight for the interests of this country. The shame lies with those who over the years have neglected these opportunities. The shame lies not with this Government who are trying to pick up those opportunities.

For years profit has been a dirty word in this country, and in the Opposition's vocabulary it still is a dirty word. Yet profit is the mainspring of opportunity, of investment and of jobs——

Ms. Clare Short: All the hon. Gentleman is interested in is profits for him and his friends.

Mr. Batiste: That intervention by the hon. Lady shows just how right I am when I say that "profit" is still a dirty word in the vocabulary of the Opposition. Until they have learned that, they have learned nothing. Until they have learned that, they will never understand how a free economy can grow and prosper and how jobs can be created. This Government have restored profitability and investment to British industry.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South) *rose——*

Mr. Batiste: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. This Government have restored profitability and investment to British industry and have reversed the strength-sapping spread of creeping nationalisation with a brilliantly successful privatisation programme leading to genuine public ownership—that is, ownership by people for themselves, not ownership by bureaucrats on their behalf.

Mr. Bermingham: Would not the hon. Gentleman agree with me that the real question is where the profit goes? Does it go into a few hands, or does it go into the hands of all those who participate in the production of the product?

Mr. Batiste: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman at all. Unless a company produces profits it will be unable to employ people. If there is no profitability there will be no employment. And if one wishes to increase employment one has to increase profitability. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not understand that point.

For years, across the world, particularly in the developed nations, inflation has been rightly regarded as

the enemy of economic progress and as the enemy of employment and of savings. Yet in this country it is only this Government who have demonstrated a clear and consistent will to take the steps necessary to keep inflation under control. I shudder to think what level interest rates and the pound would now be at if the right hon. Member for Blaenau, Gwent (Mr. Foot) had won the last general election and had implemented the disastrous Labour party manifesto. Upon these issues, and to such matters as the development of small businesses, successive Governments have for years paid lip service. Yet for years the share of the economy held by such an important sector as small businesses has declined. However, the experience of the United States economy and of the German economy shows that it is this sector that is best able to provide new jobs. It is this Government who have changed the pattern. They do not say, "We shall pay lip service to this concept." They produce the programmes that will help small businesses. This Government have produced the business expansion scheme, the loan guarantee scheme and the enterprise allowance scheme. This Government have promoted and expanded local enterprise agencies.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Batiste: No, I shall not give way. My speech must be brief because there are many other hon. Members who wish to take part in the debate. I have already given way twice without any enlightenment being proferred by the Opposition.

It is the actions of this Government that have been successful in promoting the expansion of small businesses and in creating new jobs in the small business sector—and not just in the small business sector. The example of the United States shows clearly that the service sector provides many new jobs, yet over very many years Government after Government in Britain have introduced policies that have progressively handicapped, frustrated and hindered the development of service industries. It is this Government who have turned that tide and abolished the tax on jobs which Labour introduced.

The most important feature that underpins a successful economy is the handling of industrial relations. After lurching in industrial relations, from the sledgehammer approach of the Industrial Relations Act to the pre-emptive cringe towards militancy of the Opposition—so good an example of which is shown by the faces now on the Opposition Benches—it is this Government who have had the wisdom and the tact to set about creating a legal framework for industrial relations by means of a steady, step by step process that has gone along with public opinion and that has taken public opinion along with it.

Mr. Lofthouse: Would the hon. Gentleman tell the young miners in his constituency, or the youngsters who would normally go into the pits, what are their employment prospects when pits in his constituency, such as Ledston Luck and Saville, close?

Mr. Batiste: I shall tell them and the hon. Gentleman very clearly. Every miner in my constituency who may be faced with redundancy and who comes from those pits and who wishes to continue in mining will be offered alternative employment by the National Coal Board in another pit in the area. What is the threat to those young men? What is the threat to those miners? It is the attitude of the Labour party and the continuation of this terrible strike. It is this Government who have taken steps to put industrial relations into their proper legislative framework and who have the determination to stand up to those militants who are so well represented on the Opposition Benches and who believe that intimidation is an alternative to industrial democracy.

Many of those hon. Members who came into Parliament for the first time in 1983 were motivated by the belief, reinforced by the record of the previous four years, that this Government and this Prime Minister would demonstrate the guts, the determination and the foresight to reverse what had hitherto appeared to so many of us to be an irreversible national decline. After one and a half years of this Parliament and having seen the manifest withering on the vine of the Opposition, I am pleased to say that I can see no reason to doubt that belief and that I have no reason to do other than support this Government in their handling of the economy.

6.7 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) referred to the help given by the Government to small businesses. Nobody can dispute the fact that small businesses are of enormous importance to this country, but I wish that I were able to say that the help given by the Government to small businesses, compared with the disadvantage to them, both by the number of bankruptcies from which they have suffered and the high interest rates under which they labour, was as great as the hon. Gentleman suggested. If one adds up the "pluses" and deducts the "minuses", the Government's record is not as good as the hon. Member for Elmet and so many other Conservative Members believe it to be. Their record does not come up to the standards for which we would have wished.

The starting point of any examination of the effectiveness of a Government is how much power the Government have to influence events and how they use that power. The general rule is that Governments come to office believing that they have many levers to pull and many buttons to press. However, after a year or two they realise that some of the levers have rusted up and that some of the buttons are not connected to anything at all. That inevitably leads the Government to blame others for their own errors. However, it also leads a sensible Government to learn from their own mistakes and towards the end of their term in office to put right those misjudgments that they started with in the happy, optimistic days when they came to office. But to any observer the fact remains that there is asymmetry about the operations of the Government.

It is much easier for the Government to harm the economy than it is for the Government to do good. It has some of the characteristics of any mechanism about which we know too little: tightening the screw here, removing a component there. That cannot be guaranteed to improve performance.

Previous Governments have been humbled by the fact that they must contend with the despotism of reality. They have learnt the limitations of power and acquired some of the skills of relating to that knowledge. The acquisition of such wisdom has been called U-turns.

We have seen the famous U-turns of Governments since the 1960s. But true wisdom comes when one realises that one does not know that which one thought one knew. Such

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wisdom is a recognition that the Government have had second thoughts, and the embarrassment of having to deny previous assertions is a small sacrifice for the greater good of the British people.

The Government have not learnt from their period in office, and they present that failure to learn as proof of their consistency and determination rather than a blindness to the damage done to our fellow citizens, when they are the only real reason why we are in the House at all.

The particular damage is that done to our manufacturing industry. The Manchester chamber of commerce and industry regularly presents the voice of reality in our factories. It is different from that which the Government hear from the more luxurious dining rooms in the City which benefits so much from the Government's policies which devastate so much of the rest of Britain.

The disadvantage for industry is that the City is nearer to the Government, and industry is far away and thought to be dirty. Ministers have that rapport with the City. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has an especial rapport with the City. One third of the firms in my constituency closed in the first two years of the Government's period in office and my constituency consists of small firms. We have no international finance, no international insurance and no international banking. We see the problems that small firms face, and we take no comfort from the preference given to the service industries, with which we have little to do.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend hits upon an important point when he says that there have been bankruptcies. There has been a record number of bankruptcies in the past year. How does he square that with the speech by the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste), who told us that only the Government and those on the Conservative Benches have done so much for small businesses?

Mr. Sheldon: That is true. There have been 12,000 bankruptcies, and that is a record figure. It is about four times the rate of only a few years ago. That is the danger for the small companies in so many of our constituencies.

There is the problem of international trade in goods which one can see benefiting my constituency but which is of less importance to other parts of Britain. I recall well the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) talking about the favoured parts of Britain which are dominant and which should be less dominant. The telling argument that the right hon. Gentleman used had great repercussions. There were echoes of it in my constituency and anywhere north of this city.

The Prime Minister has endorsed fully the medium-term financial strategy, the main statement of which was set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report in 1980. It said:

"The Government's objectives for the medium-term are to bring down the rate of inflation and to create conditions for a sustainable growth of output and employment."

That has been the aim of all the Government's efforts over the past five and a half years.

One of the arguments used by the Prime Minister was that her economic policy, which embraced her attitudes to monetarism, the PSBR and so on, was a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for prosperity. The notion of "necessary" and "sufficient" is one that was devised by philosophers and appropriated by scientists to distinguish in a laboratory that process which is essential to a successful experiment from that which is not. It does not ensure a successful outcome on its own.

The Government tried to show that one must reduce inflation and have a monetarist policy before anything else can occur. One could argue that a necessary condition for our prosperity is an improvement in morality. Such things cannot be tested, and the essential task for politicians is to provide policies which can be tested by results and can be seen in operation.

One possible regret is that the Labour party never thought of that one first. How clever it would have been if we had said that the nationalisation of the steel industry was a necessary if not sufficient reason for a manufacturing rebirth rather than what it was — an attempt to control and assist a beleaguered industry.

How imaginative if we had said that capital transfer tax was a necessary if not sufficient reason to improve industrial performance rather than what it was — an attempt at fair taxation.

The Prime Minister is able to hide behind that as an essential step along the road when the end has no connection with it. It is to reality that we must turn again and again. When we look at the Government's policies on incentives——

Mr. Tim Eggar (Enfield, North): Am I right in thinking that the Treasury team of which the right hon. Gentleman was a prominent member, at least from 1976 onwards, also believed that it was essential to follow a monetarist policy?

Mr. Sheldon: No. The hon. Gentleman will surely know that I strongly disapproved of that. I disapprove of it now and I disapproved of it during the interim period.

The Government's essential task has been to carry out their fixed monetarist policy, which has resulted only in deflation and a loss of output to the disadvantage of Britain, but to the particular disadvantage of the area which I have the privilege to represent.

We have been round this course many times before. In 1962 we provided advantages to those surtax payers. In 1972 we introduced a unified tax system to help the better off. In 1979 we reduced the highest rate of income tax from 83 to 60 per cent. In 1983 we removed the investment income surcharge. Those were tax changes of enormous advantage, designed for the so-called entrepreneur, but they did not come out of their closet as a result. The money was given to no avail at all, and so it will remain during the Government's period in office.

Let us turn to the particular problems that we see. How was it that we failed to take advantage of the enormous benefit given by North sea oil? The period of greatest prosperity, the period when something can be done about such a windfall, is when the revenue from that particular product is increasing. As it increases year by year, so there is extra money to disburse. The greatest period of prosperity that we can recall individually is always when our income rises the most — not when we have the highest level of income, but when it rises the most. That is when we have spare money over and above our previous needs. That is what the Government had. For the first time ever this century, the Government had an enormous increase in income—in wealth.

The question was what should be done with that windfall, which, because it was provided by oil, was non-recurring. What we should have done was use it to prepare Britain for investment in those areas which would produce a return. It is a pitiful return to think that that money went abroad to help other countries' industries and that we cannot be sure it will return to Britain. The days of tax exiles remain. They have not been brought back to Britain by low levels of tax. They are still abroad and the fleet-footedness of so many of those individuals is likely to lead to them staying abroad.

That money should not have gone abroad. It should have gone into industry because we depend on it for so many jobs. We have 50 million people in the United Kingdom, and we cannot earn our living by providing banking and insurance services. We can earn our living in Ashton-under-Lyne only by making things. There is no other way. If we give an advantage to service industries over manufacturing industries, we are saying what the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said about regional incentives — that there is no economic case, only a social case, for regional incentives.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire South) *rose*——

Mr. Sheldon: I shall give way in a moment.

That is an appalling statement to make. It implies that we are the recipients of handouts, and that there is no economic case for dealing with the large numbers of people who are unemployed and with the many people who daily see what is happening in the favoured parts—the south and south-east. They believe that they have skills which are still relevant in the modern world but which are not being called upon.

Mrs. Currie *rose*——

Mr. Sheldon: I am afraid that I am overrunning my time.

That is what is happening today, and we must be aware of it. Not all that long ago Quintin Hogg was sent to the north-east, with his cap, to do something for that area. He did not do very much, but he showed that his Government cared. We should like to see a member of the Government, preferably the Prime Minister, go to such areas to show that they care. We know that the right hon. Lady is not happy about showing that she cares about these matters. She never travels on the railways—we know that she does not like them. She has never said a nice thing about civil servants—we know that she dislikes them. She does not go to those regions, because she does not think they matter. But they are important. She must overcome her aversion and show that we are one united country. That is an essential task of politics, not economics.

Five and a half years is long enough for any political or economic experiment. The prosperity of the country and the uniting and knitting together of the people should be foremost. Those are the tests by which a Government should be judged. I regret that the Government have failed them.

6.22 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I shall try to confine my remarks to the 10 minutes that the Select Committee I chair has urged on the House. In so doing, I hope to prove that one can still debate points. I shall take the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) slightly to task. At times he is a travelling companion of mine, even in financial matters. His argument that, because there have been some failures within the small industry section, we have not achieved three times more than anything that was introduced by the Labour Government, does not hold up. It is a sign of the weakness of the Opposition's case. He argued that we had the strictest monetarist policy, but he knows that I am not a strict monetarist. Perhaps that is why I speak from below the Gangway. There is a vast difference between the Government's policy today and the strictness that we expected in 1979. The right hon. Gentleman knows that, in all honesty.

I shall deal with four matters. We must consider the Socialist approach if we are to accept the criticisms of the motion. What would that Socialist approach be? Within the shortest possible time it would bring about a return to a massive increase in inflation. It would ensure that there was a major increase in industrial costs and, therefore, a considerable decrease in the level of increase in productivity within the industrial structure. We would see a major reduction in international confidence in sterling, a genuine flight of foreign investment from Britain—I hope that all hon. Members would wish to encourage that investment in Britain—and a major departure of the foreign currency balances that are in London at present, especially those relating to America and Arab investment. The Opposition's policies would be disastrous. They are a farrago of financial fiction. They are complete nonsense —the proper definition of a farrago.

I shall put another point to those who seriously support the motion. Today's attack from the Opposition Front Bench achieves nothing; indeed, it works against sustaining the growing confidence in sterling's recovery and our economic recovery. I believe that the country is in favour of those who work to benefit the economic expansion of this nation, and not of those who work against it.

For that reason I ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer not to be waylaid by the siren voices of the false expansionists. I am worried that those who suggest a massive injection of public capital spending do not realise how in the past we have suffered from that approach. We have seen a major dash for growth by a Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, my late colleague Mr. Reginald Maudling. We have seen what that did for the economy. I criticised my party in the past, and I say that that did not prove to be either successful or helpful.

We should not forget — this is not frequently mentioned—that such an action lasts for only a limited period. Opposition Members do not consider what will happen when that injection of extra money from Government ceases. If it is the pump-priming exercise, which the Opposition try to suggest that it will be, unless the massive artificial level of Government capital expenditure is sustained, it will come to an end right in the middle of the period when the pump-priming should be working. That will have a deleterious effect on the economy because false jobs will have been created. The economy will suffer, and the policy will do nothing in the long run to achieve growth in genuine jobs, the creation of which all hon. Members wish to ensure.

I shall now deal with two matters that are frequently forgotten. I ask the House and the country to remember the number of people who are employed at present, as well as those who are unemployed. It is interesting to note that more than 24·2 million people are in work in the United Kingdom.

[Sir Peter Emery]

If we examined the position when the Government came to power in 1979 and took account of the increase in unemployment since then, we would expect to see only 23·2 million people employed. Therefore, 1 million new jobs have been created, jobs that are different from those that were in existence in 1979. That does not alter the great need to deal with the problem of unemployment. However, those who wish to attack the Government on their record frequently neglect that point.

The Government have failed to make the country realise the economic cost to the nation of Scargill's strike. It is not just a matter of fighting for the coal industry; between £2 billion and £2·5 billion has been artificially removed from expansion and from our economic recovery simply to deal with the whims of a man who wishes to bring down a democratically elected Government. More people should consider not only the arguments about the strike, but the massive economic effect, deleterious to everyone in the nation, of Scargill's policies.

There are several views about Britain entering the European monetary system. However, although we may disagree with him, we must respect and examine the opinions of the Governor of the Bank of England. A major argument that I advanced for Britain's entry into Europe was that we would have a structure of European reserves to combat the strength of the dollar. We are fast approaching the time when Britain must join the European monetary system. It may not be a popular belief, but I have always believed that the problems that the Chancellor has had to tackle during the past two weeks, especially the reduction in the value of sterling against the dollar, would have been lessened if Britain were a part of the EMS.

A fact that is seldom, if ever, considered in the Chamber—perhaps because it is unpopular—is that we shall never return to the over-full employment of the 1950s and 1960s. Anyone who believes that that is not true is living in cloud-cuckoo-land. Therefore, we must consider how best to use our valuable manpower resources. It must be sensible that the unemployed, who are being sustained, rightly, by the vast expenditure of public funds, should be asked and be able to make a social contribution to the society that sustains them. I do not advocate placing them in full-time jobs, which would mean removing work from those already in employment, but there must be enough work to be done by able-bodied men in hospitals, in caring for the elderly and disabled, and in our streets and countryside. They could do many of the jobs that we cannot afford to do within the present structure of local government or public expenditure. The payment of tens of billions of pounds in order to keep people sitting on their behinds doing nothing cannot be a proper use of resources. Hon. Members on both sides of the House would be doing a favour to the unemployed, many of whom wish to believe that they can still make a contribution to society, if they considered my suggestion.

It is easy to criticise a Government in retrospect, and we can always point to ways in which things could have been done better. But I urge the House to realise that the Government's achievements are real and that they will continue for the benefit of the nation. What is more, the Opposition have put forward no alternative.

6.35 pm

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I support the motion of censure, which would be carried overwhelmingly this evening if Conservative Members faithfully represented the views of the people who put them there rather than gave slavish support to their slave-mistress, the Prime Minister.

I make no apology for concentrating on the northern region. As I said to the Prime Minister earlier this afternoon, the northern region has been crucified by the policies pursued by her Government during the past five years. I grew up in the north-east during the bad times, under successive Tory Governments in the 1930s, but even in those days the despair was not so complete as we see in the region now. Never in my lifetime has a Prime Minister shown such callous disregard for so many of our people. One cannot run a great ship of state as though it were a small rowing boat on a park lake, but that is the inevitable price that we must pay for the Prime Minister's corner-shop mentality.

Were it not for more than £1 billion of support received from the European Community, God knows what the northern region would be like today. It has the highest unemployment in mainland Britain, and it is becoming steadily worse month by month. It would not be so bad if we could see a faint light at the end of the tunnel, but we cannot. For every 100 jobs created in new, innovative industry in the northern region, the south-east receives no fewer than 500 jobs. That cannot continue. It is immoral for a Government to allow the soft underbelly of the country to receive five times more jobs than does the northern region.

I have argued long and loud for Government intervention in the north in the shape of a Government research and development agency, yet the northern region is the only one in the United Kingdom without such a facility. It is no coincidence that the growth of such establishments — like mushrooms growing in the morning mist — alongside the M4 has created a new silicon grove in the area between west London and south Wales. When will the Government recognise the facts and give nothing less than a fair deal to the north? The Government have the power to give a lead. When will they do so?

No one can deny that good road communications are much more vital in a peripheral region like the north than in other regions, particularly the south-east. Yet the Government have failed completely to realise this important geographical factor. Since 1979 expenditure on roads in the north has on average been only 40 per cent. of that in the south-east. In the last financial year nearly £11 million was spent in the south-east compared with £4 million in the north.

Airports are crucial to an area like the north-east. The local authorities in north-east England are to be commended on the way in which they developed the little airport outside Newcastle from a pleasure-based airport to an excellent regional airport with international potential. The local authorities combined have spent no less than £8·5 million on building a new terminal. Because of the success of the airport we have ever-increasing traffic and need a parallel taxiway. The Government last May refused authorisation for such a project. In other words, they are not even prepared to allow us to help ourselves while at the same time the Prime Minister is willing to commit

countless millions of pounds in national resources to suck up to the French of all people by supporting the building of a channel tunnel. This is one of the most offensive of the many offensive things that she has done to the north-east in the last five years.

The north badly needs more resources for health care, bearing in mind that there is far too much ill-health and a high death rate.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is my hon. Friend not unsettled when he hears Conservative Members saying that unemployment is here to stay? Does that not send a signal to regions such as ours that they cannot look to Parliament to resolve the problems of unemployment over the longer term? So long as the Government refuse to raise the level of benefits, does that not indicate also that they would leave people on the dole for decades in receipt of a very small amount of money every week? Does that not disturb people in the north?

Mr. Brown: It disturbs me. More than that, I am disturbed when I see hon. Members who represent parts of the west midlands, which has suffered badly under the Government, looking as though they were enjoying the talk about unemployment. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) said that the Government were not prepared to increase welfare benefits. The reverse is the case. They have reduced them in real terms.

That brings me back to the point I was making about the high death rate in the north. I attribute much of it to suicides caused by the grim economic plight of high unemployment. Infant mortality was consistently higher in the north than in the rest of England and Wales until, thankfully, in 1980-81 the rate reduced to slightly less than the national average. We have fewer doctors and dentists than the rest of the country and the number of patients on their lists is appalling.

In the face of all these facts, what do we see? Do we see the Government rushing to help a region that has been under-privileged in regard to health care? Do we heck. The 1984-85 capital allocation to the northern regional health authority has been cut by this pathetic Government by no less than £4 million, just under 10 per cent. of our total expenditure. Does the House wonder that we in the north suffer deep anger and almost despair at the unfairness of the incumbents of the Treasury Bench?

In regard to energy, gas sales in the north fell by 8·2 per cent. between 1979 and 1983, compared with a national fall of 1·7 per cent. The most serious part of the fall in energy sales was in industry, where sales of gas decreased by 17 per cent. That point cannot be lost on the House. The same can be said about electricity. There is a reduction of 12 per cent. in industrial take-up. That illustrates what has been happening to manufacturing industry.

We have reached the stage where nationally, for the first time in our history, we are importing more manufactured goods than we are exporting. I need hardly say in this Chamber, of all places, that an island nation depends on importing raw materials, turning them into ploughshares or whatever, and exporting them. If we are not doing that, what chance have we of survival?

Disposable incomes in the north are well below the national average.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will my hon. Friend agree that in the west midlands and the black country, the very heartland of the manufacturing regions of the United Kingdom, there has been absolute devastation because of the Government's economic policies? In 1979, when they took office, the unemployment rate was 5·1 per cent. Now and for some time it has been between 12 per cent. and 15 per cent. In my travel-to-work area the official figure is 17 per cent.

Mr. Brown: The whole country has been devastated by the Government's employment policy. I sympathise with my hon. Friend. I still maintain, as I said last year in a similar debate, that all the facts and figures I have exposed must be a fair indication to the Government that they should understand the message that we are long past the time when, for survival, the north needs positive discrimination.

6.48 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Brown) has made a regional speech; I shall refer to some of his comments when I talk about manufacturing industry.

One must admire the audacity of the Leader of the Opposition in introducing a motion such as this against the Government. We should consider the background against which he introduced it, one where the Government of the day have repaid over half the money that the Labour Government borrowed from the International Monetary Fund. *[Interruption.]* It is all very well to talk about oil. When I asked the Leader of the Opposition why they had had to borrow the money, he could not answer.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough) *rose*——

Sir William Clark: I shall not give way yet. The motion has been introduced against a background of a panic visit to the IMF by a Labour Chancellor. This Government have never been to the IMF in such circumstances.

The Opposition criticise the Government's record over the last five years, but in 1979 we took over rapidly rising inflation. Today inflation is down to 5 per cent. That is no cause for criticism. We took over high and increasing overspending. We have brought the public sector borrowing requirement down through strict monetary policy and it is now about 2 per cent. of GDP. When we took over production was falling. Now production is rising.

When we took over, grossly excessive wage and salary awards were being made. One of the mistakes that the Conservative Government made was to accept the Clegg recommendations. Today claims are far more moderate. When we took over, there was gross over-manning. Today over-manning has been slimmed down, certainly in the private sector and to some extent in the public sector.

When we took over, industry was experiencing falling profits. Now profits are rising. All that is against the background of a world recession which increased in intensity after 1979 until a year or so ago. Despite the temporary setback, I cannot understand why the Leader of the Opposition has moved his censure motion.

There must be a reason. One of the reasons must be the pressure from the Left wing of the right hon. Gentleman's party. We are to have a debate about the miners on Monday, but for weeks the Leader of the Opposition said

[Sir William Clark]

that we would not have such a debate. It would have been easy to arrange a debate on a Supply day, but the Leader of the Opposition said no. The pressure built up. I understand why the Leader of the Opposition did not want a debate on the miners' strike. The public are fed up to the back teeth with the violence that they have seen on their televisions sets.

Today's debate is another sop to pacify the right hon. Gentleman's Left wing. The Leader of the Opposition had nothing positive to say today. All he did was criticise. He had nothing positive to offer about what a Labour Government would do.

The Leader of the Opposition today admonished Government Members and said, "Don't you realise that the miners' strike has cost the economy between £2 billion and £3 billion?" That must have an effect on the value of sterling. When has the right hon. Gentleman condemned the miners for causing that loss to the economy? He has never said anything.

Is the Leader of the Opposition saying to the country that the cost is too high and that the Government should give in to the demands of Mr. Scargill and his executive? We all know that the NUM executive has been infiltrated by the Left. Again the Left is using pressure. Of course it has cost money to import coal, although our balance of payments last year was in surplus.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Oil.

Sir William Clark: It is no use saying "Oil.". Opposition Members believe that the country is not fit to live in, but I believe that the country should be congratulated. Instead of trying to run down Britain, it is about time the Opposition talked about our achievements.

Mr. Winnick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Clark: No. I want to be brief.

The Government are criticised for defending democracy against the impossible demands of Mr. Scargill, but what has he been offered? He has been promised no lost jobs. Surely that is good. He has been offered the best redundancy terms in the nationalised industries. Certainly they are better than anything in the private sector. He has been offered more investment in the mines. It is sometimes forgotten that retired miners have index-linked pensions. Any trade union leader could accept such a package.

The British taxpayer cannot continue to pour money into uneconomic pits. That is the nub of the problem. For some time my considered opinion has been that the strike has nothing to do with pay, economic pits or the welfare of the miners. I believe that the strike is about bringing down the democratic system. I am certain that the Government are right to resist. Opposition Members know as well as I do that under no circumstances can any Government give way to such demands by any union because if they did Governments in future would be subjected to the whims of any trade union leader.

The strength of the dollar is an enigma and many people do not understand it.—*[Laughter.]* Opposition Members may laugh, but the United States has a 200 billion dollar deficit, which is increasing, and its national debt went up last year by 15 per cent. It is an enigma that the dollar stays so strong. Why does it stay so strong? I believe that one of the main reasons is that the United States is self-sufficient. There is no point in trying to compare Britain with the United States because we are not self-sufficient; consequently, we are in a different position.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Clark: No.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said today, oil provides about 8 per cent. of the Chancellor's revenue. If the oil price comes down by 1 per cent. that revenue will be reduced to 7 per cent. and the Chancellor's income will be reduced by about £1·2 billion. If that were added to the public sector borrowing requirement, instead of PSBR being 2 per cent. of GDP it would be 2·5 per cent. or 2·75 per cent. of GDP. With such reserves there is no reason why the price of oil should affect the pound. The effect is over-exaggerated because of the so-called link between oil and our total economy.

I deal next with the question of the balance of payments. Last year we had a surplus. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) in an intervention referred to oil. Of course oil helps. One accepts that we now have a deficit in the manufacturing industry, but one must ask why we have that deficit. For example, why is it that the car industry no longer has the same share of the world market or, indeed, the domestic market? The simple reason is that we have not been sufficiently competitive. We must therefore identify where the trouble lies in the manufacturing industry. In the last five years we have increased our service industries, in addition to oil, with the result that we were able to balance our books on the balance of payments.

I have attempted to point out where I think the censure motion is misplaced. In my view it is frivolous, and a diversion to cover up the differences between the Left and Right wings of the Labour party. Nobody should doubt what might happen if, the Labour party ever got in. In the last five years our overseas investments have gone up by £55 billion, roughly the amount of revenue that has accrued from North sea oil. One has to realise that from those investments abroad come not only dividends but also the influence that we can have on making overseas subsidiaries buy British. Anybody who knows about imports and exports knows that that will help in the long run.

I feel sorry for the Leader of the Opposition. He has an impossible task in trying to straddle the two extremes of the Labour party. One section of his party is not really interested in democracy, and moderate Opposition Members know that I am right.

I hope that we will throw out the motion, knowing that it is a frivolous and merely diversionary tactic by the Leader of the Opposition, and a sop to the Left wing of his party.

7.2 pm

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) devoted a good part of his speech to dealing with the miners' dispute, as did some of his hon. Friends. I began to think that I had transgressed into next Monday's debate on the mining industry.

The hon. Gentleman repeated some of the usual excuses of the Government—for example, that we have not been

competitive enough. There may be something in that. Next came the old chestnut about a world recession, but there is no world recession. I can point the hon. Gentleman to a number of countries in Europe which have far lower levels of unemployment than the United Kingdom.

I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) say that we would never get back to levels of full employment such as we have enjoyed in the past. He may well be right, but, if the Government had the will, there is no reason why we should face such a situation. We are lacking many amenities that would provide work for people. No Government, if they had the will, need accept the dismal forecast that we will never see anything like full employment again.

I thought that the opening speeches on both sides were rather poor. If I do not embarrass the Leader of the Liberal party by saying so, his speech was the first coherent one in the debate, although I did not agree with it by a long shot. At least it was something to listen to compared with the mixed up excuses and recriminations that were offered by the Opposition and Government Front Benches.

The Leader of the Opposition made what I thought was a good point when he said he took offence not only at the policies but the attitude of the Government. The whole ethos of the Government is wrong—their meanness of spirit and purpose and their incompetence, compounded by their stubborn refusal to heed the warnings even of members of their own party. It makes for a dismal prospect.

Some hon. Members have suggested that the entry of the United Kingdom into the EMS snake is a way out of our difficulties. I differ entirely from that point of view. Whatever readjustments might be made in the United Kingdom when we have the power to make them, we would lose to a great extent if we joined the EMS.

There are many ways still in which we could save money. We are to continue with Trident, for instance, although many people have lost faith in it as a weapon and have questioned its escalating costs. Some people are discussing the building of a Channel tunnel, although they seem to have learnt no lesson from the fate of Concorde and the way in which its costs rose gradually inch by inch. Initially it was going to cost £125 million. The ultimate cost was approximately £1,200 million. The public was conned stage by stage—"We have spent £x million. Therefore, we must go on to the next stage."

I hope that, whatever other mistakes they have made, the Government will not become involved in building a Channel tunnel. Let us leave that to the private people who like profit. Although some people allege that profit is a dirty word, I do not take that view. However, I object to the view that profit is all that matters in the world. I hope that the Government will not make the mistake of backing the Channel tunnel. As some hon. Members in business life know, in the few months before a business goes bankrupt it often sets out on the maddest spending spree of all.

In my brief intervention, I intend to deal mainly with the Scottish aspect. Today's figures for unemployment in Scotland are tragic. The unadjusted figure of 362,000—16 per cent. unemployment—equals the peak figure experienced early in 1983 before the Government carried out their exercise of massaging the figures later that year.

I was amused to hear the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, on the "Today" programme, chiding Mr. Brian Redhead for describing the number of unemployed as 4 million. It may not be 4 million, but it is near enough. While we may accept the official figures, it was the right hon. Gentleman who fiddled the books with regard to future figures. Thus, he was in no position to pull up his interviewer on that point.

In the last few years, the official Scottish Office propaganda has suggested that Scotland is leading the United Kingdom out of recession. Nothing could be further from the truth, as I have told the Secretary of State from time to time. Today's unemployment figure proves that beyond measure. Unemployment in the United Kingdom has risen by 122,000, but Scotland has borne about 19,000 of the total.

The spurious claim that Scotland was leading some sort of recovery was based on the fact that the proportionate rise in Scottish unemployment throughout the recession had been smaller than in the United Kingdom as a whole. That is not in the least surprising to anybody who knows anything about Scotland, because our pre-recession level was higher. Like the noble Earl of Stockton in another place a few days ago, I was not impressed by that argument. When output and unemployment statistics are analysed, it is abundantly clear that Scotland's dive into recession has been just as deep and that its present recovery is in fact less advanced.

The manufacturing base in Scotland has been almost destroyed in the last six to seven years in particular. Under the policies of the Government, neither Scottish oil nor the advent of the silicon glen has been able to replace the jobs lost. The Labour Government failed to improve the Scottish situation, but this Government have taken the failure to new depths.

When we examine the areas that should be giving Scotland a bright future, even the signs there are disturbing. Directly oil-related employment in Scotland fell by 2,700 between December 1983 and June 1984. Many firms in the oil industry in Scotland are subsidiaries of foreign companies — British, French, Dutch or Norwegian. The Norwegians know how to handle their economy and politics. Unlike Scotland, Norway has control over its vast oil resources. Unemployment, which was far lower in any case, has fallen by 18 per cent. in the past year. There are now about 16,000 unemployed in Norway. When one compares that with the situation in Scotland, one realises how much we are losing through being part of the United Kingdom set-up. Scotland would do well to emulate the Norwegian example of gaining independence as a prerequisite for a healthy and prosperous economy.

Investment in the oil industry and other industries in Scotland has come heavily from overseas, while the British Government have used the massive wealth from Scottish oil most unwisely. Instead of using it for capital investment in industry and infrastructure, they have squandered it on undesirable objects and tax cuts for the wealthy. In view of the attacks on health, education and local government expenditure, it is deplorable that that money has been consumed by tax cuts for the wealthy. The value of sterling has fallen from $1·57 in June 1983 to $1·11 now. That should provide a great opportunity to embark on an export drive which would greatly benefit Scotland, but the Government's general mismanagement of the economy has probably precluded that.

There is a social and economic crisis of tragic proportions in Scotland, and it has been growing for many years. One sign of the crisis has been the haemorrhage of

[Mr. Donald Stewart]

skilled people through emigration, which is on an upward trend. In 1982, net migration from Scotland was 15,100. In 1983, it rose to 18,000. The crisis facing Scotland results from the fact that we do not govern ourselves and cannot control our own economy. Only Scottish independence can solve that problem for the Scottish people.

7.11 pm

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): The right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) ought by now to have accepted that the Scottish electorate has thrown out the idea of Scottish independence. It seems entirely appropriate that the Government should use the revenue from North sea oil to maintain the purchasing power of pensioners, to ensure a decent level of subsistence for the unemployed and to maintain real expenditure on the National Health Service. Those seem entirely laudable objectives.

Today's debate raises two questions. Have the Government mishandled the economy? And have the Opposition put forward any viable alternatives? Looking back over the Government's policy, I see, first, their success in reducing inflation. I hope that the whole House agrees on that. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) will recall that when he was a Treasury Minister inflation was edging towards 30 per cent. We have come a very long way since 1976.

Secondly, have we got the economy moving? The latest CBI report shows that the economy is growing quite substantially.

Thirdly—the Opposition may wish to forget this—the key dimension of the Government's objectives when they came to power in 1979 was to remove controls. They have removed all price controls, exchange control, dividend control and wages control. Those are major successes for any major Western Government. Finally, they have had some success in making British industry competitive, restoring profitability and helping entrepreneurs to succeed in this environment.

The whole House will agree, however, that the remaining challenge is that of unemployment. I do not share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) that we shall have to live with the current level of unemployment for the rest of time. Looking back over the past six years, I believe that the Government's broad strategy has been correct. When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor presented his Budget last year, I was certain and I still am certain that it was a major reforming Budget of great help to British industry, and I believe that that will continue to be the case.

Conservative Members too easily forget that the Prime Minister and the Cabinet have had to roll back 40 years of Socialism. Some of us have lived in parts of the country dominated by Socialism for 40 years. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) was not laughing because he knows what that has done to Sheffield. The results of 40 years of Socialism are all too clear in my old borough of Islington. Rolling that back takes time. Inevitably, minor mistakes are made. A recent one was the removal of the pound note. Another current mistake is the attack on the National Health Service and parts of the pharmaceutical industry by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health. But those aspects are not central to the overall situation.

What alternative policies do the Opposition propose? The speech of the Leader of the Opposition contained little of substance but much bombastic insult directed at my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Let us consider the reality of what the Opposition are offering. There is the miners' strike. Mr. Scargill, having been three times defeated by his own membership, decided that it was time to attack the democratically elected Government. He did so without a ballot because he knew that he could not win one. He set forth to challenge the Government on the basis of uneconomic pits. Three times the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) went cringing to Mr. Scargill to try to bring the parties together and three times he came away empty handed — not from the National Coal Board, which has been prepared to discuss uneconomic pits at any time, but from Mr. Scargill and his Left-wing friends.

Only in recent weeks have Labour Members voiced any objection to the strike. I have listened to all the recent energy debates and as a member of the Select Committee on Energy I have listened to the evidence of Labour Members, but not once until the past few weeks have they made any attempt to resolve the strike. Even now they will not admit that uneconomic pits will have to be closed. It was in the Labour Government's "Plan for Coal" and in their legislation, but they still refuse to accept it.

Let us consider another aspect of nationalisation. Did the Opposition spokesman on transport, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), tell the Southampton dockers that the only way to keep container traffic was to be economic and efficient? No one in the Labour party told them that. As a result, container traffic has left Southampton, major redundancies are likely and the future of Southampton as a container port has gone.

There is indeed a crisis in Liverpool and places like it, but it results from the attitude of local authorities and some trade unions in those areas. Until that attitude changes, no industrialist—British, Scottish, Welsh or foreign—is likely to go there. The sooner the Labour party realises that, the sooner it is likely to solve the unemployment problem in those areas.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in the Merseyside area, where there has been a loss of 80,000 jobs, many firms have never had a day of industrial unrest or had any strikes? The image of Merseyside seen by many people, including the hon. Gentleman, distorts the reason why Merseyside is in its present position.

Mr. Morris: I am sad to say that parts of British industry do not change or face changing realities. Unless firms provide products for today's needs there will never be high employment. The problem is that the investigators go where they are welcomed, and not to those areas where they are not welcomed.

Although the speech of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) was coherent, it did not contain much policy. He criticised the Government for not believing in sharing profits among employees, yet my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has done more for wider share ownership than any other Chancellor since the war. I shall be disappointed if my right hon. Friend does not do more in the coming Budget.

I appeal to my right hon. Friends in the Cabinet to remember that we are an exporting nation. If I have a criticism of the Government, it is that we have lost a little of the impetus we had when we came to power in 1979. Our former colleague, Sir John Nott, was very much involved in the engine room of the Treasury, cutting out Government forms and making a drive for exports. There is a need for more impetus.

I have just spent some time in south-east Asia, and I know that British investment would be greatly welcomed in Indonesia, which is just one country that needs investment. Indonesia is crying out for further investment from Britain. There are many opportunities in Indonesia for industrial companies, including companies from Ashton-under-Lyne.

We need to re-emphasise our determination to create jobs. It is criminal that factories in my constituency in Northampton are short of skilled labour. That is unacceptable when there are 3 million unemployed, and is a sad reflection on our education and training systems. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment should push ahead vigorously to ensure that every young person takes part in training and that no young person is allowed to go on the dole. Young people should be encouraged and should be cajoled into taking a skill, as happens in Germany. No wonder the Germans are more successful that we are.

I say to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench, for heaven's sake, carry on boldly trimming public expenditure but do not fall into the trap of doing that in a Socialist way.

Mrs. Currie: What about the Health Service?

Mr. Morris: I shall come to the Health Service if necessary. I say to my right hon. Friends who are responsible for local government and housing, stand firm. There is still excessive expenditure in Camden, Hackney, Islington and Northamptonshire. We should get tough with the Ministry of Defence. We know about the overruns of expenditure which are considered by the Public Accounts Committee. It is time a cut was made.

My right hon. Friends should push ahead with privatisation. They have had a major success with British Telecom in bringing about a private shareholders' market, and we want more of it. My right hon. Friends should also remove restrictions on overseas trade.

There is a real need to undertake a drive to remove the impediments to the private sector and not to forget the role of manufacturing industry. I do not share the views of those who believe that manufacturing industry is finished.

I do not complain about what the Treasury is doing, but I complain about the lack of consultation, sensitivity and understanding in certain Departments by certain junior Ministers. Our party needs a drive to see through our strategy and to communicate our conviction that this country will and must compete successfully in the world. There is no reason why our share of world trade should continue to decline. If we undertake that drive and build on last year's Budget—this year, we have to deal with the other half of our strategy in terms of direct tax cuts —we will complete our strategy. Now is not the time to waver. Given that consistency, confidence will return to the Conservative party, the country and the exchanges.

7.24 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Conservative Members have asked whether the censure motion is justified. I believe that it is justified and necessary. I have been amazed at the mixture of arrogance and ignorance portrayed by Conservative Members about the real issues in the debate, and I am sure that people outside will note the way in which they have dealt with the motion.

Regardless of the wording of the motion, the central issue is, and will remain, mass unemployment. So far, Conservative Members have said nothing that will help to deal with that matter. The dissension among Conservative Members, which has been apparent from time to time—it was mentioned by the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris) — disappeared when the censure motion was tabled by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. In recent weeks, we have seen the nervousness of Conservative Members when Government policies have affected their constituency or class interests. There have been murmurings from Conservatives about the Government's policy. No doubt those murmurings will disappear when the Division is called tonight.

Conservative Members should take on board the statement consistently made by the Opposition—that the northern regions are facing tremendous economic and social problems which appear to be totally ignored by the Government. I do not want to be parochial in a debate that concerns the whole of Britain, but hon. Members should consider what is happening in certain parts of the country. The hon. Member for Northampton, South, who talked about unemployment, should note what is happening in places such as Merseyside, the north-east, the north, Scotland and Northern Ireland. There are pockets where there are male unemployment rates of 50 per cent., 60 per cent., or 70 per cent. That is the reality in which people live today.

The facts and figures that have been bandied about today ignore the real human problem that develops from mass unemployment. Conservative Members have said nothing that shows they want the Government to alter direction in order to tackle unemployment. Unemployment has been used by the Government, especially the Prime Minister, as a battering ram against the employed. Since 1979 the Government have made it clear that their prize would be a considerable reduction in the power and rights of the trade union movement. The Government have sought to roll back not 40 years of Socialism, but 40 or more years of the advancement of the living standards of ordinary working people.

Lord Donovan, the chairman of the Royal Commission on trade union employers' associations, said that the conflict of interest at the point of production was an integral part of capitalist industry and could not be removed. Clearly, there is a conflict of interest if Labour pursues better living standards—that aim is justified—and those who own and control industry and capital pursue the maximisation of their profits. That fact should not be denied by the Conservative party which places profitability above all else.

Conservative Members argue that they are rolling back 40 years of Socialism, but I believe they are whipping back 40 years of advancement under previous Labour Governments and ignoring the role played by the trade union movement in abolishing the hyper-exploitation that

[Mr. Eddie Loyden]

existed from the turn of the century until after the war and enabled people to begin to achieve a better standard of living.

Capitalism can no longer afford to make concessions. It can no longer allow working-class people to enjoy better living standards. The Government know that the first shield against them is the trade union movement and that that must be weakened. That is the prize that the Prime Minister has been pursuing. That is why she has taken her stand against the National Union of Mineworkers.

The Government have missed the point of the NUM dispute. It is not about wages for those who are employed at the moment. It is not good enough to say that there are good redundancy payments. The Opposition have made the point—it has not been answered by the Government—about the next generation of job seekers. Who will provide them with jobs, or will they join the 3 million-plus—in reality 4 million or 5 million—who are now in the dole queue and on the scrap heap?

Nothing has been said so far from the Conservative Benches to give any hope to the youth of this country who have been completely alienated. Why do people think that in areas such as Merseyside and others drug abuse and crime are in the ascendancy? The answer does not come from the left-wing press. The current edition of *Police* gives details of the aftermath of Toxteth. The police say that there is a direct correlation between youth unemployment and crime and drugs. The Government disregard the consequences of that. The Opposition would be reneging on their responsibilities if they did not table a censure motion such as the one that we are debating.

The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) mentioned new technology. Anyone who knows the writing of Tom Paine will recall that, in his book, "The Rights of Man", he said, in relation to Louis of France, that he was admiring the plumage and ignoring the dying bird. We are all aware that the new technology will come and will be beneficial, but it will be beneficial only if it helps all society, not merely those who make profits from it.

New technology offers, possibly for the first time, the opportunity for us not to rely on human resources to produce wealth. Wealth will be produced. It will allow a compassionate Government to look at the areas of poverty, but not, as the hon. Member for Honiton implied, to compel the unemployed to carry out social work. There is a tremendous amount of work to be done by human labour. Our schools, hospitals and infrastructure need human labour. The opportunity to do that work has never been as great as it is now that we have the new technology. The new technology is releasing—if I may use that word—millions of people from the need to be involved in production. That labour is lying around. Human labour is the most precious commodity that we have. It is being left to rot. The Government have made it clear that they do not intend dramatically to change their political course.

Not until we see an end to the Government will we see an end to the poverty, frustration and inhumanity of mass unemployment.

7.33 pm

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) said that the Government had done nothing for the people of Merseyside. May I point out to him as gently as possible that only this week the Ministry of Defence has placed an order with Cammell Laird in Birkenhead which will provide work for 1,000 men for three to four years? Whatever the economic rights and wrongs of that, it was regional policy in everything but name. He might at least be grateful for that aspect of Government policy. One might think that Liverpool was the only place in this country that had unemployment. The hon. Gentleman might care to remember that on my side of the River Mersey we have a higher rate of unemployment than the city of Liverpool.

I thought that the debate was about a censure motion on the Government. We have heard a number of remarks about hon. Members' own areas. I should like to try to bring back the debate to what the motion is alleged to be about. I shall be supporting the Government tonight without the slightest hesitation.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman always does.

Mr. Porter: Not at all. The Whip is an utterly unnecessary instrument for that purpose.

I support, as I have always supported, the general strategy of making the control and eventual defeat of inflation a priority. It seems to me, as it seems to the Government, that without that control none of our other economic objectives of increased competitiveness, investment and production and eventually increased employment is attainable. I shall return later to the subject of unemployment.

In offering my vote to my right hon. Friends tonight, I do not pretend that they are necessarily the acme of perfection, because all Governments make mistakes although often they are more obvious in retrospect than at the time they are made. For instance, many years ago VAT was introduced on far too narrow a base even though the exemptions and zero ratings appeared to have virtue at that time.

While the principle of broadening the VAT base is being widely canvassed at the moment — every suggestion is met with howls of indignation and gloomy forecasts of the collapse of civilised society as we know it—it strikes me, and I hope that it strikes my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench, that the long-term political and social cost of a radical revision of the present VAT arrangements would be difficult, if not impossible, to bear.

It was, in my view, an error in the Government's first term of office to raise VAT to 15 per cent., for reasons which I hope have become glaringly obvious. It is fair to say that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) pointed that out at the time. If VAT is to remain at that level to counterbalance any reduction in the standard rate of tax or to raise income tax thresholds, I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider raising the VAT turnover ceiling, under which VAT is not payable, to about £50,000. It would be of enormous benefit to small business and of relatively little consequence to the Treasury in terms of tax revenue.

May I deal briefly with the events which have brought about this debate and which the Opposition declare are the result of the mismanagement of the economy? It enters my mind that the latest opportunity that the Opposition had to do a bit of managing is hardly the most solid basis on

which to declare that they would do any better now. It may have entered people's minds that the Government cannot do a great deal about the United States budget deficit and high interest rates, although President Reagan's inaugural speech gave me some hope that the deficit will be reduced, that interest rates will fall and that accordingly the dollar's external value will decrease.

There is not a great deal that the Government could do — if I may borrow a quote — about the irrational behaviour of the market in relation to sterling. Whether we like it or not—and we do not—the market treats sterling as a petro-currency, although the facts to a large extent gainsay that view. I believe that with the present level of the pound some of the original objections that we had to joining the EMS have disappeared. We should take a long hard look at the possible advantages of the relative stability that could flow from our joining.

As it happens, it looks as though the OPEC agreement and the Chancellor's intervention in the market, which was inevitable and might have taken place sooner, have stabilised the position, although there will probably be a further small fall in oil prices. However, as our major oilfields would still be profitable at $20 a barrel, I face that prospect with some equanimity.

The position of the past few days was a touch tricky, to say the least. It was not a crisis, as the Opposition thought.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): It was straight panic.

Mr. Porter: The Opposition certainly panicked.

There is a wide expectation that the base rates can be reduced in the near future, and the impending and inevitable end of the miners' strike can do nothing but good to the economy both in the long and the short term.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the arguments about coal, the opinion has been widely held that the militant trade union activity had to be shown to be a total non-starter. The Government deserved the support of the country, which they got, and the congratulations of my hon. Friends, for their courage, determination and consummate skill in dealing with a totally unnecessary dispute.

That is the nice bit. The blot on the Government's escutcheon is the rate of unemployment. When I came to the House in 1979, having supported in every possible way the policy of my party in the period leading up to the election, neither I nor any other new Member nor the incoming Government expected that, almost six years later, unemployment would be at its present level.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: We said that it would.

Mr. Porter: The hon. Member for Workington has made many forecasts to his own satisfaction, but that forecast was not made.

Unemployment has risen for various reasons, many of them unconnected with the policy of the Government. We should not forget that 23·5 million people are working. A higher proportion of the population of working age is working than in any other country in western Europe except Denmark.

Even so, I am not prepared to accept that it is beyond the capacity of the Government to deal with some of the problems. The Government have a role to play. Like my noble Friend the Earl of Stockton, I am not an 1860s Manchester Liberal. That does not mean that the demand side of the equation is the only side by which the matter can be dealt with. Domestic demand can be boosted by fiscal or monetary means. However, the evidence of the past 20 years shows beyond a peradventure that the benefits of such a stimulus have been more and more quickly dissipated by accelerating inflation.

On the other hand, the efficiency of markets has not been vindicated by experience. There is not much point in exhorting workers to restrain their wage claims. That is futile. It is equally futile to ask employers to resist wage claims. However, there are methods by which Government can assist the process of re-employment. I do not pretend that I know the exact answers. No one does. However, we could do more within the general economic strategy of the Government—that is the important point —to generate employment.

If the *Daily Telegraph*—of all organs—is prepared to say that unemployment must not drift on, I, for one, am prepared to agree. Perhaps the Government and Chancellor will be prepared to consider all or some of the suggestions made by Mr. Andreas Whittam Smith in yesterday's *Daily Telegraph*. They seem sensible, because they fall within the general strategy of the Government. At the very worst, they are worthy of serious consideration. At best, they could provide positive proof that my party and our Government are concerned with the plight of the unemployed, especially in the north.

I am not prepared to contemplate the possibility of the return to office of a party which, by its performance today, has shown an inability even to understand the problems, and which has also shown its inability to control the strange and disparate elements within its own ranks. The Labour party could not run a drinks party in a brewery. On that basis alone, I would support the Government. However, I also support them for positive reasons. I support them for their success in relation to inflation, and their success over the past few years in relation to investment and productivity. I merely ask that those achievements should not be thrown away in political, social and economic terms by a failure sensibly to address the problems of unemployment.

7.45 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): It is a thing about censure debates that they start off by being one-way but after a bit become two-way. It turns out that those who censure are themselves censured. It is an examination of two sides of the question, not just one side. Nevertheless, it is the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the policies centred upon his Department that have been under censure in this debate. I had always supposed that it was not merely a courtesy but the duty of a Minister whose Department was under censure to attend the debate and hear what was to be said in criticism of him. It is only a partial justification—though it is a partial justification—that the Bench from which the censure was launched has for most of the debate been empty or nearly empty of those responsible for representing the Opposition on economic and financial matters.

One count against the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the rise in interest rates, for which he is held responsible. Certainly the Chancellor has seen himself obliged on two occasions sharply to raise the rate of interest. The reason why he did so is not difficult to discern. He has to borrow. He has to borrow on a substantial scale. He has to borrow

[Mr. J. Enoch Powell]

on a scale probably larger than he envisaged when he drew up the Budget, or during most of the financial year. With the pull of interest rates and investment in the United States, if the Chancellor is to go on borrowing from the public, he must borrow at a competitive rate of interest. He shares that with those who are borrowing for other purposes and not on public account: indeed, the rise in the rate of interest offered by the Government was forerun by a rise in the rate of interest offered by the private sector. The hon. Gentleman was responding, as he was obliged to respond, to the conditions in the market for loans and for savings. I hope that he has taken from that the lesson not to rely too much upon the small percentage which the public sector borrowing requirement bears to the gross national product or to the budgetary total, but to realise that it is that element which is marginal—it is the borrowing requirement that is marginal—which exerts the leverage effect upon the policies and successes of a Government.

However, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is censured by the Labour Opposition. We have no doubt about the attitude of the Labour party to Government borrowing. They want more of it. They have advocated more of it. Borrow, borrow, borrow has been the ingeminated cry from that Bench until the House almost ached with boredom at hearing it. If this alternative, this criticism, it to be pushed home—that one ought not to put up interest rates but ought to be borrowing much more—what is the solution to the conundrum? As far as I can see, there are two possible solutions. One is not to borrow from the public but to borrow from the banks—that is to say blue it on inflation. The other is to prevent those who have savings, to lend, and are within one's powers of control, from doing anything but lend them to the Government; to create, in other words, a prison state. The counter-proposition of the Opposition to the Government's raising rates of interest in the circumstances which rendered it necessary in order to continue to fund their debt from the public is either a prescription for inflation or it is a prescription for a state in which all the elements of production, of enterprise and of savings would be controlled by an iron and centralised despotism.

We have heard a good deal today in favour of the Earl of Stockton and his period—some of it, I thought, rather mythical. But this prescription does not take us back to the good old days of Stockton. It takes us back to the good old days of Lord George-Brown, and the national plan. It is the spectre of Lord George-Brown not the beneficent, angelic presence of the Earl of Stockton, that is evoked by the prescription of those who have moved this vote of censure.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer also stands accused of having failed to control the movement of the sterling rate on the exchanges. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), when this matter was mentioned earlier, interjected, "It is not in the censure motion." He is quite right: it is not in the censure motion. There is a reason for that. Some of us remember how the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore)—he is not here to verify it, for he made but a fleeting attendance at the debate—used constantly to complain of the high level of the exchange rate of sterling and say that the correct course of action, the manner in which to stimulate the economy, export trade and the industries involved in it, was to bring the exchange rate down. He intended to do that artificially by creating pounds and selling them on the market—that is the way in which the exchange rate of a currency is normally brought down. However, the exchange rate has fallen. It has fallen, one might almost say, beyond the dreams of the Opposition who put it forward in earlier debates as part of their recommendations. One would have thought, therefore, that, as a change from a motion of censure, there might have been a motion of congratulation to the Government on having carried out one at least of the elements in the prescription of the Opposition, in bringing down the exchange rate to a competitively low level. *[Interruption.]* Apparently that does not entirely meet with the satisfaction of the authors of the motion of censure.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Interest rates are too high.

Mr. Powell: If interest rates are too high, a floating exchange rate will adapt itself to relative advantages and attractions, including those created by the prevailing level of interest rates in the various countries.

Ms. Clare Short: What will happen to the British economy?

Mr. Powell: One of the interesting moments in this debate—which has not been without its longueurs—a point of great fascination was the dialogue between the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) and the Leader of the Opposition about the alleged views of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on the desirable level of the exchange rate of the pound sterling. The right hon. Gentleman had been accused unjustly of saying that the present rate was, in his view, "about right". It turned out that he said that it might have been "about right".

This is not merely semantically fascinating. There is a really solid point behind what might appear to be merely a difference in the voice of the verb. If the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook is not sure that whatever the exchange rate of sterling happens to be today is the right one, how is he to be sure, and how does he ascertain, what is the right rate? If he says, "Well, it may be right," what is he waiting for, to know whether it is right? What he is waiting for is to see what will happen. Just as he waited to see the pound sterling fall to its present level before declaring that that might be "about right", so he reserves to himself the right and the opportunity, should it go either up or down, not be found in disagreement with—dare I say it?—the market. He accepts in fact the judgment of the market as an expression of the real world in its fixing of the terms on which we conduct our trade with the rest of the world.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that foreign exchange dealers and bankers throughout the world believe that sterling will fall to parity with the dollar by the middle of this year? Is it not incomprehensible that the Government might wish to intervene on the exchanges and prop up the pound by high interest rates in the knowledge that it will fall? Is not that the objection of British industry? We are throwing good money after bad.

Mr. Powell: I had hoped that I had carried the hon. Member with me when I explained that the motivation of the Government in raising interest rates so as to match those being offered elsewhere was to be able to continue

to borrow what they required for the financing of public expenditure, and that they were not engaged in playing the exchanges. Indeed, they have almost ostentatiously abstained from playing the exchanges.

What the hon. Member for Workington says does not, however, rescue the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook because, if interest rates or prospective prices of oil are factors, as indeed they are, that enter the interplay in the market which fixes the exchange rate of the pound sterling from day to day, the trouble is that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook knows no more than any of the rest of us how those factors—all of them throughout the world—will move. Therefore, he wisely refrains from attaching himself to a dogmatic statement that such and such ought to be the exchange rate of the pound sterling but reserves to himself a safe position from which to observe what will happen and issue his blessing as and when he thinks fit.

Mr. Loyden: My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) should be a politician.

Mr. Powell: I had not regarded the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook as conspicuously deficient in those qualities with which those most hostile to politicians commonly credit us. However, I might be wrong and I am prepared to accept the judgment of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden)

If the exchange rate was not in the censure motion, a reference to the balance of payments and to our visible surplus was there. The fact that it features in the censure motion, and the form in which it features in the censure motion, show how little a major factor in the causation of unemployment has been grasped and understood by the Opposition. That we have suffered in the past five years, almost for the duration in office of the Government, from a corking surplus on current account on our balance of payments, which has in part, and perhaps preponderantly, been due to the fact that we had become an oil-producing and oil-exporting country, has been savagely inimical to the manufacturing activities of the British economy. That should—it is not the first time I have invited the House to contemplate the connection — evoke from those wishing to censure the Government some view on our approach to the surplus on current account on the balance of payments and to the part which is played in it by the oil production and oil exports of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Leave it in the ground.

Mr. Powell: The hon. Member for Workington is helpful, and suggests that we leave it in the ground. I am not, however, prepared to accept that statement of Labour policy from him. I would rather have a policy statement about British oil from the Opposition Front Bench.

This subject has been too little debated in the House. Although he is not at present in his place, I align myself with the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) in asserting the almost self-evident proposition that for this country, of all countries, to be engaged in a sustained operation to make oil, one of the major sources of energy, dearer than it would otherwise be, must be nonsensical. Whatever else is good and stimulating for the economy of this country, to have the cheapest available sources of energy must come under that description.

I ask those who censure the Government for the inevitable fact that, within our overall current account surplus, there has been a manufacturing trade deficit, if it is their view that the price of oil should be brought down? Is it their view that we should not take part in OPEC's arrangements or in any of the cartelisations, but go for obtaining oil at the lowest possible price at which it pays to explore, exploit, extract and refine it? Is that their point of view? It is a subject on which they should have a point of view, because the issue is crucially bound up with the level of unemployment in Britain.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): North sea oil is expensive because of the investment required to obtain it. Must it not, therefore, be sold at a higher price so as to get a return?

Mr. Powell: One can rarely sell at a higher price than the market price. We are engaged in keeping the world price of oil, to which we tie the price charged for British oil, way above the profit-making price for our own oil. If our oil were unprofitable at anything below the OPEC price, I would understand, though not necessarily approve of, the policy; but what the hon. Gentleman says does not fit the existing situation.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does the right hon. Gentleman advocate the abolition of the role performed by the British National Oil Corporation in expending taxpayers' money on purchasing North sea oil at a ludicrously high price?

Mr. Powell: I am opposed to any use of public money for rigging prices. What is more, I deplore the fact that the Treasury has a vested interest in a high market price for oil. I would sooner see the price of oil, the price of energy and the price at which oil is sold in this country reduced and sacrifice the oil revenue, so that it would have to be made up in other ways to meet Government expenditure, than that we should keep that price at an artificial level, for that is a form of indirect taxation, which probably comes home to roost on our own industry and our own unemployed.

This is, therefore, a subject on which there should be a statement of views to the House from both Front Benches —certainly from those who censure the Government for their part in the present composition of the balance of payments.

Ms. Clare Short: Is it not a fact that throughout the 1960s the constraint on Britain's growth was the constraint of the balance of payments and that in the current situation we could afford to have more demand so as to reflate the economy, and not be constrained, for example, by the oil situation? That would be the way to create jobs and wealth in the economy.

Mr. Powell: I remember the period to which the hon. Lady refers. Throughout that period I used to say that we should not be constrained by the balance of payments. We were constrained by the balance of payments through our attempt to maintain a fixed parity—or, more accurately, an only occasionally altered parity — for the pound sterling. It was that which made us the slaves of the balance of payments. One of the early blessings — I hope that it will not altogether go away—of freeing the pound and allowing it to float freely is that we no longer had to read about crises in the balance of payments every morning at our breakfast tables. There is no inconsistency in the fact to which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) draws attention.

[Mr. Powell]

One proposition on oil has persistently been put forward by the official Opposition. They say, "We should have used the profits and revenue"—or rather, the revenue, for only that is within the Government's control—"from British oil to invest in Britain, but the Government have been spending it instead of investing it."

That sounds fine until one begins to examine it. Our revenues from oil have been part of the total revenues which almost, but not quite, met our total expenditure. If, therefore, it is the proposition of the Opposition that we should be using our oil revenues for investment — presumably Government-directed investment on public account—what are they really saying? They are saying that the total of public expenditure should be increased by the amount of that revenue and that, whether we hypothecate the oil revenues to it or not—hypothecated revenue is a silly game—or whether we simply continue to put the oil revenue in the Consolidated Fund, we should be spending that much more. It is mere spoof for them to say that because part of the revenue which the Government have currently spent — about which they did not complain — was derived from oil, the Government should somehow, by double counting, have been also spending that oil revenue on public investment.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), in an interesting speech which hon. Members were unlucky not to hear, made an important philosophical observation. He said that there is an asymmetry in Government, whereby Governments can do harm but cannot necessarily do good. Whether wittingly or not, he there placed his finger on the fallacy by which the Labour party is hag-ridden, the notion that because Governments have certain powers and can use them to make mistakes—to do harm, to inflict problems and troubles on their citizens—therefore they also have it in their power to do not just good generally but specific good. [*Interruption.*] I think I hear the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), if not others, reaffirming the credo.

I am saying that this Government have abstained, and they are still abstaining, from use of their power which would bring self-evident harm to this country — either by manipulating the exchange rate so that it no longer matches the real conditions in the world or by creating inflation and thus taxing without parliamentary authority.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: I am grateful to the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) for allowing me to correct one part of my speech. Essentially what the Government have done wrong is to pursue their monetarist policies. It is that interference which has been so damaging to our economy. I pointed out that the damage of that kind which can be done is much greater than any good the Government have done.

Mr. Powell: My difference with the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne—his experience and reflection upon these matters is very wide and deep—is that he takes it to be an interference for a Government to ensure that they finance their expenditure directly and honestly, not indirectly and dishonestly by means of inflation. That is monetarism as I understand monetarism. In holding to that principle the Government have done part, at least, of the good that is in their power, and have refrained from doing that harm which all previous Governments have done and which this Government were the first resolutely to reject. For that the Government would deserve support and not censure, even if the censure which is set out in the motion could be sustained in the terms in which it is expressed. My right hon. and hon. Friends will tonight be helping to defeat that motion of censure in the Lobby.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. The House will wish to know that the wind-up speeches are expected to begin at about 10 minutes past nine, so we have less than one hour. Many hon. Members still wish to speak, so I appeal again for short speeches.

8.11 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): One of the great ironies of this debate is that if, on top of a strong dollar and weak oil prices, we also had the uncontrolled public spending, inflation and debts that we suffered under the Labour Government, we would now be talking about a real crisis—not a $1 pound but a 50 cent pound. It is also odd that the Opposition can whinge about the weakness of the pound on the one hand and propound policies which would weaken it still further on the other.

One of the main causes of the weakness of the pound is the perception that we are still spending too much. Even now, if the value of sterling was truly to reflect our higher inflation rates since 1976, it should stand at only 96 cents. So the fall in the pound over the past few months has its roots in the hyper-inflation of the mid-1970s — something which oil has been able to camouflage until now. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who is not in the House, recognised that fact not so very long ago when he called for a 30 per cent. devaluation of the pound. Now he has got it, and the Labour party is still not satisfied.

Another common theme of the Opposition is that the Prime Minister has, single-handed, put 3·5 million people out of work. I am sure that hon. Members in all parties can agree that unemployment is the key problem facing us. But, does it really help to make out that it is a problem that has suddenly arisen over the last six years? The debate turns upon whether more or less Government spending is the answer to the problem, whether a moderately tight financial policy and tax cuts will have a greater impact, or whether yet more public spending will. I am not sure whether either policy would have much effect—at least in the short term—but to find the cure for the problem it may be a good idea to look for the real causes.

For too long as a nation we have relied on the cosy markets of the Empire and the Commonwealth to keep our factories running. High inflation has further eroded our competitiveness. Some of the unemployment we suffer from today is directly related to the profligate policies pursued by the Labour Government and, indeed, all Governments in the 1970s. We are also going through a stage when the effects of new technology are causing painful adjustments which might mean net job losses in the short term. Furthermore, we as a nation have a higher proportion of women in the work force than most industrial nations. In fact, in Britain 66 per cent. of people of working age are in employment, compared with 61 per cent. in Europe.

Yet another factor which is all too often overlooked by the Opposition in their zeal to pin the blame for unemployment upon the Government is the increase in the number of people of working age. In the past six years the number of people coming up to working age has risen by

800,000. At the same time, the number of people coming up to retirement has fallen by 400,000. That is a net gain of 1·2 million people looking for jobs over the past six years. That is why we have record numbers of people in jobs at the same time as record numbers of unemployed. Even the most bigoted, rabid Leftwinger would be pushed to blame the whole of the "baby boom" on the Prime Minister.

We also have a cultural problem in this country. Too many of our best minds spurn productive industry and go into service industries. The result is that we lead the world in a great many service areas, especially in the City, but we lack good management in much of our manufacturing. Anybody who thinks that we can survive just as a service-oriented society should look at the prosperity of Germany and Japan which is soundly based upon the messy business of making things.

The key problem—not the unions, though they must take their share of the blame—is poor management in some of our industries. Too many of our vital industries have simply failed to design, produce and deliver the goods that we want at home and that we can sell abroad. British Leyland, for example, now produces only half the number of vehicles that it produced in 1970. Meanwhile its work force has been halved, and for evey job lost directly three jobs have been lost among BL's suppliers. One reason why the Consett steelworks had to close was the it had to rely upon making steel plates for the motor industry.

In too many of our industries mediocre management has led to the export not of products but of jobs. All those factors cause unemployment, but they are largely outside the Government's control. However, I am not one of those who would argue that unemployment is all the fault of extraneous forces outside Government control. On the contrary. Of course the Government can affect and influence levels of unemployment. They can cause high inflation. They can borrow money which future generations have to pay back. They can create a climate which allows extreme trade unionism to succeed. They can burden employers with national insurance surcharges. In looking for the causes of unemployment, one must not forget the pernicious effects of Socialism which has tried to make a public enemy out of business enterprise and profit. All those things, and more, cause unemployment, as the Opposition know full well.

The answer to the problem is not more Government investment. Investment in industry is at record levels and efficient companies are able to raise more money than ever before. Nor is public enterprise the answer. There is a great lie in the Socialist claim that jobs can be created merely by shifting money used for unemployment benefit into job creation. They know that unemployment benefit costs only about £5,000 a person a year. But new jobs require not just wages but buildings, equipment and, above all, products that one can sell.

The cost of so-called job creation is nearly £50,000 a person. Even jobs building roads—not something that I recall the Labour party was very keen on in the 1960s—cost about £20,000 a person. The idea that by building bridges, roads and canals we can spend our way out of the problem in a kind of latter-day new deal is totally out of date. Construction no longer involves hordes of lowly paid navvies sweating over picks and shovels. It involves massive amounts of machinery, much of it imported.

Previous experience of Government enterprise is not encouraging. The simple fact is that bureaucrats and politicians cannot run companies better than good managers and business men. No amount of Government projects or new town halls will replace a healthy manufacturing sector. "But," no doubt say the Opposition, "what about America?" Is it not ironic that President Reagan, who is their whipping boy on everything else, is held up as a model of economic rectitude by the Labour party?

Apart from all the structural differences between the American economy and ours, even now, at the height of its deficit, it is still only a shade above ours at 3·1 per cent. of GDP, and its public spending is still only 37 per cent. of its GDP while ours is 47 per cent.

It is also conveniently forgotten that the United States has experienced a real reduction in wages and tax cuts. If there is a lesson to be learnt from America, it is exactly the opposite of that which some people are currently preaching.

Surely a better example for red-blooded Socialists is France. After all, a Socialist-Communist Government came to power in 1981, pledged to spend their way out of the recession. By 1983, inflation and unemployment had nearly doubled. The result was a spectacular U-turn and the imposition of policies which some have dubbed "Thatcherite."

Earlier this month the French Prime Minister, Mr. Fabius, told the press that tax cuts would take priority over more public spending in Left-wing Socialist France—straight from the Socialist horse's mouth. Therefore, it is clear that high public spending is not the answer to unemployment. Indeed, high public spending and joblessness have gone hand in hand for the past 15 years. The Leader of the Opposition knows that full well. He knows, as Mr. Mitterrand found out, that the realities of government are somewhat divergent from the insubstantial huff and puff of Opposition and speeches at Scargillite rallies. He knows that public spending does not create jobs. Otherwise, why did he not resign when the previous Labour Government cut public spending by more in a year than we have managed to do in six years?

It is no mistake that low-spending countries tend to have the lowest unemployment. Indeed, high spending is one of the real causes of a current world recession which is a major cause of job losses today.

I have the honour to represent a constituency which consists primarily of skilled industrial workers. I know that if they are to have jobs they must supply things which people want to buy. We have many successful firms which do just that. They do not do it because of Government spending. They succeed because they are well managed, because they design and make products people want to buy and because their work forces know that to strike would be to put a grin on the faces of our competitors in France, Germany and Japan.

I cannot see that more public spending will help those of my constituents who are in work or out of it. However, I can see that to raise tax thresholds might help them. I can see that to restore incentives and enterprise might help them. I can see that the spreading of wealth through denationalisation and the sale of council houses might help them. I can further see that a policy of putting more money in people's pockets but asking them to pay for what they consume will also help them.

[Mr. Phillip Oppenheim]

We cannot reverse 30 or 40 years of decline and profligacy in a few years. There are no easy, magic solutions. Admitting that does not mean that one cares any less about unemployment. It means that we are not prepared to mislead the public and dishonestly and falsely raise the hopes of the unemployed by offering a mirage.

Surely the greatest irony of the debate is that in censuring the Government the Opposition are putting forward policies that will greatly exacerbate the problem, as they have done in the past. The country which forgets its history is doomed to re-live it.

8.23 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) is a real hard-line Thatcherite, bashing his head against the brick wall of the real world. He should go far under this regime.

Earlier this week I had positive proof that the Tories were desperate about the fall in the value of the pound. I found one outside the Chamber; it had obviously been thrown away by a Conservative, disgruntled at its fall in value. I can assure whoever lost it that it will go to an excellent cause—the miners' strike.

The miners' strike is linked with the current crisis caused by the fall in the pound and the consequent rise in interest rates. The Government are now so dependent on oil because of their fight against the miners that any discord in the international oil market sends the pound into a spin and a frenzy.

But the miners' strike is linked not only to that short-term crisis but to a much longer-term economic crisis in Britain. That crisis is a personal one for millions of people and their families—the crisis of unemployment.

The official figure of today's record unemployment is 3,340,958, but the reality is a lot worse. That is over 13 per cent. of the population. One person in seven is out of work. That is the figure for my constituency of Leyton. It may be a bit higher. Earlier this week, before the rise in interest rates, a CBI survey said that it was likely that an additional 5,000 people would be added to the unemployment list each month from now on. That is the real crisis.

For the Prime Minister to put on her Saatchi and Saatchi sympathy voice and describe that unemployment as disappointing when it is her Government who have increased it threefold and for her Back-Bench minions to gloat about such statements in today's debate is worthy of censure alone.

The miners' strike has also exposed one of the central lies that the Tory party used at the general election—its monetarist lie. It used that to justify its policy to cut social services. We have all heard the lie that we cannot afford to spend on the public services, to repair and build homes for our people, to provide decent pensions and proper schools. But we have afforded the £5 billion-plus that has been wasted on the miners' strike which the Chancellor of the Exchequer described as a worthwhile investment.

We have afforded a lot more. We have spent billions on the fortress Falklands policy, and money is still being spent. We could afford tax cuts for the rich. Indeed, the Chancellor wants to give more in tax cuts rather than invest for jobs. We intend to afford about £11,500 million for the Trident missile programme as well as other nuclear weapons. Only this last week there have been reports of getting the neutron bomb for the Army. We can afford all that and we can afford to waste our North sea oil resources in a desperate and expensive burnout to try to beat the miners. We are wasting all that money to finance the ever-growing dole queues.

All that is supposed to be a worthwhile investment. It is only such if it is put in the context of the real aims of the Government's economic strategy—to enhance and maintain their economic and political power here and abroad to keep the few, the rich and the owners of industry, in a dominant position, and the vast majority firmly in our place.

That latter job is done in the main by reductions in living standards, by worsening real pay and working conditions for those in work and the pay of those who are reliant on pensions and other benefits. It is done by cuts in the social wage and in public services which benefit people. Housing has been cut in real terms by 70 per cent. by the Government since 1979 and, according to their White Paper, they are planning another 4 per cent. reduction on top of that.

Above all, the Government have used the fear of unemployment as an economic weapon; indeed, as their main economic tool. The Government have deliberately used mass unemployment as part of their strategy. They have written off millions of men and women, whether old, young or middle aged, in their bid for power and to support their vested class interests. That is not in the interests of the British people.

To make their strategy work, they have to break all resistance to it. At present the miners form that resistance, so it is their turn to experience the Government's vicious vendetta. From the start we have heard the lies that the Government have used. For example, they said that they were not intervening in the strike. The Prime Minister planned the confrontation and has been its main protagonist. She appointed Mr. MacGregor, and he is her puppet. Last week she stepped in to stop a settlement. The Government's role in that must be plain to everyone.

The miners' strike is about unemployment. That is what fuels the miners' resistance. They are struggling to stop pit closures, to keep their jobs and to keep jobs for future generations. At the beginning of the dispute, the National Union of Mineworkers spoke about a hit list, and that was ridiculed. But the Prime Minister acknowledged its existence on television only last week when she said that she was demanding a 12 per cent. reduction in the industry. Therefore, the NUM was right, despite that vilification.

There is no other work for miners when the pits close. That is why they fight for their jobs and the industry. The miners are fighting for jobs, but the Government are fighting to get rid of jobs. Although miners have faced hardship and vilification for 11 months, 140,000 of them are still on strike. They have a fantastic network of support in communities throughout the country, including London.

The Government have nothing to offer the miners except pit closures and grinding unemployment. The Government's only approach has been to starve them and their families back to work. The Government are playing the numbers game. No doubt we shall see more of that again next week. That sort of victory, if the Government achieve it, would be shabby and shoddy. As it will only add more people to the dole queues, it will not be a victory for the British people.

The miners can produce plenty of cheap safe fuel for Britain and for people, such as pensioners, who would benefit from it. Many pensioners are suffering and dying from hypothermia this winter. The miners can produce fuel to rebuild our industry and create more employment all round. We should use our natural resources for the British people, not waste them. We should invest in jobs. Until that is done, resentment of and resistance to Government policies will continue to grow.

8.33 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): The Government's policy during the past 11 months, as has been articulated plainly—at least, to my ears—has been that we should produce cheap coal. The argument between the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers is whether to have an energy policy that allows us to concentrate on cheap coal — that would benefit the people whom the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) identified — or to continue to produce coal more expensively than necessary.

We have had a wide-ranging debate this evening, and there have been many notable contributions. Two themes have run through the speeches. I shall deal with the first theme. With the notable exceptions of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Brown), it has been as though the world began in June 1979. It did not begin then.

Hours ago, I when I listened to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) describing in bleak but undoubtedly accurate terms the plight of unemployed steelworkers, I felt bound to contemplate the reaction of unemployed steelworkers in my constituency. Their once great steelworks was identified for closure under the Labour Government and the decision to announce the closure was made by that Labour Government. Although it was plain to the workers that the great Stewart and Lloyds steelworks in Corby would close, not the slightest effort was made to provide for them after the day of the closure, when 13,000 people were to lose their jobs. Although the hon. Gentleman talked about the changes that have occurred in the steel industry, in Sheffield it is preposterous for him to blame it, as he has done, on my right hon, and hon. Friends.

Last year saw the conjunction of two factual events in the United Kingdom, which had not previously occurred in my lifetime, nor in the lifetime of a growing number of hon. Members. All my life I have been told that as a nation we should aspire to high growth and low inflation in the conduct of our economic policy. That is now perfectly self-evident to me. Last year, for the first time, we had a growth rate slightly higher than the average of our major competitors, and an inflation rate slightly lower. We achieved that for the first time, albeit only by a narrow margin, but at least we are coming near to our targets.

I expected from the Leader of the Opposition a different line of approach. I expected him to say, "Congratulations. You are getting into the target area. You have made that progress for the first time. The only censure that we can pass on you is that we are not convinced that your plans and intentions for consolidating that progress are sufficiently serious." If that had been the Opposition's line of approach, at least there would have been a respectable argument.

I shall now deal with the second theme. Not one Opposition Member urged the growth of our competitiveness in the markets. All hon. Members can describe the effects of unemployment. However, when one analyses how it has come about, it is clear that during the 1960s and 1970s, for a combination of reasons, we lost our competitiveness in world markets. British Leyland did not lose its position in the world when the pound rose to $2·40 or $2·20. It was on the rack long before that happened.

One after the other our once great industries have been destroyed because our policies have not ensured that they remained competitive. It does not matter how much we spend or what laws we pass; unless we have competitive industries, there will be no jobs in the future. I would have expected from the official Opposition an indictment of the Government's policies on improving competitiveness, and to have heard their ideas for fulfilling that task. I heard not a word.

The general thrust of the Opposition's policies would lead to a further loss of competitiveness. Therefore, their policies are a recipe for disaster, not for the restoration of the economy.

Much has been said about demand, which has been increasing sharply. In 1983, cash demand increased by about £6 billion, but British industry was able to satisfy only £3 billion of that. The other £3 billion was satisfied by imports. If we are to compete in world markets and exclude those imports, we must either create a fortress Britain or beat the competition by making more reliable products at a better price than those made by our competitors. The brutal truth, if one takes the example of the motor car industry, is that many Opposition Members talk about the glories of that industry, but then go out and buy cars that are manufactured abroad. It is time that such nonsense was stopped.

As my right hon. Friends decide how to consolidate the priceless conjunction of events last year and to increase the foothold that we gained, they should concentrate on several factors. One of those—here I agree entirely with the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell)—is the price of energy and oil. The right hon. Gentleman said it far more clearly and eloquently than I could, but I must say that one of our primary national interests is to have the cheapest possible energy. Any policy that seeks a higher price for energy than we need to pay is positively insane. I commend to all hon. Members the right hon. Gentleman's analysis of energy prices. I hope, as he does, that it will become the subject of closer examination and debate. It is insane to try to prop up the price of oil when it would naturally fall. We have no interest in high oil prices.

I hope that my right hon. Friends will address two other matters as they develop their policies in the coming weeks and months. The first is the poverty trap. When I came to the House 18 months ago, I was the Conservative Member with the highest number of unemployed people in his constituency. Although the number has decreased, and will continue to do so, I still represent many thousands of unemployed people. It is noticeable that Britain has a system of tax thresholds and social insurance benefits which means that a family man must earn a substantial wage before he is better off in work than out of work. I have no doubt that hundreds of my constituents examine the equation whether it is worth their while to work when they are offered work.

[Mr. William Powell]

We can do many things, but the most important is to tackle income tax thresholds and national insurance contributions. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has talked about tax cuts in the context of raising thresholds. The Government have managed to raise thresholds during their period in office, but they have not done enough. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor would be the first to agree with that proposition. What my constituents want more than anything is an end to the system of income tax thresholds and social security benefits that makes it extremely unprofitable for them to work, unless they are to be paid a very large salary. It is an extremely serious problem. It is no good Opposition Members saying that the solution to poverty is substantially to increase social insurance benefits. That would only make the poverty trap worse—*[Interruption.]* I know that Opposition Members do not like what I am saying, but as I have to listen to them day after day, perhaps they would be courteous enough to listen to me.

Another matter on which my right hon. Friends should concentrate is that, during the years, the House has deliberately tried to increase the cost of employment. It has imposed taxes and laws that make it more expensive to employ people. If we had no unemployment that might be a sensible policy, but for years we have pursued policies that favour capital over labour, and we have made laws that price people out of jobs. If we are to reduce unemployment, we must have a bonfire with all those restrictions. The old Conservative slogan was, "Set the people free." There is no better way to set the people free than to loosen the bonds that make it difficult for employers to take on workers and that encourage them to move in the direction of capital investment. Last year's Budget was the first to take steps to redress that balance and to make it more sensible for people to employ labour than to employ capital unprofitably.

Although the great Corby steelworks is closed, steel tubes are still made there on two production lines. One was installed in the 1930s by Stewart and Lloyds, and the other — highly mechanised — was established in the mid-1970s, when money was available for investment in steel. It is still an extremely impressive sight. When I visited the plant I saw how well the new line worked. When I saw the old production line, it was obvious that many more men were working on it. I asked, "When will you install the new process here?" British Steel told me, "We will not do that because we cannot justify the investment. We would never get any return." In the 1970s, unprofitable and stupid capital investment was made at the expense of labour. That has been the story in many areas of the British economy. I urge my right hon. Friends to do everything possible to ensure that such nonsense and contradictions are finished for good.

8.49 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). He may have thought that we were not listening to him, but we were, with great interest. We are not obliged to agree with what he said, but I congratulate him on the way in which he put his speech over. He mentioned high growth and low inflation. We have neither high growth nor low inflation. The growth that we have is due entirely to the pull back in the United States economy as a result of borrowed money. As for low inflation, the inflation rate will rise shortly because of the increase in bank rate and in mortgages.

The hon. Member for Corby and I came into the House together after the election on 9 June 1983. He may have been in the House, as I was, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer spoke in the debate on the Queen's Speech in 1983. If I may borrow a phrase used by the Chancellor of the Exchequer then, I too was in at the birth. He was talking about the birth of the medium-term financial strategy mark I. I was in at the birth of the medium-term financial strategy mark II. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) defined the medium-term financial strategy mark I. It was aimed at bringing down the rate of inflation and creating conditions for a sustainable growth in output and employment. Throughout the debate Conservative Members have congratulated themselves on the reduction in the rate of inflation. Few have referred to sustainable growth; few have referred to output and few have referred to the strides which the Government should have made on employment.

I ally myself briefly with the remarks of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). The policies of the Chancellor are under attack. Many of us would have expected to see him in the Chamber for longer than he has been here. I am grateful for the fact that he is here now. I hope that he will listen with care and attention to what I have to say.

It was the Chancellor himself who proudly proclaimed that he had been the architect of the medium-term financial strategy; that he had laid the foundation stone and had poured the concrete. In the debate on the Queen's Speech, he described that strategy as a framework for sound financial policy. What he really meant — he was too modest to say so—was that he would continue wringing inflation out of the economy at the cost of jobs. On Teesside we are still feeling the effects. In the 10 days between 1 January and 10 January we lost 1,000 jobs.

The Chancellor emphasised a theme referred to by the hon. Member for Corby — competition. He said that there would be competition where none had existed before; that it would encourage the development of a more flexible and responsive economy; and that it would improve the working of the markets. As we know, the markets have been the Chancellor's lodestone. He has come back to them more and more often during the first parliamentary year of his Chancellorship. It would be for the markets to be impressed by the reduction in the growth of money supply and the public sector borrowing requirement. Both, of course, are deflationary. Both detract from growth. Even the definition of money supply itself would be altered to accommodate the Chancellor's vision of the future. He announced that he had extended the medium-term financial strategy to embrace narrow as well as broad monetarist aggregates.

The weaknesses of the Chancellor's strategy were apparent even during the debates. As Napoleon once said, a chain is as stong as its weakest link. Curiously, but disastrously, the exchange rate would have no role to play in the new medium-term financial strategy. Exchange rate policy was Keynesian and the Chancellor of the Exchequer wanted nothing to do with Keynes or Keynesians. At the time the Chancellor was not aware that in her handbag the Prime Minister carried the Keynesian White Paper of 1944

on employment. The White Paper called for a high and stable level of employment, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) pointed out earlier.

Those who live by the markets will fall by the markets, a fact which the Chancellor of the Exchequer has not grasped. Although he may wash his hands of the British economy, letting the markets take the strain, should they not share the Chancellor's confidence, and should they not believe in his policies, all this will rebound to his discredit. That is what we have seen over the last two or three weeks. We have seen what has happened when there is no policy on exchange rate. One unforeseen consequence of the Chancellor's failure to have an exchange rate policy is that the market has devised one for him—the pound is now oil-related and, therefore, subject to what is happening or not happening wherever OPEC Ministers happen to be.

The oil-related economy was mentioned by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) in an interesting speech. I sought in vain to intervene during that speech. He referred consistently to the fact that the Labour Government borrowed money in 1974-75 and that the Conservative Government in 1979 began to pay it back. As I tried to tell him before, all Governments in the Western world, faced with a fourfold increase in the price of oil, borrowed money to sustain the standard of living of their people. We based our policy on repaying that money as North sea oil came on stream. It was the Conservative Government who fulfilled the policy laid down by the Labour Government in 1974-75.

The other unforeseen consequence, which has been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), is that if there is no policy for the exchange rate the market will create one. It created a second strand—that the exchange rate should be one dollar to the pound. Therefore, it will depress sterling still further. The Chancellor's knowledge of the market is abysmal. Everyone knows that the value of anything on the market is the price arrived at between a buyer and a seller acting independently. Therefore, in a free and open market —we can go back to Adam Smith on this—that is the value of that article.

It is useless for the Prime Minister to say to the nation on "Woman's Hour", in her best dulcet tones, that the pound is undervalued, or for the Chancellor to say that the markets are distorted. The right hon. Gentleman's failure to understand the markets and his blind faith in them is an abdication of responsibility. The way that he has washed his hands of responsibility and his monumental ignorance would make even Pontius Pilate blush.

The Prime Minister referred to those who had been able to buy their own council houses. She did not refer to those who, because of the hike in the mortgage rate, find that they are not able to pay for those houses. She did not refer to the people on council estates in Middlesbrough whose dwellings are not being improved because of the lack of improvement grants, or to the people desperately in need who will be deprived of housing because of Government cutbacks. Those people will not appreciate the Prime Minister's comments.

As I said earlier, 1,000 jobs have been lost on Teesside since the beginning of the year. What do we tell a small business man who has set up on borrowed money under the Tory Government and who now cannot pay back the interest, let alone the capital? Does he draw any comfort from the fact that General Electric is cash rich and is profiting from high interest rates? What about the importers who see the cost of their imports rising, not because there is an increase in the value of the merchandise but because the financial market has been allowed to run rampant because the Chancellor has said that there is no exchange policy? The Government have consistently turned their back on joining the European monetary system. We hear hints that possibly when conditions are right we shall be moving into it. Why are the Government reluctant to use the concerted intervention agreed with the other leading industrial nations in Washington last week? Perhaps the Chancellor will answer that.

Why should the British people, six years into a Thatcher Government, have their living standards cut? Why should their job prospects be diminished? Why should they feel the evil hand of insecurity stretching towards them? Why should they have to fret and worry about a future for their children?

The Chancellor has turned his back on the British people. His fixation with monetary targets and public spending restrictions, and his desire to reduce inflation at the expense of unemployment, has not worked—even by his standards. The high value of the dollar feeds inflation into the system, as do high interest rates. The consequence is that inflation cannot be kept down and unemployment will rise still further. The Chancellor's own policies, by his own standards, have failed. The markets have not let the Chancellor down. Neither OPEC nor the City of London has let the Chancellor down, rather it is his failure to annunciate a proper policy.

John Bunyan wrote "The Pilgrim's Progress." I looked that up, but I was thinking of "The Rake's Progress". In this instance, the rake is the Chancellor of the Exchequer. His policy has raked the progress of these islands. It has left behind it unemployment, insecurity, lower living standards, poorer health care and tougher social security regulations, and those who are in work have to work longer hours for less money. Union rights have been degraded and diluted. Civil liberties and civil rights have been eroded. That is all happening because of the rake and his progress.

I tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Government that this nation will be a better nation when the rake's progress is over, when he is no longer at No. 11, when his Government are no longer in power and when they are consigned to the oblivion which they all so richly deserve.

9.1 pm

Mr. Michael Knowles (Nottingham, East): Many hon. Members have predicted that we shall never have full employment again. I do not believe that. Vast structural changes in society are taking place, but historically whenever there are changes in technology we have full employment again. That has happened before, and that is what is happening now.

The difficulty is that the attitudes of the old society are carried through to the new society. In Britain's industrial society the attitudes of the agricultural society did untold damage. That was true of all parts of that society. If I had more time, I could cite many instances. Perhaps the new shape of our society will mean a service rather than an industrial economy, but it will still provide jobs for all our people.

We must cut the size of government. I do not believe that we should keep it the same size; we should govern more efficiently. We need to cut down. I recommend the

[Mr. Michael Knowles]

Chancellor to consider zero-based budgeting so that we do not just take last year's programmes and estimates and top up. Officials love that. We must examine the programme and ask whether we really need it. It is not a case of saying "That would be nice." We must ask "Do we really need it? If we do not, it has to go." That is the only way to get enough manoeuvring room to cut taxes.

Many hon. Members have spoken of the evils of unemployment. If one has not suffered the sheer terror for oneself and one's family one cannot really know what it means. Unemployment is terrifying. I suppose that I am not the only hon. Member who has suffered unemployment. It is not something that I shall forget. People say that there is a trade-off between employment and inflation. Unemployment affects an individual and his family. It is terrifying for them. Inflation erodes the moral basis of society because it is nothing more than the state stealing money from people's pockets.

An inflation rate of 27 per cent. was indefensible. So is 5 per cent. inflation. I shall not be satisfied until we bring it down to zero. Nothing else is acceptable because inflation undermines the fabric of society. That is the difference between unemployment and inflation. That must be made crystal clear. The Government's aim must be to destroy inflation and to squeeze it out of our economy and our country once and for all.

9.4 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): When we have the highest real interest rates since the 1930s, the highest rate of unemployment since the 1930s, a trade balance of only £200 million and all the North sea oil is being exported, it is simply not good enough for the Prime Minister to seek to persuade us and the country that the Government do not deserve censure. The record levels of real interest rates will cause a further rise in unemployment on top of an already unacceptably high level. The official figure is given as just over 3 million, but we know that with the 500,000 who are on special employment schemes and those who have been taken off the employment register by the Government's measures, the unemployment figure is 4 million. Hon. Members who represent constituencies in the north-east, the north-west and other regions of the country know that that means that half the residents in street after street are unemployed, with a level of unemployment at 50 or 60 per cent. in many wards.

It is not good enough for the Prime Minister to seek to give a gloss that there is nothing wrong and that the Government's strategy is working. The Government have been in office for five years. When will we see an end to the present high levels of unemployment? They have been reached because the Government have been pursuing a restrictive fiscal policy and a restrictive monetary policy. The Government have been screwing down the economy so hard that it has not been able to expand in the way that other economies in the western world have expanded. If the Prime Minister and her colleagues would only examine the way in which our competitors in the world have been behaving in the last few years, they would see the key to the success which those competitors have achieved.

I agree very much with the Conservative Member who said that the failure of the Government has been their lack of competitiveness against industries overseas. The Government have done nothing to increase the competitiveness of British industry through their fiscal and monetary policies. I acknowledge that they have done something to make British industries face the realities of life, and I support what they have done in that regard. However, the Government have not provided the economic background against which industry can thrive and compete with our major competitors in Germany and Japan.

We want from the Government a rethink of the economic strategy that they have been pursuing. We want to see the Government pursuing a much less restrictive policy than hitherto so that expansion can get under way. We want to see our industries becoming more competitive and growth taking place at a faster rate than in the past in order to bring down unemployment.

If the Chancellor had not been so hung up on the monetary and borrowing targets that he set himself, the latest crisis which has given rise to the censure motion might never have occurred.

The Government have adopted an ambiguous attitude towards the exchange rate, the oil price and the oil depletion of the country, and they know that pay rates in the private sector are rising to a level that will make industries less competitive and our economy more vulnerable. The Chancellor has no policy on these matters. All he can do is offer exhortations to industry that rates of pay should come down.

We have made clear our belief that, if the Chancellor were to relax his borrowing strategy and his monetary strategy, it would be possible to start some growth in the economy so long as he maintains a right monetary policy to avoid inflation taking off again. If pay continues to increase in the private sector at current levels, the Chancellor and his Government will have to be prepared to act unless unemployment is to continue increasing. It is no good having an ambiguous exchange rate policy and an ambiguous policy on oil and on pay. That is a recipe for disaster.

I hope that the censure motion and the support expressed for it will give rise to some second thoughts by the Government on the policies that they have been pursuing for the last five years. Unless the Government have second thoughts, there is no hope of our reducing the 4 million figure over the next two or three years, and not only the Government but the whole country will rue the consequences.

9.9 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The conduct of Tory Back Benchers at the beginning of the debate did more to rehabilitate the reputation of football hooligans than anything that has happened for a long time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they now?"] The football analogy is exact. Having realised from today's shameful unemployment figures that they had an impossible position to defend, they decided to disrupt the proceedings.

Nothing, however, can change the facts. Unemployment stands at the highest level in our history. Shamefully, all that the Prime Minister had to say about that was, "Don't blame me." That was not always her view of prime ministerial responsibility. Before she became Prime Minister she believed that Prime Ministers had the power to act and ought to do so. In April 1979 she said in Birmingham:

"There is nothing inevitable about rising unemployment".

I did not hear her express that sentiment today. A month later, in Bolton, she added a stricture which everyone who heard her today will applaud. She said:

"The Government likes to blame every ill and error on world trends in the face of which they are powerless."

Yet that was exactly her own claim today.

The Prime Minister was absolutely right when she said that she had never predicted that unemployment would fall. The Chancellor, however, has continually and consistently done so, in the general election campaign and most recently in Leicester at the end of last year. The Prime Minister did not repudiate her right hon. Friend at that time, and she simply hides behind his bogus forecasts now.

The Prime Minister's amendment asks the House to support what it describes as the Government's

"firm action to maintain the sound financial conditions and medium-term strategy".

That is as near as it comes to mentioning the collapse of sterling, the consequent rise in interest rates to the highest level in our history, unemployment, which——

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon) *rose——*

Mr. Hattersley: Having sacrificed a little of what is normally Opposition time, I am prepared to give way to some extent, but not in the middle of a sentence.

I was about to remind the House that, on the Government's own doctored figures, unemployment now stands at 3,341,000. If the figure had been calculated on the honest basis that was current until the Government decided to massage the statistics, it would now be 3,728,000.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The right hon. Gentleman seeks to lay the blame for the present high unemployment at the door of the Government, implying that the Labour party has policies which would dramatically reduce unemployment. Will he be good enough to tell the House with precision what those policies are? If the Labour party has no credible policies, or indeed no policies at all, in seeking to make a debating point the right hon. Gentleman is practising a cruel deception on the unemployed.

Mr. Hattersley: That is the last gross abuse of an intervention to which I shall give way, but I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's question directly. To start with, we would spend the £1·5 billion which the Chancellor proposes to give away in tax cuts on direct job creation by investment in the infrastructure. Not only would the Labour party do that. Half the Tories below the Gangway would do the same, and I am delighted to see some of them nodding assent.

I return to the Prime Minister's amendment, which refers to "firm action". I hope that the Chancellor will tell us to what "firm action" the amendment refers. For instance, was it the "firm action" characterised by the two weeks of indecision before 11 January? Was it the firm briefing given by the Treasury on 12 January saying that the Government would not intervene? Was it the firm briefing given by No. 10 Downing street saying that the Government would not intervene? Was it the firm way in which the Chancellor intervened to increase interest rates in three nervous instalments, two of which did not work? Perhaps "firm action" is even the firm way in which the Chancellor persists in confusing the markets about his impressions and therefore undermining confidence.

So that the right hon. Gentleman may at last remedy that error, I ask him again: will he concede that the policy of the free float of sterling has now been abandoned? We all know that that policy has been abandoned and that it will be in the interests of sterling stability for the Chancellor to say so, but he will not acknowledge that change in policy, because what is good for the economy requires a formal denial of Tory dogma. It requires the right hon. Gentleman to say in public that the whole free market philosophy has failed. The Government now intervene to determine the exchange rate and now manage domestic interest rates, invariably upwards—upwards on 11 January, 13 January and on 28 January to the highest level of real interest in this country's history.

I concede at once something which the Prime Minister certainly never conceded when she was in opposition—that uncertainty about oil prices and the frenetic behaviour of the markets puts great pressure on our economy. However, it is the Government's proclaimed policy to allow those frenetic markets, and those markets alone, to determine sterling's value. The Government cannot convincingly bleat about the behaviour of the market's irresponsibility, while insisting that the exchange rate should be determined by those irrational markets, and those irrational markets alone, especially when the Government have added to the uncertainty, first, by refusing to confirm that there is any exchange rate for which they will stand and fight, and, secondly, by encouraging the markets to believe that the Government positively welcome depreciation because the increased size of the fiscal adjustment that depreciation brings about will provide more room for the tax cuts which are politically so necessary to the Government and their supporters.

The self-inflicted wounds of the last month are wholly characteristic of the Chancellor's economic performance. For the past three weeks he has been running about like Corporal Jones in "Dad's Army", hysterically crying, "Don't panic, don't panic. There is nothing to worry about." The right hon. Gentleman has behaved like that throughout his stewardship.

In the medium-term financial strategy, this Chancellor and his predecessor set the Government targets which the Government have constantly failed to achieve. The money supply consistently exceeds the Chancellor's intention. Public expenditure has been off course for four of the last five years, and it is now higher than when the Conservative party came to office. In fact, the Chancellor constructs his own hurdles, trips over them, falls flat on his face and then complains bitterly when international opinion notices what happens. Having made those blunders,

"Their favourite . . . excuse is that their appalling record is all due to the oil crisis and the world-wide economic depression."

I have taken those words from the 1979 Conservative manifesto.

Let us look at the Government's appalling record as described in our motion. We have the highest level of unemployment and the highest level of interest rates in British history and the worst deficit in manufacturing trade since the industrial revolution. We could have added to our motion

"the highest level of taxation and the highest level of company liquidations in British history."

The Government's answer to those charges comes in three humiliating parts — first, it is not their fault; secondly, some things have gone well; and, thirdly, it will all come right in the end. Let us look at each of those excuses. Let us examine what has gone right as listed in

[Mr. Hattersley]

the amendment, starting with "record output". That means that output is now rather higher than it was in 1979. Every Government since the war have increased output, except, that is, the first Thatcher Administration. In the past five years output has increased by 3 per cent. In the Labour Government's last five years it went up by 8 per cent. No doubt the Chancellor will tell us that the mining dispute is part of the reason for the current year's poor output. I think this part is right. That is why the Prime Minister should be assisting a solution to that dispute, rather than prolonging it for political reasons.

Secondly, the Government talk about record investment. That is true, but only if they talk about gross investment, rather then net investment. Net investment has been lower in every year of Conservative government than it was in any year of the previous Labour Government. In machinery, construction and transport — job-creating sectors—investment is now negative. Such selective use of statistics hardly strengthens the Prime Minister's case, nor does the Prime Minister's pathetic insistence that she deserves credit for reduced inflation but none of the blame for rising unemployment. Honest people know that the two trends cannot be separated.

The Government's inflation record is the statistical success that the Prime Minister describes, but prices have been held down by depressing the economy, by the intentional creation of unemployment, by the abandonment of regional aid, by the assault on local authority spending, by the destruction of the public sector building programme, by first allowing exchange rates to rise absurdly to a point where they prejudiced exports and then allowing them to collapse to the point where it was necessary to impose a massive increase in interest rates to prevent a major sterling crisis.

Over the past five and a half years, whenever the Government have had to make a choice between the real economy of work and jobs and the theoretical world of the medium-term financial strategy, they have always chosen theory in preference to the needs of the real economy.

The Government have justified their choice, as the Chancellor did yesterday, by insisting that the policies which have increased unemployment by over 2 million will soon begin to bring unemployment down. I therefore ask the Chancellor a simple question: when will that begin to happen? When will his certainty that the pursuit of the magic numbers enshrined in the medium-term financial strategy begin to produce the result that he has promised? How, as that strategy has gone so wrong for so long, can he have the effrontery to ask the people of this country to believe that one day all the indications will change, all the auguries will be different and all the results will be as he pretends?

There are people in this country who are not prepared to wait for as long as the Chancellor demands. It is convenient and comfortable for him at lunch or dinner in London to say that soon, as long as we are patient, unemployment levels will decline, but for the men and women in the north of my constituency, where adult unemployment is now running at more than 50 per cent., it is not such a conveniently comforting assurance, when we do not know when and do not believe that, the promises will be kept. The assurance is not comforting, in particular because we know that there is an alternative, in terms of unemployment. That alternative involves two things. It involves, first, what the Prime Minister used to deride as bogus jobs, but now euphemistically calls the measures —the conscious, considerate and continuous attempt by the Government—to provide direct forms of employment.

Secondly, it involves the Government using what money is at their disposal for investment in projects which are desirable in themselves and will directly create jobs.

When we debated the topic some weeks ago, the Chancellor said that his criticisms of a call for more public investment were based on the insistence that public investment must in itself be worth while. I believe that it is worth while to end homelessness, to end overcrowding and to rebuild slums. I believe that it is worth while to improve the decaying roads of our great cities and to renew the sewers which are literally collapsing under those cities. I believe that it is worth while, as well as investing in those great capital projects, to employ extra men and women in our social services to provide those aspects of life which make ours a civilised, compassionate and decent society. As well as being worth while in terms of social objectives, such expenditure would have the net result of creating jobs.

The Chancellor still has to defend his stubborn persistence in saying that what money is available will be spent not on job creation but on the reduction of direct taxation. I share the view that there are people at the bottom of the income scale who should pay no tax at all. If he wanted to, the Chancellor could find the money to help them by a simple process of fiscal redistribution.

What has happened during the right hon. Gentleman's chancellorship and that of his predecessor? The major tax benefits have been given to the families living on £18,000 a year or more. I tell the Chancellor, and all those who want hope for the prospects for employment, that even within the parameters of his policy he could spend £1·5 billion on job creation and, via a little redistribution—offensive to the right hon. Gentleman philosophically, but right for the nation as a whole—take the members of the lower income groups out of tax.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Will the right hon. Gentleman be less coy this evening and tell us what he meant when he referred on 15 January, when we last debated unemployment, to the need for "a massive boost in demand".—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1985; Vol. 71, c. 204.]
Can the right hon. Gentleman give us some figures?

Mr. Hattersley: I did so at the time, but I will gladly do it again. I began by making a crucial moral point. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] There are 3,700,000 unemployed men and women who may consider that morality is involved in the situation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The moral point is that, according to the Chancellor's parameters as they were before the latest crisis, there was £1·5 billion to be disposed of. I said that I would prefer to use that money to increase the number of jobs rather than to reduce taxation.

I went further. The Chancellor was proposing to reduce the PSBR by £1·5 billion. I said that since our public borrowing was on a smaller scale than that of many of our successful competitors, I did not believe that making that cut—the Chancellor's choice—would be as likely to do the right thing by the economy as would using the money for the other puposes that I have described. I could not have been much more specific.

I believe that the specific question that I have asked the Chancellor — and which I shall continue to ask him between now and the next general election—will not be answered either in general or in specific terms. When are the right hon. Gentleman's policies for reducing unemployment likely to show any result? That is my question. We all know that he will not answer it because he cannot, for the simple reason that the Government propose to fight the next election with unemployment standing at or about 3 million. The new policy on unemployment is to wring hands, counterfeit concern and say that it is not the Prime Minister's fault.

I do not ask the Prime Minister to care about the hardship and suffering that the Government have caused. To do that would be to expect her to act entirely out of character. However, I ask her to accept the economic consequences of the level of unemployment which, in truth, is nearer 4 million than 3 million. I ask her to concentrate especially on one of the consequences—the dissipation of the oil revenues.

Last year, the Government's receipts from oil were about £10 billion. Without them, Britain would have been literally bankrupt. The Chancellor will speculate, as will the House, on what would have happened to the public sector borrowing requirement without the boon and uncovenanted benefit of oil. The House will consider what would have happened to the Chancellor's entire public spending programme had there not been oil revenues on which to rely. I hope he will remember that the cost of unemployment, in benefits paid and tax forgone, was somewhere between £15 billion and £17 billion last year. The whole North sea oil bonus is not so much swallowed up by the cost of unemployment as swallowed up by the cost of the extra unemployment that has been created since the right hon. Lady became Prime Minister.

If the Chancellor responds in his normal fashion——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: Certainly not. The hon. Gentleman has been notably absent, apart from the shouting parts of our debate, and I do not propose to give way to him. I propose instead to ask the Chancellor to answer two specific questions. First, why does he persistently choose to use North sea oil revenue to pay the cost of unemployment rather than to create the new jobs that would reduce unemployment? Secondly, why is he so surprised, indeed affronted and offended, when he discovers that the international markets regard Great Britain as a one-commodity economy? He was not in his place when two of his hon. Friends said that that judgment was justified and went on, quite rightly, to explain that the significance of oil revenues is not their size as a proportion of national income but our total dependence on them for survival.

Instead of being used to create a buoyant manufacturing industry, the oil revenues have been used as an alternative to manufacturing industry and to compensate for the destruction of that industry which has been planned by the Government.

Mr. Marlowe: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I think that the hon. Gentleman understands words of one syllable. No.

Under the Conservative Government, by an extraordinary paradox, instead of making us more prosperous, oil revenues have made us more vulnerable. They have made us more vulnerable because the Government have persisted in using them for the wrong things rather than to expand, increase and improve our manufacturing base. Until the Government go, the vulnerability will remain. It will be reflected time after time in the periodic crises such as we endured last autumn and which we have endured again this month. It will result, while the Chancellor remains in office, in panic reaction. Above all, it will result in a panic reaction that requires the Chancellor to take all of the alternatives that conform to his view about monetary aggregates, the public sector borrowing requirement and the demands of the medium-term financial strategy and therefore woefully, cynically and intentionally to neglect and deny the interests of the unemployed. That is why we censure him and the Government tonight.

9.35 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): The debate was opened by the Leader of the Opposition with a speech—the only one of its type that I had ever heard from a Leader of the Opposition—which began with a rambling introduction and went straight into an inconsequential peroration with nothing in between. *[Interruption.]*

The right hon. Gentleman commented on recent events. He spoke of speculation in the foreign exchange markets and said that it had been exactly the same with the privatisation of British Telecom. He was saying that the 2 million people—2 million of our fellow countrymen, the vast majority of them small shareholders—who had bought British Telecom shares were speculators.

Mr. Kinnock: The Government are selling the country out.

Mr. Lawson: The only people who are selling the country out are the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends. *[Interruption.]*

In the British Telecom share privatisation small shareholders were given a choice between vouchers for reductions on their telephone bills or a discount, in effect, if they were prepared to hold the shares for three years, and two thirds of them chose the discount and to hold the shares for three years, yet the Leader of the Opposition calls those people speculators. He does not have the first idea—*[Interrruption.]*

The development of share ownership in Britain by the people of the nation has been one of the most important political and social developments for a long time, building on our success in the encouragement of home ownership through the sale of council houses.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): The right hon. Gentleman has been talking about privatisation and members of the public buying shares. What is his answer to the now well known fact that with the exception of British Telecom, in all other privatisation measures, 86 per cent. of the people buying shares sold them within four weeks of purchase—

Mr. Lawson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Ewing: It is no good the right hon. Gentleman shaking his head in dissent. In the case of British Telecom, 40 per cent. of those buying shares sold them in the first week they held them.

Mr. Lawson: To regard the 2 million people who bought shares in British Telecom as an exception must be considered a most strange kind of exception. The hon. Gentleman's figures are wrong and the vast majority of employees in those companies bought and hold the shares.

The link between speculators and British Telecom is clear, at least in the mind of the Leader of the Opposition, because he said that the speculation that had taken place and the turmoil in the foreign exchange markets was all the fault of Mr. Alexander Graham Bell and the invention of the telephone. *[Interruption.]* That is what the right hon. Gentleman said and he said that the Government had to do something — presumably cut all the telephone wires. [HON. MEMBERS: "Get on".] The Government indeed had to do something, and they did. They acted, raised interest rates, and the market has turned. The right hon. Gentleman and Labour Members are squirming .

The Leader of the Opposition said that if the Labour Members were to come to office, they would reimpose exchange control. *[Interruption.]* That is what the right hon. Gentleman said and I think I see him nodding in assent. Obviously he has not read what the deputy leader of the Labour party said in *The Sunday Times* on 13 January. Putting forward his own bizarre programme for confiscating the assets of pension funds—which belong to millions of pensioners—the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said:

"Re-introducing the system amounts to starting again from scratch and is literally impossible."

So perhaps the two right hon. Members, one of them advocating the reintroduction of exchange controls, the other saying that it is literally impossible, ought to get together.

Mr. Hattersley: Even for the Chancellor that is a most corrupt distortion. *[Interruption.]* If he were to read the introduction and give an honest interpretation of it to the House he would acknowledge that what I am clearly saying is that exchange control is necessary and essential and that has to be introduced in a new form.

Mr. Lawson: The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said:

"Continuing existing exchange controls is a simple enough operation. Re-introducing the system"—

that is what is at issue here—

"amounts to starting again from scratch and is literally impossible".

Since the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition had no alternative policy whatever to put forward he suggested that we might follow the advice of the Earl of Stockton, who in turn had suggested that we might follow the advice of the United States. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman does not know what is the policy of the United States. Therefore I shall inform him. The policy of the United States — *[Interruption.]* the right hon. Gentleman will say whether this is what he is advocating — is strict monetary control. They are the most monetarist Government in the western world today because they are the only Government who believe that monetary control will do it all without worrying about the fiscal deficit. The United States is cutting public expenditure and taxation, and it has no Socialist party whatever. That is the policy of the United States and that is the policy the right hon. Gentleman is telling us that we should emulate. There is something in what the right hon. Gentleman says on this occasion.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook who wound up for the Opposition referred to unemployment — as did many hon. Members in all parties

"What comes first? Economic efficiency or social efficiency? This matter has been debated untold times but, believe me, without economic efficiency there cannot be social efficiency. The only way to overcome the unemployment problem is by making firms more efficient. It is simply not possible to reconstruct a company without shedding some labour. If anyone knows of an alternative way to do this, let him say so, because there is no alternative."

The Opposition do not like that, but those are not my words. They are the words of Mr. Gonzalez, the Socialist Prime Minister of Spain in a major economic speech that he made last year. Such matters are well understood by every Government in the western world, whether they be Socialist, Conservative or Liberal. This was borne out very clearly at the meeting of the G5 which I attended in Washington, and the Socialist Finance Minister and Government of France endorse the policy that the only cure for unemployment is to improve the structure of the economy, remove the rigidities and make the labour market and other markets work better. Every single Government who are in office today in the western world acknowledge that fact. The expansion of demand that is suggested by the Opposition would be fatal.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about the destruction of manufacturing industry. In fact, he went on about the destruction of manufacturing industry. That is grossly to underestimate and run down the achievement of manufacturing industry in a difficult world climate and in the wake of the worst world recession since the 1930s.

Manufacturing output has been growing steadily since the end of 1982 and the latest CBI survey says that that is likely to continue. Manufacturing investment has risen sharply in the past year. It is 15 per cent. up on the previous year. Again, the CBI expects that to continue. Manufacturing exports are up by more than 11 per cent. compared with a year earlier and there was a 40 per cent. increase in the export of manufactures to the United States in the first nine months of 1984 compared to the first nine months of 1983. Manufacturing productivity is up by 26 per cent. over the past four years. It is time that the Opposition acknowledged those achievements.

In contrast to those contributions we have had some excellent speeches from several of my hon. Friends. My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), in an outstanding contribution, referred in particular to the possibility of our joining the European monetary system. Indeed, that has been referred to in a number of other speeches. Of course, that is kept continually under review, as I have told the House on previous occasions.

A number of hon. Members believe — I am not talking about the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) who seems to think that the United States is a member of the European monetary system— that if we were to be within the European monetary system we would be able to get our hands on the reserves of other members of that system. The system does not work in quite that way. There is something called—this must be what is being referred to because it is the only part of the system that is relevant to this — the very short-term financing facility. That enables a country to borrow

reserves from another member, provided that it is repaid within three months at the most. What is more, it is permissible to use that facility only if the country is having to use reserves right against the margin. The countries within the EMS have discovered that it is fatal to be right up against the margin because speculators have a one-way option. Therefore, all the intervention in the EMS is what is called intramarginal investment where no very short-term financing facility is available. I hope that that clarifies the matter for the leader of the Social Democratic party——

Mr. Steel *rose——*

Mr. Lawson: —and for the leader of the Liberal party.

Mr. Steel: May we take it, then, that the Chancellor is disagreeing with the statement of the Governor of the Bank of England yesterday that it would have helped if we had been inside the system?

Mr. Lawson: That is a gross travesty of what the Governor of the Bank of England said. The right hon. Gentleman should read the full text.

My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) referred to the importance of small businesses. He is right. Indeed, the record has been encouraging. Over the last four years for which we have figures, 1980 to 1983 inclusive, the number of new businesses started in Britain exceeded the number of liquidations — net new businesses—by over 500 a week, every week of the year, every one of those years. Indeed, the trend has been rising in every region of the United Kingdom, and in 1984 the total number of new business registrations reached an all-time record of over 100,000.

My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) also made an excellent contribution and spoke more good sense about the causes and cures of unemployment than all the Members on the Opposition Benches put together.

It is incredible that the Opposition should have chosen to put down a motion of censure on the Government's handling of the economy based on a rise in interest rates this week. I agree there with the remarks of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). I apologise to him for the fact that I was unable to be in my place when he addressed the House.

The economy today displays a range of symptoms of good health which the Labour party could not have dreamt about when it was in office. It must be something of a record to have a motion of censure on the conduct of the economy when the share index is within 4 per cent. of its all-time high. I doubt whether that has ever happened before.

Inflation is low and has been around the 5 per cent. mark for most of the past two years. Despite the temporary increase in interest rates last July, inflation at the end of the year stood at much the level that I predicted in the Budget. Growth has been continuing at 3 per cent. a year. The recent increase in interest rates will not knock that growth on the head, any more than the increase in July did, and any more than the interest rate increases in the United States knocked American growth on the head.

Profitability in British business has made a remarkable recovery. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about the CBI?"] The CBI estimates that for companies operating outside the North sea, real pre-tax returns were 7·5 per cent. in 1984, which was the highest for many years. The CBI forecasts 9 per cent. for this year, which, if it is attained, will be the highest since the 1960s. Output is at an all-time high and rising, as are investment and exports. The living standards of those in work are also at an all-time high and rising. Employment is rising. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) accused Conservative Members of behaving like football hooligans. I hope that his Back Benchers will take his good advice.

Mr. Lawson: The Opposition are keen on adopting a high moral tone. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, who wrote in *Punch* the other day about his meeting with Miss Samantha Fox, said that we should adopt a moral approach.

The record on employment of the Labour Government was scarcely something to boast about. The number of people out of work doubled while they were in office. I do not blame them for that and I never have done. They did not wish it. To determine the level of unemployment is more than any Government can do. However, if the solutions were as easy as they pretend they are, would they not have tried them and succeeded then? Why did they not try them?

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North West) *rose——*

Mr. Lawson: If the answer to unemployment is more Government spending and borrowing, would not the numbers out of work have fallen when the Labour party was in office? When the Labour Government pushed up the PSBR to one tenth of national output and Government spending to a share of GDP higher than it had ever been before or has been since, that did not create jobs; it destroyed them.

Mr. Robinson *rose——*

Mr. Lawson: As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) pointed out in an extremely good contribution, where was the morality in allowing inflation to rise to 26 per cent.? The rate of inflation, unlike the rate of unemployment, is a matter largely determined by Governments. The Labour Government's acceptance of high inflation brought misery to the many millions of elderly people who live on their savings. In a few brief years they destroyed the value of money which had been carefully put aside during a lifetime.

The motion complains about the high level of real interest rates. Obviously, the level fluctuates, but during the lifetime of the Government it has been 5 per cent. It was much less under the Labour Government. The level of real interest rates during the Labour Government's lifetime was minus 5 per cent. That was not because interest rates nominally were low, but because inflation was high. That high inflation robbed every saver in the country. We shall not reproduce that. They cheated savers, the elderly and pensioners. Those who paid the price in anguish and in humiliation were the defenceless in our society. The only ones who kept ahead were the members of the more powerful unions—the paymasters of the Labour party.

Mr. Hattersley: The Chancellor has six minutes left. Will he not answer questions about the prospects for unemployment and his plans to reduce it?

Mr. Lawson: I have said many times that the policies that we are pursuing are the best prospects to reduce unemployment. It is a problem throughout the western world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern) referred to my autumn statement. In it, I followed the convention that was established by my predecessor of announcing what leeway I then foresaw, on some purely conventional assumptions, for altering the burden of taxation in the Budget. That convention arose following pressure from the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee which wished to examine the building blocks available to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in framing the following year's Budget. My predecessor adopted that practice because it was the wish of the House. My hon. Friend was right to say, in his excellent speech, that the convention has some drawbacks and inconveniences. The announcement of the fiscal adjustment either depresses or arouses expectations out of all proportion to what it merits, and the leeway that a Chancellor may believe he has in the autumn is a poor indicator of what he will have in the spring. It certainly does not commit him to a course of action, since that must be a matter for judgment at the appropriate time.

In November's autumn statement I said that, as matters then appeared, I should be in a position to lower the burden of taxation in the Budget. It is still too early for me to judge whether I shall be able to do so. But to put the matter beyond doubt, I should say this: our fiscal policy will determine whether tax cuts are possible; our wish to cut taxation will not be allowed to determine our fiscal policy. If to reduce taxation would in any way—I do not say that it would—put our economic strategy at risk, it would have to be ruled out. If to lower taxation might lead to defeat in the fight against inflation, tax cuts would have to be forgone for the time being. In the Budget I shall set the public sector borrowing requirement at a responsible level that will ensure the continuation of our policies. Then and only then, I shall decide whether I have the scope to reduce taxation, and, if so, by how much.

Whether or not I can cut taxation in this Budget, many Conservative Members believe that an economy that enjoys lower taxation will be more able to foster enterprise and, therefore, to grow and to provide jobs and prosperity. The clear lesson from many countries is that where taxation is lowest, economies tend to be the most dynamic and successful. The lesson from British history is that high Government spending and taxation produce, at best, sluggish growth and steadily increasing unemployment.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook mentioned the coal strike. During the past 10 months and more, the Government have given their full backing to the National Coal Board in resisting the wholly unacceptable demands of Mr. Scargill. The issues have been whether the management of the Coal Board should be allowed to manage the industry, and Mr. Scargill's demand that the taxpayer should pour ever larger subsidies into preserving uneconomic pits at the cost of thousands of jobs in other industries. We shall not do that. It is a striking tribute to the strength of our economy that we have been able to endure the strike for as long as nearly 11 months—we shall endure it indefinitely if need be—with so little damage to the economy. We all know why the debate has been called. It has been called because the right hon. Gentleman had a date with Mr. Alfonsin, the president of Argentina, today. He was so embarrassed that he had to find some excuse to cancel that. That would have been too much.

This debate has nothing to do with the economy; it has nothing to do with jobs; it has nothing to do with the prosperity of the country. The motion should be rejected by the whole House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 395, Noes 222.

Division No. 85] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael

Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Heyward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jankin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James A.
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Ian Lang

NOES

Adlee, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*

Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Austin Mitchell.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Main Question, as amended, put:—
The House divided: Ayes 392, Noes 221.

Division No. 86] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry

Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James A.
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Ian Lang.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard

Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Austin Mitchell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House supports Her Majesty's Government in its firm action to maintain the sound financial conditions and medium-term strategy which have brought about the lowest level of inflation since the 1960s, nearly four years of sustained economic growth, record output, sound exports, record investment and record living standards, and which provide the best long-term prospects for a fundamental improvement in the performance of the British economy and for the creation of new jobs.

PETITION

Human Embryos

10.30 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I beg to ask leave to present a petition for the protection of the human embryo, signed by 7,720 of my constituents. They affirm their belief that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real living individual human being, and they oppose all practices which discriminate against the embryo or violate his or her human dignity or right to live.

The petition concludes:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Adult Education (Wales)

Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn. *—[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

10.31 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): The subject that I propose to raise tonight is adult education in Wales. I am concerned primarily with the Workers Educational Association, but I shall touch on the activities of the Open University which is, as I well understand, outside the remit of my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I shall also touch briefly on the provision for adult education made by local education authorities as well as the extramural departments of the University of Wales.

I am not launching an attack on the Government, still less on the Welsh Office. Welsh Office Ministers deserve at least half a cheer for their success in postponing for a year the cuts in the grants to the WEA that have already been applied in England. A year's delay means an extra year of support at the old higher rate, but, even more importantly, the longer advance warning of a coming cut enables the WEA to plan its economies with appreciably less disruption of courses of study.

I shall not argue either—as I might well be tempted to — that there should in these days of sadly high unemployment be a substantial expansion in public expenditure on adult edcuation. It is true that I want to see an expansion of adult education, but I have always taken the view that it is greatly preferable to increase charges to the individual, whenever possible, than to cut services. It follows by extension that I must accept that, at a time when reductions in public expenditure are inevitable, there is nothing inherently wrong in increasing the charges to adults taking education courses or even in increasing the proportion of the total costs of those courses that are covered by fees.

My worries about the Welsh Office's proposals for a cut of 7·5 per cent., phased over the next two years, for the north Wales district of the WEA out of a contribution of £109,000 from the Welsh Office are practical and pragmatic. From the point of the view of the WEA, the cut is substantially worse than it appears at first. Local education authorities normally match the contributions of the Government, although in some cases the matching is pretty meagre, but they will reduce their subsidy correspondingly.

Right hon. and hon. Members are only too well aware that local authorities are coming under pressure as severe as any that they have encountered to find money to pay for nursery education and higher teachers' salaries and to satisfy demands for smaller classes from a budget that is being squeezed by angry ratepayers and a justly tight-fisted Government. The WEA is therefore facing a cut in the money it gets from the Government and a corresponding cut in the not excessively generous sums that it gets from local authorities. In addition, the WEA, which used to get all of the receipts from courses that it ran jointly with the extramural department of the University of Wales, will now, under a new agreement that was concluded last year, get only 50 per cent. of receipts. For the north Wales district, that means a loss of £2,000.

The WEA is responding to the challenge, partly by increasing course fees, in a desperate attempt to maintain its full pattern of activity. It has managed so far to avoid increases in charges to old-age pensioners and the unemployed, but that entails some pretty steep increases for other students. The point has already been reached at which the scale of charges is sufficient to deter potential students. Indeed, some existing students have had to give up their courses.

There is another, and perhaps even more worrying, development. It is cheaper and more profitable to hold courses in substantial centres of population such as Rhyl, Llandudno or Colwyn bay than in remote country areas to which tutors might have to travel long distances and where the classes are likely to be much smaller. However, it is in just those remote areas that the work of the WEA is more necessary. The classes are a vital ingredient in enabling some scattered communities to retain a reasonable quality of life. I fear that we might be witnessing a noticeable and gradually accelerating decline in the numbers involved in WEA classes and a steady reduction of WEA activity in rural areas.

The same need for economy is also limiting the scope of the Open University, which is of special significance in scattered rural areas. For some time I and, I am sure, many of my colleagues in Wales have heard from Open University students in our constituencies that they are having increasing difficulty in meeting the new higher fees, which now amount to very nearly £1,000, to collect the credits necessary for their degree. As a result, some are having to drop their degree courses before completion. In addition, the mounting pressure on local education authorities which are desperate to find economies, means that they have to cut the number of evening classes that they run in schools.

It is not easy to dramatise the case for adult education —it is not headline-grabbing stuff—or to claim that any reduction would bring catastrophic consequences. I have already debarred myself from arguing in principle against any increase in course fees. Nevertheless, it would be a bad mistake to allow the decline in the provision for adult education to gather pace, especially when one considers the derisory sums of public money to be saved. Is it really worth stopping some classes in remote areas, and put at risk the attendance at others, to save the princely sum of £9,000?

It is commonplace to talk about the increased leisure in our society and the need to find rewarding ways of using it. Most of us, I fear, have not faced up to the fact that unemployment, or very part-time employment, will go on for many people for a long time. Human beings thrown on to their own resources in this way will be unhappy, perhaps destructive, people if they have not been given the intellectual skills or manual dexterity to make satisfying use of all the time on their hands.

We in this country—indeed, people throughout the industrialised world — will have to adopt a different attitude towards work, which, however brainless, boring or unhealthy, is always regarded as meritorious; and towards leisure, which, however wisely and constructively used, is regarded as being ignoble—not the sort of thing one should be seen doing on a weekday afternoon.

We must get away from that attitude and away from the idea that education happens to people between the ages of five and 16, or 18 if one is lucky. Education—or, for that matter, training—should be a continuous, almost lifelong, business if we are to have a society able to face the challenges of technological change and diminishing industrial employment.

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

The WEA has been a pioneer in developing those attitudes and changes and it has done so at amazingly little cost to the taxpayer, because so many of those who work for it are happy to do so for material rewards which are far lower than they would get on the open market. There is no danger that an increased allocation of taxpayers' money would be swallowed up in ever larger wage claims. On the contrary, the public gets the kind of value for its money in the operations of the WEA that it gets by its subventions to voluntary organisations; very little public money produces a disproportionate amount of public good.

The Minister will probably tell me of the successful efforts which the Government have made to maintain, indeed improve, standards in education. I do not dissent; this Government, and the Secretary of State for Education in particular, have achieved great things in raising education standards. But if I have tonight drawn the attention of my hon. Friend to the anxieties felt by those who work in adult education, if I have succeeded in highlighting the social value of this form of education, and if I have reminded him of the disproportionate contribution that the WEA could make at small cost, I have not wasted the Minister's or my time.

10.44 pm

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Mr. John Stradling Thomas): I wish at the outset to compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) on his excellent speech, to which I listened with great interest. I appreciate that this is a subject in which he takes great interest—indeed, almost a vested interest —as he has contributed directly to the adult education movement as a Workers Educational Association lecturer, and therefore speaks with a voice of experience. I am pleased, therefore, to assure my hon. Friend that I, too, want to encourage the development of the adult education service in Wales.

Let me put the matter in context. We have in Wales a long and proud tradition of adult study, beginning with the circulating schools of the 18th century and progressing through the Sunday schools movement to the variety of public and private sector provision which we have today. The demand for adult education remains strong, I am glad to say, both from those who see it as a means of acquiring or improving their qualfications and thereby advancing their career prospects and from those who simply wish to undertake a course of study for its own sake, which in the context of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West is very appropriate. I am grateful to him for setting the kernel of what he had to say tonight in the context of total adult education. It is my Department's policy to seek to ensure that the demand from both of these categories is met, and in the most cost-effective way possible.

My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that this commitment to adult education can be demonstrated in terms of the expenditure which is being devoted to it. Total expenditure—that is, expenditure by the local education authorities and Welsh Office grants to other bodies— amounted to £3,069,000 in 1983-84. The sum is expected to increase to £3,250,000 in the current financial year, and the provision being made for 1985-86 is £3,930,000— not far short of £4 million. A little more than a half of this expenditure is in the form of Welsh Office grants and the balance is expenditure by the local education authorities.

I have already mentioned one of the bodies which receives grant from my Department, the Workers Educational Association. The WEA has of course made and is continuing to make a very important contribution to the tradition to which I referred earlier through the opportunities that it offers to adults to increase their knowledge and personal capability. I recognise and appreciate the work that the WEA does and is doing, and I am pleased that my Department is able to support its work with grants which will amount to £264,000 in the current financial year.

However, my hon. Friend will, I am sure, concede that the WEA is not the only body carrying out useful and important work in adult education. In fact, my hon. Friend acknowledged this during his speech, and I thank him for it. A very substantial share of the adult education service in the Principality is provided by the local education authorities through their adult education centres and further education colleges. In 1983 the local education authorities and colleges enrolled nearly 100,000 people on adult education courses at their adult education centres and youth centres.

This compares with enrolments of nearly 40,000 for courses provided by what are technically known as the "responsible bodies" in Wales. I thought that we were all responsible bodies in Wales. However, that is a technical term. The responsible bodies are the Workers Educational Association, the extramural departments of the university colleges that were referred to by my hon. Friend, and the YMCA.

Other bodies active in this field are Coleg Harlech and the adult literacy and basic skills unit. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education also plays an important part in co-ordinating provision and staff development on an England and Wales basis.

In addition to providing support for these bodies, the Government have taken some initiatives of their own. Hon. Members will be aware of the Government's professional, industrial and commercial updating programme—known as PICKUP—which is designed to encourage employers to arrange retraining and updating courses for their employees in mid-career. I should also mention the Government's REPLAN scheme, designed to promote the development of educational opportunities for the adult unemployed to improve their employment prospects by giving them new skills and knowledge. My hon. Friend referred to the difficulties that high unemployment can create and therefore I stress the importance of that aspect.

The variety of provision is desirable if we are to provide an efficient and flexible service for adults with widely varying requirements. However, the budget available to my department — my hon Friend described the Government as justly tight-fisted — is limited, and, in order to encourage the development of new initiatives it is sometimes necessary to trim back a little on the support for well-established programmes. That is the situation with the programmes of the WEA and the extramural departments, referred to by my hon. Friend, whose financial allocations from the Welsh Office are being marginally reduced in 1985-86 and 1986-87. However, the reductions in their forward provision are very small. Indeed, in both 1985-86 and 1986-87 the WEA will still

receive more in cash terms from the Welsh Office than it is receiving this year. As my hon. Friend pointed out, we have phased that over two years, which is helpful from a planning point of view.

Therefore, the reductions in the Government's level of financial support for both the WEA and the EMDs are in no sense significant cuts. Furthermore it is my belief that the WEA could compensate for the small reductions by making some increase in its fees to students. I noted carefully my hon. Friend's points on that aspect, but the present fees are low and arrangements are always made for old-age pensioners and the unemployed. I hope that that can be maintained, but I noted my hon. Friend's point that that to some extent increases the burden in adjusting fees. I understand that.

The fees charged in Wales are modest, ranging from 60p per class to £10 for 20 lectures. Even so, I would expect the WEA districts to agree fee structures, as they do at present, which provide for the remission of fees to which I referred a moment ago. Therefore, there is scope for the association to increase its income from fees without causing any significant difficulties for adults who wish to attend its courses.

The reduction in the level of grant to both the WEA and EMDs has been made so that Wales can take part in initiatives to improve opportunities in adult education. The financial support to this wide range of bodies means that I have had to effect savings, albeit small, but nevertheless deliberately restricted, to meet the extra financial demands arising from those new initiatives.

The adult literacy and basic skills unit, whose remit has been extended to 1988, continues to perform invaluable work in Wales in stimulating provision for adults who have literacy and basic skills problems. For that reason, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science, I have increased our contribution to its budget not only in the current financial year but for the next two years.

In relation to the adult unemployed, I am pleased to be able to say that I have agreed to join the DES REPLAN —the adult unemployed programme announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science in March 1984. Under the banner of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, the institute and the further education unit are managing complementary programmes of development projects.

The institute is employing and managing an advisory team of field officers led by a national co-ordinator. The field officer for Wales took up appointment earlier this week and I envisage that she will be contacting the LEAs, voluntary bodies and other organisations, including the WEAs, about courss and other activities. In the coming year and the next academic year I expect great activity in the setting-up of courses. Apart from the financing of the field officer, my Department is also contributing towards the cost of the development projects. Two of those projects have been agreed for Wales, one in the Mid-Glamorgan and Gwent area to encourage groups to acquire skills and expertise, and to help towards self-sufficiency and the creation of commercially viable enterprises, and another for Coleg Harlech for research into the education needs of the unemployed.

I shall now deal with vocational training. I am pleased that we are now a part of the professional, industrial and commercial updating programme. At local level the PICKUP agents provide liaison between colleges and employers. The PICKUP agent in Wales has been in post since last September, and I know that he has already been actively promoting the scheme in many parts of Wales.

I mentioned earlier the benefits to be expected from a diversity of provision. For some time there has been pressure from adult education interests in Wales for an advisory council to be set up to co-ordinate provision to organise staff development and to offer advice to the providers of adult education and to central Government. I recognise that there are special Welsh considerations in this as in other areas of education, and I have taken note of the views expressed by bodies within Wales and by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. The institute has expressed its particular concern about the absence of a Welsh dimension to its work and it has pointed out that it has no specific single point of reference within Wales. A proposal which has been put to me would involve the setting up of a separate sub-committee for Wales of the institute, which would carry out the sort of co-ordinating role that has been suggested and which would provide the institute with the presence that it has been looking for in the Principality. I have come to the conclusion that such a sub-committee could perform a useful function for the providers of adult education and, in time, could lead to significant improvements in the service. I am pleased to be able to announce today that I have endorsed that proposal in principle, and that funding of £11,000 for each of the next three years will be made available by my Department to enable a sub-committee of the institute to be set up for a trial period. My Department will now consult with the institute, the Welsh joint education committee and other interested bodies about how the sub-committee should be constituted and about its terms of reference.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasise that my Department remains committed to the provision of an efficient adult education service for the people of Wales. I believe that there is a strong demand for the benefits that the service is able to offer. The service must recognise, however, that the type of courses that adult students require will change over time. The Government and the Service need to be alert to the changes in demand and must be prepared to adapt the pattern of provision in line with the change in requirements of the students, for whose benefit the service exists.

I have taken careful note of the points that my hon. Friend made. Coming from my background, I understand his points about remote rural areas. However, I still think that we must be cost-effective in adapting to changed circumstances, and I hope that we shall have both demand and provision for adult education in the Principality. I know that it is dear to our hearts and part of our tradition.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 1 February 1985

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Children's Shoes (VAT)

9.34 am

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I beg to ask leave to present a petition against any proposal to end the zero-rating system on children's shoes for VAT purposes and against any suggestion that a positive rate of VAT should be imposed. The petition is from my constituents in Great Grimsby and those of my neighbour the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), who asks to be associated with the presentation of the petition.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons in Parliament assembled:

The Petition of Her Majesty's loyal subjects living in Great Grimsby, Cleethorpes and round about sheweth:—

That the extension of Value Added Tax to children's shoes will cause hardship to many, and by compelling some parents to buy shoes of inferior quality, inflict irreparable injury on the feet of the next generation.

Your petitioners urge your Honourable House to reject or to repeal, as may at the time be appropriate, legislation providing for such an extension.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

The petition is signed by Mrs. Vera Whiting of 24 Pasture street, Grimsby, who organised the petition, and by 1,547 of my constituents and those of my neighbour the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes.

The petition is aimed indirectly at the Chancellor of the Exchequer to help him in his pre-Budget deliberations, but it also asks the House not to sanction a positive rate of VAT on children's shoes. I hope that the House will treat the request seriously and act on it, if necessary, when the time comes.

To lie upon the Table.

Human Embryos

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I beg to ask leave to present a petition signed by 1,154 constituents of Portsmouth, South entitled

"Petition for the Protection of the Human Embryo".

The petitioners affirm their belief

that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real, living individual human being.

They

oppose all . . . practices . . . which discriminate against the embryo and violate his/her human dignity end right to life.

The petition continues:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate action to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos . . .

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

St. Jude's Church, Southsea

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I beg to ask leave to present a petition on behalf of 2,500 constituents of Portsmouth, South. The petition reads:

Petition for the Saving of St. Jude's Church, Southsea.

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled:

The Humble Petition of the residents of the constituency of Portsmouth, South and surrounding areas showeth that we are opposed to the demolition of part or all of the fabric of St. Jude's Church in Southsea in the County of Hampshire.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to revoke the ecclesiastical exemption contained in the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 whereby churches may be demolished without listing building consent.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Sub Judice Rule

9.38 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. No Member of Parliament has received more expert guidance from or been shown more kindness and courtesy by the Table Office than me. I do not criticise the Clerks at the Table Office, but we are in a grey and difficult area. This point of order relates to the sub judice rule.

You, Mr. Speaker, may have seen on page 2 of *The Guardian* this morning, a report arising from the Ponting trial. It states that the report by the Admiral of the Fleet, Sir John Fieldhouse, had been altered without his knowledge. That was denied by civil servants. I therefore tried to table at the Table Office a question asking the Prime Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must stop the hon. Member, because this matter has not yet been brought to my attention. I must confess that I have not seen the report in *The Guardian* this morning. Will the hon. Member allow me to look into the matter? I shall then get in touch with him.

Mr. Dalyell: Of course, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Local Government (Access to Information) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.39 am

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

"'Publicity is the greatest and most effective check against arbitrary action.' That is one of the fundamental rights of the subject. Further, publicity stimulates the interest of local persons in local government. That is also very important."

Earlier it had been said:

"The public has the right, in the first instance, to know what its elected representatives are doing." — [*Official Report*, 5 February 1960; Vol. 616, c. 1350-51.]

Those are not my words, although I fully endorse them. They are the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoken during her maiden speech virtually 25 years ago to the day when she introduced the Public Bodies (Admission of the Press to Meetings) Bill which became the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

That Act opened up council meetings. It is of some interest to note that at that stage my right hon. Friend, as she now is, was worried about local government expenditure of what was then £1,600 million. I am advised by Ministers responsible that the equivalent figure now is some £33,000 million. That underlines, above all, the importance of the role that local government plays in the economy and the importance of ensuring that maximum publicity surrounds local government's activities.

The greatest opportunity should be given for local people to be informed about, and, if necessary, to talk to their councillors, before decisions affecting their lives are taken.

May I make my position crystal clear? I am an unrepentant friend and supporter of local government. That is based upon my 14 years as a local councillor. I found that, with all its imperfections, which have been detailed and documented, it still represents the most immediate form of accountability compared with any other structure of service. Indeed, I wish that certain functions, no longer the responsibility of local government, retained the same degree of closeness to the people they serve.

May I equally assure my many friends in local government, some of whom may be worried about the somewhat exaggerated reports of the Bill's effects, that I would not be sponsoring the Bill if I did not believe that it would benefit local government without impeding its ability to take necessary executive action on behalf of its electors. I have been heartened in that respect by the friendly discussions I have enjoyed with the various local authority organisations that, although worried by some of the clauses as drafted, have stressed their strong support for accountable and open local government.

It is becoming fashionable to talk about freedom of information and all that goes with it. Later speakers may, subject to your tolerance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, wish to speak on wider aspects on access to and freedom of information. I have no such intention.

My Bill seeks simply to tackle access to information in local government. I shall in no way be drawn on the relative positions of central Government, nationalised

industries, quangos or any other bodies. They all lie outside the scope of the Bill. All have differences in operation, which may strengthen or weaken their respective cases for change and, above all, would allow right hon. and hon. Members to be distracted from the matter under discussion, and might even divide what I otherwise hope would be a virtually united House.

The background to the Bill is, I hope, of some interest to the House. The measure was first introduced here in some form by the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) as an amendment on Report to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. I contributed to the discussion.

The first draft of the Bill was launched in December 1983 as the Local Government (Access to Information) Bill. It was circulated to 10,000 local organisations and individuals during the first half of 1984. It was also circulated to many authorities. Numerous suggestions were made by individuals and some local authorities, and detailed discussions were held with Bradford, Lewisham, Hillingdon and Derbyshire. The Bill was then presented and drafted by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—who is here today, as well as the hon. Member for Bootle—as a ten-minute Bill in June 1984.

Following that, further detailed discussions were held with the various local authority associations, and resulting papers were sent to those working on the Bill. On the basis of those papers plus further detailed papers from another 20 councils, the current Bill was drawn up.

I have held discussions with the district councils, the county councils, the metropolitan authorities, the Society of County Secretaries, the district secretaries and the London Boroughs Association. Seminars have already been held for senior and chief officers of Cambridge, Leicester and Cardiff and more are planned. Inevitably, some of the suggestions have taken time to summarise and analyse, and should the House feel able to give a Second Reading to the Bill today a further list of amendments will be sent for discussion to the various local authority associations.

I hope that that demonstrates two things to the House. The first is the wide-ranging nature of the consultation, which is continuing. That ranges from the large—the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, which represents some 18 million people—to little parish councils up and down the country. I quote from a letter from Idbury parish meeting in Oxfordshire with a village population of under 200:

"The Bill will have the unqualified support of the Idbury Parish Meeting. We would like to thank all concerned for the effort they are making on our behalf."

The second matter that it demonstrates is my willingness to consider amendments which improve the Bill and clarify its intentions. At this stage it would be only proper if I paid full tribute for the real debt that I owe to Mr. Ron Bailey and all his helpers at the Community Rights Project. Without their untiring help and advice over many months, none of this would have happened. I hope that they will draw some genuine satisfaction from the further progress of this measure, although it will involve them in still more late nights.

By now, hon. Members may be wondering what matters are still unnecessarily discussed in private. The answer, I am afraid, is literally thousands and thousands. I shall take, just by chance, one small part of the country, central east England. I could have picked on any other area of the country and found the same thing. I shall mention some of the sub-committees that are held in private. In Broxtowe the twinning sub-committee and the tourism sub-committee meet in private. In mid Suffolk the poultry meat sub-committee meets in private—that is a daring one. In north Bedfordshire the bottle bank donation sub-committee meets in private. In Nottinghamshire the residents' parking sub-committee—there is a lively issue —and the catering sub-committee meet in private. I assure the House that I could quote many other examples. On planning matters, many authorities, including two London boroughs, still hear all planning applications in private.

As for the issues discussed, you will be relieved to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I do not intend to trot out an almost never-ending list, but let me take just one authority. My eye has fallen by chance on Stevenage, in Hertfordshire. I stress that it is no better or worse than many other authorities. The council's policy on removing or replacing storage heaters and a report on the Housing and Building Control Act 1984, and the Department of the Environment booklet "Your Right to Know" were privately debated by the housing committee. The colour of roses in the memorial rose garden was privately debated in the health and community services sub-committee, and the use of dyed maggots by anglers was discussed privately by the leisure and community services committee.

I hope that that demonstrates that we still cover issues great and small in private. In principle, the Bill is not solely about, so to speak, dyed maggots; it is about the important issues which are unnecessarily taken in private at the moment.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The hon. Member said, "unnecessarily taken in private". I am sure that he will confirm that there are some matters that it is still right to take in private—personal matters of confidentiality that arise in social services committees and that type of thing — and that in the Bill he is getting at the completely unnecessary privacy which continues in matters great and small. There are matters small as well as great which may need to be kept private because of their content.

Mr. Squire: I fully accept everything that the hon. Member has said. He anticipates me by five or 10 minutes, when I shall talk about the schedule to the Bill in which I have detailed the exemptions which, as he rightly says, must still apply on genuine grounds of privacy.

The best way to sum up the matter is to give the comments that were received from the solicitor to Ynys Môn council. When asked which matters were taken in private, he answered, "controversial issues". I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment would wish a similar facility to be extended to the Government.

In various ways, the Bill introduces the best practice which is already followed in all cases in other authorities. The Bill has three main principles. The first is to increase the public accountability of councillors between elections by allowing the public closer and more detailed insight into their decisions. Councillors' performance can therefore be more accurately judged. Secondly, in order to improve the quality of decision making, the public will be able to challenge or add to information provided by

[Mr. Squire]

officers for councillors' decisions. Presenting alternative information or premises for an argument can only be healthy if it adds to the range of views and evidence available to councillors. Thirdly, the Bill will strengthen relations between councils and their electorate and will break down the traditional suspicion, hostility and alienation which local electors often express about local government.

Clause 1 makes two provisions. It opens up sub-committees to the public, in line with the recommendation in the Department of the Environment circular 45/75, while allowing for confidentiality for genuine reasons, as stated in schedule 1. It repeals the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, which allows secrecy for such non-specific reasons as confidentiality and public interest. Evidence of totally unnecessary secrecy is overwhelming. In future, specific reasons, which are laid down in schedule 1, will have to apply. Many authorities have already implemented that aspect voluntarily.

Clause 2 requires the minutes of all committee and sub-committee meetings to be publicly available. At present the public have a legal right to see only minutes of full council meetings and of committees with recommendatory power. They do not have the right to see the minutes of committees with delegated power — in practice most sub-committees and committees have that these days— or sub-committee minutes. The clause allows councils to publish the minutes of the confidential parts of meetings, as defined in schedule 1, in such a way as to preserve the confidentiality that the meeting has resolved to be necessary. Once again, numerous authorities already implement those provisions.

Clause 3 requires reports that are being discussed at meetings to be publicly available three days before the meeting, unless one of the reasons in schedule 1 requires the report to be kept confidential, and that reason must be stated. There are additional safeguards, in that reports that would otherwise have to be made available three days before the meeting need not be made available if the meeting is convened under the short notice procedure, if an item or report has been added to the agenda at short notice, or if the council's officer believes that a schedule 1 reason requires the report to remain confidential until the meeting takes place. That would be an exceptional circumstance, but it is an added safeguard to meet the sort of circumstances that may occasionally occur.

Clause 3(5) requires a reasonable number of the reports that are being discussed during the public part of a meeting to be made available for the public who are present, thus enabling them to understand what is going on. Many councils already operate in that way.

Clause 4 has attracted more comment than any other part of the Bill, and I hope therefore that the House will permit me to speak at length about it. The concept of the general public having access to certain documents is not new. At present, a variety of Acts grant such access under certain circumstances. The Local Government Act 1972 granted access for the inspection of payments and statements of account. The Town and Country Planning Act 1971 rightly laid heavy responsibilities on local authorities for planning matters. Anyone affected by planning decisions today can inspect the relevant file and the plans. Other Acts have covered such matters as the inspection of councillors' expenses, of plans for sewers and even of records of common lodging houses. There are also many provisions which cover the purchase and renting of property. Therefore, the concept is not new.

The Association of County Councils, which otherwise presented a strong note of reservation about clause 4, pointed out that current good practice—the sort of thing that local authorities are advised to follow—enables a member of the public to have access to a background document that deals with a matter of fact and elucidates an issue discussed publicly. Clause 4 deals with research data, background papers, interim reports and other matters which relate to any item on the public part of the agenda of a council, committee or sub-committee meeting.

Clause 4(1) provides that after the agenda has been published but before the meeting has taken place the public can inspect such documents unless the council officer has reason to believe that any such documents should not be made public for any one of the reasons stated in schedule 1. The reason must be stated on the report or document in question.

Clause 4(2) provides that after the meeting has taken place the public can inspect such documents, unless the meeting itself has decided that any of them should not be available for any one of the reasons in schedule 1, in which case the reason must be stated.

There are, therefore, two safeguards to protect genuinely confidential information. The clause refers only to background papers relating to items under discussion in the public part of a meeting. Even documents relating to items being discussed in public can be kept confidential if a schedule reason applies to such documents.

The wording in clause 4 is based on that used by Bradford council, which is one of three authorities which have operated the entirety of the Bill for the past six months. Bradford, Brent and Derbyshire — two Conservative authorities and one Labour authority—are all happy and satisfied that it has caused them no problems. A further six authorities have publicly stated that they are in the process of changing to adopt the provisions set out in the Bill.

One of the best comments made about clause 4 comes from one of the operating officers. If the problems are as great as some critics of the clause imply, operating officers would feel the most stress. Mr. Jack Feather is the director of housing and environmental health services in Bradford. He said:

"I welcome the most contentious aspect of the Bill, public access to internal documents, because it forces officers prepairing agenda items to file all their relevant background papers carefully. While assisting the public, this is an aid to good management in that it allows committees and chief officers to have confidence in the reports put before them."

I seek to do two things by clause 5. For councillors who are on the relevant committee, the Bill seeks to codify case law, in particular the Birmingham city council v. O case, and grants wide access to all background papers, not merely those which relate to an agenda—the thrust and subject of this Bill. For councillors not on the relevant committee, the Bill seeks to give statutory right of access to all papers relating to agenda items. To the extent that the clause, as drafted, may be imperfect in meeting those aims, I shall seek to make clarifying amendments in Committee.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): For the benefit of the House, will my hon. Friend clarify

paragraph *(g)* of the schedule? Will he explain how he hopes a councillor might be able to prove the fact that information

"in connection with his duties as a member"

was a reason why he might refer to documents covered by clause 5?

Mr. Squire: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for intervening. I hope that he will allow me to cover paragraph *(g)* when I reach it in my speech. I have received some comments about it and it deserves separate attention. I fully accept that everything in the schedule ultimately relates back to the Bill. If I have not covered his point when I have dealt with paragraph *(g)*, I invite him to question me again.

The remainder of the Bill is relatively uncontentious and is widely practised. Scotland the Northern Ireland are currently excluded from the Bill because the appropriate wording to cover the relatively unintelligible activities of the north and west of England and Wales were not in my possession when the Bill was drafted. However, should the House see fit to give the Bill a Second Reading, I shall table appropriate amendments in Committee to extend the Bill to Scotland and, I hope, to Northern Ireland.

The schedule sets out clearly and, I hope, concisely a series of reasons why confidentiality should legitimately be preserved. I hope that it meets the point made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) about the understandable and justifiable need to retain confidentiality in some circumstances. Paragraphs *(a)* to *(f)* are self-explanatory and are based closely on the practices that have been followed by the London borough of Hillingdon since 1978. That authority confirms that they have posed few, if any, difficulties.

It may be interesting for the House to note that, regardless of the absence of legislation, several authorities have made considerable moves towards more public meetings and less use of the power to exclude the public. I give as examples two authorities, one Labour-controlled and one Conservative-controlled. In 1978-79, the London borough of Lewisham excluded press and public from its policy and resources committee on 81 occasions, and from its development control sub-committee on 31 occasions. The figures for last year are four occasions and one occasion respectively. Last year, the London borough of Hillingdon, operating the reasons for confidentiality that are found in the schedule, excluded press and public from its policy and resources committee on two occasions, from its education committee on two occasions and from its social services committee on one occasion. I hope that I have demonstrated that, in practice, such reasons tend to concentrate the minds of councillors and officers, who can then readily ascertain the matters that are genuinely confidential and the many issues that can and should be discussed in public.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): A blemish on the record of the London borough of Hillingdon is that it refuses to send housing statistics to the Department of the Environment. One finds blanks in the return of housing statistics by that borough.

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment in detail on the good and bad points of that borough, which I am sure is admirably run. If it is falling short in this respect, to the extent that even in Hillingdon there may be greater publicity in the future, I am sure that more pressure will be brought to bear by the appropriate councillors to ensure that it complies with the intelligent requests of my hon. Friend the Minister.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) rightly highlighted paragraph *(g)*. That paragraph was inserted initially at the request of some local authorities, in different parts of the country and controlled by different parties, which were worried about the need to protect advice given to political groups. I am conscious, from representations made to me, that much concern has been expressed about that paragraph and especially about whether it belongs in legislation at all — certainly whether it belongs in legislation of this nature. In Committee, I shall be willing to discuss the paragraph in detail, especially to satisfy myself that the original reason for its conclusions still holds true. I take very much to heart several comments that have been made about it.

What objections could be raised to the Bill? As I understand it, there may be three. The first is that the Bill will be too costly and that we cannot introduce such legislation at a time when local authorities are watching every pound and must meet targets. The chief executive of Bradford council, Gordon Moore, says this:

"Our three party group leaders have estimated the annual cost at around £2,000 — a minimal sum to pay for democratic accountability."

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree with that statement.

The Bill may be objected to on grounds that it is unworkable, impractical and impossible to put into proper effect. The chief executive of Brent council, Michael Bichard, has said:

"Since we have implemented the provisions of the Bill there has been no administrative difficulty or extra cost, and some initial fears of officers that it would inhibit written communication have not materialised in practice. If this system can work in Brent, where there is an extremely volatile political situation, then I believe it can work anywhere."

That sounded like a call from the heart by the chief executive.

A third reason why the Bill might be criticised is that it goes too far too soon. It may be said, "You have the right ideas, but you are going too quickly and the Bill is too extreme." Three authorities have already written to me accusing me of being too timid: Brent, Hinckley and Bosworth, and Yeovil, whose chief executive says:

"I am sure you will know that in some respects we are going well beyond the policy proposed in the Bill."

I am in danger of being tarred as a moderate because I am trying to steer a course between extreme councils pressing me to go even further, and those which say that I have gone too far.

The national support that has been gathered for the measure extends from the Confederation of British Industry to the National Council for Civil Liberties, and from the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses to the Consumers Association — all told, about 70 national bodies, most of them voluntary. They are supplemented by more than 1,000 local voluntary organisations and nearly 400 parish and town councils, while 47 local authorities of all colours have supported the Bill in principle. As I said, nine local authorities have implemented or are implementing changes that bring them fully into line with the Bill. Last year, 153 hon. Members from all parties supported an early-day motion on the subject, and during the last two weeks more than 100 hon.

[Mr. Squire]

Members signed a similar motion tabled by me. Few private Members' Bills in recent years can have come to the House with wider proven support in the country.

Ultimately, good practice cannot depend on legislation alone. It must be a shared responsibility of officers and councillors to ensure that their councils' affairs are conducted with a proper regard for the genuine interests of their electors. Most councils will rise to that responsibility, as they have responded to many other changes in recent years.

In her speech 25 years ago, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

"The paramount function . . . is to safeguard civil liberties rather than to think that administrative convenience should take first place in law."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 1960; Vol. 616, c. 1357-58.]

This morning I have demonstrated that the Bill will not inconvenience administration, and that, at little cost and with minimal administrative reorganisation, a new era of openness can dawn, bringing with it the increased accountability that all of us seek, regardless of our political parties. I ask the House to give the Bill a Second Reading.

10.7 am

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): In supporting the Bill, I, too, will try not to be too party political. The Bill has all-party support and was presented in that spirit. The hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) believed that he might be accused of being a moderate. I should tell him that I support the Bill as an extreme moderate, which is the political position that I have always held.

The media will not regard the Bill as meaty or sexy in the sense of legislation such as the Sexual Offences Bill that we debated last Friday, but I hope that the media will pay attention to the Bill because it is important, especially at this time in the history of the relationship between central and local government.

Like the hon. Member for Hornchurch, I do not wish to become too involved in some of the arguments about freedom of information in relation to other activities. I believe in open government not only in local authorities but in central Government, the nationalised industries, water authorities, health authorities, development corporations and quangos. It is no criticism of the Bill to argue that local government is more democratic than those other bodies anyway, and that we should have started to democratise water authorities, health authorities and development corporations before we turned our attention to democratically elected local authorities. That argument has been put to me by many Labour councillors. I sympathise with their view. Those other bodies should be democratised. Indeed, there may be a stronger case for democratising them than there is for opening up the functions of local government through the Bill.

That does not mean that there is not a strong case for the Bill or that local government should not be made more democratic. Indeed, the opposite is the case. Today, when local democracy is under attack from central Government, with rate capping and threats of abolition, democratically elected local government must gather strength unto itself to resist the efforts of central Government to interfere more and more in local affairs. The Bill will help local authorities in that process, for it will enable them to enter into partnership with the local electorate so that the voters, officials and councillors can resist the onslaught.

The Bill cannot be described as an attack on local government. If it becomes law, it will strengthen and support local government. No local authority officer or councillor can criticise the low turnout in local elections and at the same time oppose legislation of this kind. If decision-making is shared among all the local people, more of them will vote in local elections.

It has been suggested that if the local decision-making processes are opened up, councillors and officers will go into a caucus and meet at the Bull and Bush, Red Flag Arms or the local Margaret Thatcher coffee bar to discuss the issues and make decisions. That is a fair criticism. Whatever we do, we will not avoid that sort of activity. Nevertheless, much of the decision-making undertaken by officers and councillors — usually of the controlling group—which now takes place behind closed doors will be opened up to public scrutiny.

Nor will the Bill remove power from councillors. After all, knowledge is power. We want more information about what is happening locally to be given to the press and general public. We also want to give rights to councillors —not only those of minority parties, but even members of controlling groups in local authorities. Frequently councillors who belong to controlling parties cannot get information because the ruling members of their party do not want them to have it, and that has to do with power struggles in individual groups.

In that context, I am told that such struggles go on within the controlling Conservative group in Sefton, of which my constituency of Bootle forms part. Conflicts occur between Conservatives from Southport, Crosby and Formby. In Sefton, power is not just delegated to sub-committees. That authority often has sub-committees of one, and the leader of the council is usually the one who forms the sub-committee and takes decisions in secret.

The Bill will give councillors the right of access to information. Councillors will then be able to get hold of the background documents used by chief officers in making recommendations or policy reports to committees. That is particularly important in these days of corporate management. Elected councillors should have before them all the options and arguments and be able to reach decisions in the light of the best advice and alternatives available.

Under the system of corporate management, the chief executive may call together the chief officers, who can collectively discuss all the alternatives, based on the information in the background papers, hammer everything out among themselves and put forward just one recommendation in a report to the local councillors.

The trouble is that what went into the decision-making —all the information that was before that corporate team of officers—is not before the councillors, who are then, in effect, faced with a fait accompli. In that situation, the chief officers are doing the political job that should be done by the councillors.

I am in favour of corporate management. I am not a believer in the old type of all-powerful departments. It was wrong for individual service or spending departments to act on their own, almost without regard to the consequences for other local authority services. Corporate management can lead to efficiency, but without a Bill of this type, which will ensure that councillors have access to all the background information that is available to chief

officers, corporate management can remove power from councillors and place it in the hands of the officers in a way that is bad for local government and democracy.

I accept that some areas must remain private and confidential. For example, details about people's personal lives contained in social service files and so on should not, generally speaking, be made public. We shall need legislation in due course to give individuals access to their personal files, but that does not arise from this measure.

While I accept the need for confidentiality, we must be careful not to go too far in protecting it, particularly in relation to tenders and contracts. There must be some confidentiality to ensure that contractors do not get advance notice of certain facts. We must avoid fiddles occurring. However, we could have much more openness about the way in which tenders are awarded and contracts received in local government.

Had this measure been on the statute book at the time, the web of corruption that was revealed in the Poulson affair would not have been possible. A measure of openness such as this would have prevented the letting of contracts on the nod, time and again, to the same contractors. There would have been the necessary competition to protect local government.

When tenders have been received and studied, more information could be given about the awarding of contracts, together with the figures. Although the Bill allows for the exclusion

"of spending estimates for specific items . . . that . . . would be likely to benefit a contractor or supplier,"

we would have more information about the letting of contracts in a way that would benefit and be healthy for local democracy.

I admit to having been guilty of a degree of great openness when I was a councillor in the city of Manchester. When I was chairman of the housing committee I was often accused of taking too many decisions in public. People in the Labour group and others said that I was publicity-seeking and that certain matters should have been dealt with in private. My view has always been that politicians should not act in a stealthy way. As for publicity-seeking, a politician is failing in his duty if he does not receive publicity because the public have a right to know what he is doing.

I was a member of the sub-committee of the policy committee of that council. It was called the secretarial and services sub-committee and it consisted of every member of the policy committee. It met in secret and its title, "Secretarial and Services Sub-Committee," hid a multitude of sins. For example, it decided what civic receptions should take place and who should attend them. That is why its affairs were conducted in private. It was also why all the members of the policy committee wanted to be on it. If one belonged to the sub-committee that planned the reception, one was certain of an invitation to the reception. Although I have dealt with that point in a light-hearted way, it illustrates the need for this legislation.

The metropolitan district of Sefton, the authority in which my constituency is situated, is perhaps one of the worst offenders when it comes to secrecy. When the organisation concerned with freedom of information and community rights, Ron Bailey's group, wrote to Sefton asking for its views on the Bill — about access to information and the whole question of open government —it received in reply a memo, signed by the chief executive and sent by mistake, saying, "Send the usual reply to this rubbish."

Sefton refuses to give information over the telephone. It will not tell people how many sub-committees there are and whether they meet in secret. It has a system that denies information to the public and a system that denies the system for denying information. Sefton even has a book called "The Scheme of Delegation," which describes how to avoid enabling the public to find out what it does. The book runs to 50 pages and tells us that there are 14 sub-committees made up of just the chairman or the chairman and the vice chairman. It reveals that there are ad hoc committees and others which comprise the chairman, the vice chairman and the opposition spokesperson.

The list of committees that are closed to the public is amazing. It includes those on parental rights, social services, amalgamation of secondary schools, the disciplinary sub-committee, the consultative committee for staff, the school curriculum sub-committee and the standing sub-committee of the education committee. One of Sefton's committees is open—the accident prevention sub-committee. It is open to avoid any accidental giving of information to the public. The press and public were removed from one of Sefton's sub-committees because it was to consider a list of books that should not be allowed in the public library. A list of 100 books was put before the council. I can understand why the council was embarrassed and conducted the meeting in private, because the list included "When the Wind Blows", by Raymond Briggs, "100 Questions on Pregnancy" by Claire Rayner and novels by Norman Mailer and Graham Greene.

Hon. Members would have to be elected representatives in Sefton to appreciate that authority's secrecy. Even the mayoral selection sub-committee meets in secret. I cannot think why, because the Labour party will not accept a mayoralty in the area, so I imagine that the matter is settled in the Conservative group before the sub-committee meets. The practices that I have listed should be ironed out, but I am not making a political point. Although Sefton is Conservative-controlled, and it does me no harm to criticise it, there are Labour-controlled authorities which are not as bad but getting that way. The practices of some Labour-controlled authorities leave a lot to be desired.

I understand that the city of Salford has a sub-committee for everything. He is called Les Hough, the leader of the council, who has been there for about 25 years. I have a vested interest in the London borough of Tower Hamlets as I live there when in London and pay rates there. It takes almost all of its major decisions in secret. It has sub-committees on policy, health, consumer services and social services, all of which are closed to the public. It has often refused to provide the housing emergency office, now Shelter's empty property unit—of which I used to be the chair—with information about planning and empty houses. It has failed to reply to questionnaires from the Town and Country Planning Association, refused to provide information concerning planning matters and declined consultation with the public. Tower Hamlets was alone among the London boroughs in not giving such information. I could go on at length about how it does not fulfil its responsibilities in communicating with the public, so enabling them to participate with councillors and officers.

[Mr. Allan Roberts]

The Bill is about partnership. It defends democracy and supports local authorities. It gives them strength, although some of them do not realise that that is what we are at. At this juncture in the history of local government, they need all the support that they can get.

10.24 am

Mrs. Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on presenting the Bill. Like other hon. Members, I shall endeavour to confine my speech to the workings of local government and not stray into other issues such as quangos and other authorities that might follow the example of local authorities if the Bill becomes law. I am acutely aware that hon. Members can be accused of standing in a glasshouse and throwing bricks. That is a dangerous practice at the best of times.

There is some surprise at the fact that the Bill has to be introduced. Although I am convinced that it will greatly improve the workings of local government, it is a pity that local government has not adopted the suggested alterations and practices voluntarily. I should like to quote the chief executive of Bradford city council, Mr. Gordon Moore. He said:

> "Left to its own devices local government would never voluntarily accept the freedom of information proposals in Robin Squire's Bill because they strike at the heart of the paternalistic 'we know best' attitude which dominates town halls."

I am afraid that that is all too true. Many of us who have spent many years in local government share Mr. Moore's view, probably more than others who have not had experience of the workings of a council.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch said, many of the proposals are unnecessary for many councils that already practise a good deal of what the Bill suggests, but some authorities do not admit the public to their sub-committees. Although such meetings might fall within the exceptions set down in paragraph *(g)*, of the schedule, it is important to clarify the matter beyond reasonable doubt.

The Bill can do nothing but improve the workings of local authorities and the relationship between the council and its electorate. When I was a councillor, I thought that the image of councillors was poor to say the least. A substantial cause of that was the simple inability of local authorities to communicate with their public. That was especially true of contentious issues such as school closures, changes in social services and that awful word that local government and, I suspect, the Government use — rationalisation — which covers a multitude of sins. Admitting the public and giving them the same bits of paper as elected representatives will at least illustrate the difficulties of coherent and sensible policy-making.

The Bill will create one problem to which I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch because he will encounter it at the Committee stage, which I am certain the Bill will reach. For nine years I was the elected member of a London borough. At this point I should say that I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) will not take amiss what I am going to say. In common with many other authorities of both political persuasions — I emphasise that this involves authorities of both political persuasions—there is a committee of this London borough whose membership is restricted to the majority party. These committees are generally classified under the name of leader's committee, consultative committee, co-ordinating committee. For seven years I was a member of such a committee. I believe that it is still in existence as a properly constituted committee under the standing orders of that council. It attracts attendance allowances and officers of the council attend and advise committee members. The committee has agendas. Minutes are taken and its proceedings are reported to meetings of the full council.

The purpose of the committee is to enable discussion to take place of sensitive policy and strategy matters. Therefore it would possibly be included in paragraph *(g)* of the schedule. However, the agendas are not published, except to members of the committee. During my time on the committee no other council member ever saw the agendas. The minutes were never circulated to members of the committee nor to members of the council. They were simply signed by the chairman at the beginning of each meeting. I do not believe that the chairman ever read the minutes. At least when I chaired that committee I have to confess that I did not read the minutes. The reports to the council merely gave the names of the members who attended the committee meetings and the dates upon which meetings were held. As far as I am aware, all this is perfectly in order. I do not believe that if the Bill becomes law it will be in order, although I can think of ways in which it will be possible to conduct business without the spirit of the Bill being transgressed.

There are both merits and demerits in the system. The merits are that sensitive issues relating to future policy planning, finance, and personnel can be discussed frankly in a small forum and the advice of officers can be obtained. The hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) referred to issues that are brought before local authorities where, of necessity, there is a variety and range of solutions. Some are more palatable than others and need to be discussed at one stage or another. I contend that the possible solutions should be looked at by everybody on the council, not simply by some members of the council. However, they can be aired in a particular forum and a collective agreement between the officers and members concerned can be reached. Early warnings can be given. This is particularly important for those who are responsible for the work of the council, simply by virtue of being in the majority. Warnings of problems that can arise can be given to members, who then discuss them with their colleagues. This possibly helps to facilitate the management and passage of the work of a committee.

However, in my view the demerits are these. Under this system only a few members are privy to the discussions. While my experience was that these matters were always presented to full meetings of the majority party members, privately this system was open to the unscrupulous caucus treatment that was outlined by the hon. Member for Bootle. It is a dangerous practice. Essentially, this committee was a non-executive forum. In other words, it could not make any decisions. It could merely discuss them. Therefore, nothing was ever decided. However, it was held and still is held at the expense of ratepayers because it attracts attendance allowances and takes up a vast amount of the time of officials. Very often I queried whether this was either desirable or necessary. A source of constant irritation was that it provided a closed forum for the expression of both paternalism and prejudice that was not always a true reflection of the views of the

members of the majority party, let alone anybody else, and was very much open to misinterpretation by the officers who attended those meetings.

Mr. Steve Norris (Oxford, East): Would not my hon. Friend agree with me that one has to draw a very clear distinction between private meetings at which a group of members of a particular party discuss their policy—for example, how they might develop a strategy towards a particular issue—and private meetings where they are made privy to information that is not then made available to the other members of an authority? Is not that the crucial distinction? Ought we not to recognise that there may well be circumstances in which a group of council members will quite legitmately want to meet privately to discuss the formulation of policy and that that should not be excluded? Indeed, paragraph *(g)* of the schedule makes it quite clear that it is to be included. It is the conceding of information from all members of the authority that we ought to try to prevent.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) for drawing my attention to that point and I accept it absolutely. There is no question but that it is very important for members of majority parties on any council to have the opportunity to discuss policy strategy and the broad outline of what is in the best interests of their ratepayers. My question is whether it is right that there should be these small groups of people who attend properly constituted council committee meetings that attract attendance allowances and that are always advised by officers of the council, thus giving those committee members the privilege of expert advice and information that is not always available to other members of the council—not even to all members of the majority party, let alone to members of minority parties. That I believe to be questionable. I am absolutely certain that paragraph *(g)* of the schedule to my hon. Friend's Bill covers most of the matters that are undesirable for public consumption, but I query whether only certain elected council members should have access to information, in the interests of better local decision-making. This is an exceedingly important point to which we must turn our attention.

On the availability of agendas and notices of meetings to the public, I make a plea that comes from the heart: that the language used in agendas, reports and even notices of meetings to the general public ought to be in the kind of language that the average man or woman can understand. Local government has its own special language. In education, for example, unless on understands what initials stand for—I cite the CLEA, the AMA, the RTA, the NAS/UWT, the NATFHE—one can be in very considerable difficulty in reading a report. In my very first year on a local council I remember reading agendas and papers wondering what on earth certain words meant. I came across the word "varnd" which I had never met before. I dared not ask either an official or a colleague what it meant in case I was thought to be too stupid for words—which I probably was. Therefore I looked up the word in a dictionary, but that did not help me very much—at least, not in the context of the use of that word in agendas and reports. It was a long time before that word meant anything to me. It is important that those who write reports, notices and agendas should ensure that they can be understood by the average person if they are seeking to inform the public of what is going on.

I chaired a committee for a year and there was always at least one item on the agenda that I never understood. Explanations were given to me, again in terms that I could not understand. I never believed that the people who read the agendas and attended the committee understood such items. However, we always got through the agendas and the items were always passed. I often wonder what happened to those decisions. They cannot possibly have meant anything much to anyone.

I am not surprised that the Association of Metropolitan Authorities has some reservations. On clause 3, I received a letter which said:

"Additionally, a further exemption might be required to cover cases where reports are simply not available three days before the meeting takes place."

That is yet another area of aggravation for many people who work in local government.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend may be interested to know that one of the amendments that has already been suggested, which I did not discuss in detail in my opening speech, relates to that point. There is a suggestion that an additional clause should be submitted which would have the effect of covering items which, for exceptional reasons, were not available in three days. If that were the result of sickness, for example, the reason would be noted on the face of the book.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. It is important, because many reports and agendas require more than three days for the people involved in the decision-making to have an opportunity to understand and consider them and if necessary research their responses.

On clause 4 the same briefing from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities said:

"The Bill provides that a large number of documents will be confidential and therefore excluded from public scrutiny,"—

that is right—

"but this means that in future every document will have to be examined and a decision made as to whether one or the other of the 'confidentiality' reasons applies. This task will be time-consuming."

That caused me concern. Of course it will be time-consuming, but is not that a great argument for the people who write reports having the discipline of thinking carefully about the length and nature of what they write?

Mr. Allan Roberts: I have heard the same criticism from the AMA, but that is the case now, anyway. Officers writing reports decide whether they should allow them to be available to the press and public. They stamp them and make a recommendation. Two agendas are produced. Agenda B is dealt with at the end and taken in secret. The officers decide which report should go in part A of the agenda and which in part B. Much of what is put in part B is put there for the wrong reasons and would not be there under this legislation. It would not be any more time-consuming, as that task is performed now.

Mrs. Rumbold: I agree. I hope that clause 4 will be put into effect so that officers' minds will be concentrated on the essentials that need to be included in order to facilitate sensible decision-making.

I fully understand that there are areas in local government which can, for one reason or another, never be discussed at a public meeting. Such areas relate to the personal lives of employees and people who live within the authority and whose business comes before local authority

[Mrs. Rumbold]

committees. There is no intention here to obstruct the sensible working of local government. The Bill will enable people who live in the area governed by a local council to understand with much greater clarity what is being done and how it is being done. That is essential if we are trying, as I hope we are, to improve the relationship between the general public and local government.

It is only by doing that that we can possibly attract people with broader interests, but less time than is presently required of such people, to stand as members of local government so that they can give the benefit of their time, attention and possibly greater experience to the matters that come before local councils, all of which affect our lives in one way or another and all of which are vital. That is in no way intended to be derogatory of the many men and women throughout Britain who devote an enormous amount of their time, expertise and lives to the good running of their local authorities.

Clause 6 asks the local authority to publish a list of the names and addresses of all members of the authority. I should want to couple with that a list of the wards for which those members are the representatives and the committees on which they serve. I do not want to deny local ward councillors their effectiveness, but unfortunately it is a fact of life that many people do not know who their local representatives are on the council. It may be true that not many people in a constituency know who their local Member of Parliament is, but at least the local Member of Parliament has the opportunity, if he so wishes, to rectify that by seeking to inform people through letters, publicity and so on that he exists and what he stands for. The local councillor seems to be rather more obscure and it is important that local communities know who represents their ward.

It would be wrong not to mention my local authority of the London borough of Merton before I sit down. Every meeting of its council is open to the public and I pay tribute to it for that. It sets a good example. Would that every borough were so good. I suggest that in the adoption of the Bill, through its Second Reading today, and I hope through its successful Committee stage, all councils will be able to follow that excellent example.

10.48 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): First, I join in the congratulations expressed to the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on his bravery in using his high place in the ballot for private Members' Bills to choose this Bill with which he had been associated in its previous lives. It is a good thing in a way that he has chosen it because he comes from a background of local government service. He was a former local government leader in the London borough of Sutton. If any hon. Member is able to persuade the, for the time being, majority party of the Bill's merits, it should be him.

It is important to stress, as we have in this debate, that the Bill has always had, in whatever form it has been drafted, all-party support. I hope that the Bill will receive a Second Reading today and will ultimately take its place on the statute book. If that happens, the hon. Member for Hornchurch will have completed the task that was begun by the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) about two years ago. The hon. Member for Bootle lit the torch by bringing the draft of a Bill before the House. I was able to pick up the torch, as it were, and was given leave in June 1984 to introduce the measure by way of a ten-minute Bill. That measure is now before us in a more substantive form. It has been revised and improved and is now even more worthy of general support.

It is appropriate to recognise the efforts that are made to keep the House and the public informed of the desperate need for legislation of the sort that is before us. Mention should therefore be made of the Community Rights Project, which has its headquarters only about a yard outside my constituency in Waterloo road. Ron Bailey is the main worker for the project and he has been assisted in his campaign for this legislation by Daryl Upsall and others. The project has kept us on our toes. It has chivvied us over the past few days, perhaps even over-exhaustively, to ensure that no opportunity is lost and that everyone possible is present to support the Bill.

It is against that background, and on behalf of the Liberal party, that I give full support to the provisions in the Bill, which in their respective and different ways will enable local government to return to the principles for which and on which it was established. Its purpose was to bring government closer to the people and to allow the people to participate in what is done in their name.

The struggle among those who are elected can be generalised perhaps as the struggle between authoritarianism and libertarianism. It is the struggle between those who believe that when they take authority, or, rather, are given it — that is the essence of democracy — for a temporary period they are entitled to impose and those who believe that they should always act accountably in a representative capacity. Those who are elected to act on behalf of others should be accountable, and the more accountable they are, the better. A parallel premise is that information and knowledge are good. Democracy relies on information, and the more information that is made available, the better. Information provides a safety net and is not a danger.

There have been many attempts to open up government and I hope that another attempt will be made in another area of government later today when the House considers the practices of water authorities. The leader of the Liberal party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), introduced a Bill last year to get rid of secrecy in national Government. In doing so he followed the excellent earlier attempt of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud). It can be said generally that there has developed an increasingly urgent feeling — this can certainly be said of the Liberal party — that every effort should be made to ensure that government is open. Nothing is more ludicrous than when actions are taken in the name of others at meetings that are closed to the public.

We in this place set a good example. The proceedings of the House and its Committees are open to the public, as they should be. It is that practice that we seek to translate to local government, where over the years, especially since 1960, more and more councils have resiled from the practice of open meetings. They have done so by moving more and more work from committees to sub-committees which are formed by delegated groups of councillors. That has happened since 1960 when the first Bill on this subject was introduced by the right hon. Lady who is now the Prime Minister when she was a Back Bencher, in her first speech to the House. Councils have taken the view that, with the formation of smaller groups

they can close their doors on the public. The doors of councils have been closed increasingly and it is only of late that the extent to which they have been closed has been realised, together with the necessity to burst them open.

The hon. Member for Hornchurch has rightly paid tribute to the three authorities of Brent, Bradford and Derbyshire but he was not quite accurate in his description of their political status. It is interesting that there is no overall political control of the Bradford and Brent authorities. Lack of overall political control does not necessarily imply that there is good behaviour in local government, but I believe that it makes it more likely.

Bradford has done an excellent job in opening the doors of the council to the public. The authority has allowed its activities to be reported and written about. A booklet is available entitled "Bradford City Council Behind Open Doors". It has put its officers at the service of this cause and they have travelled to many different areas. They were present when the three party group leaders of Bradford city council came to receive freedom of information awards this month from the Campaign for Freedom of Information. It has produced a code of practice on public access to documents and generally has given a sterling lead.

Brent is another good example. There is no overall political control in Brent, indeed, the party with most councillors is in opposition. The Conservative group rules but only with the support of my three Brent Liberal colleagues. On this issue the three Liberal members of the Brent authority are equally keen to ensure that Brent retains the principle of open government.

The third authority to which the hon. Member for Hornchurch referred was Derbyshire, which is not a split authority in political terms.

ILEA deserves recognition for the steps that it has taken to open its doors to the public. In other respects it can be criticised but in many areas of its activity it has made itself accountable to the public. It has done a good job and has set an example. That has also been recognised by an award for its efforts over the past year.

There are other good examples of open government, especially in local authorities where there is no overall political control. More and more councils do not have single party government and my party believes, as I do personally, that that is in many ways a good thing. It means that the tyranny of the numerical majority, which can often be contrary to the interests of the individual, is stopped. However, the battle still remains to be fought. Many of the provisions set out in the Bill offer a framework for the many and various stages of the battle.

Clause 1 deals with admission to meetings. That is obviously important because without the right of attendance one does not know what is going on. Some authorities allow the public to attend meetings but not to see documents while others allow the public to see documents but not to attend meetings. Some authorities prevent the public from attending meetings and from seeing documents. They are the worst offenders. There is a need for general improvement and the Bill provides ways of achieving exactly that.

Clause 2 seeks to provide access to minutes. Even such a small element of local government activity can be open to considerable abuse. I received a letter in August 1984 from Willie Hamilton, a borough councillor from the east Yorkshire borough of Beverley, which is commonly known as Beverley borough council. He complained about the abuse of the council in its failure to produce minutes of meetings of its committees and sub-committees for verification and signing at the next or following meeting, which is a requirement that is laid down by the Local Government Act 1972. Those who support the Bill believe that that Act was the second step in developing what was done in 1960.

Apparently, the Beverley councillors receive an agenda for each council meeting and a record of what happened at the previous meeting, but only at the very last moment. It seems that they can make alterations to the minutes only by tabling formal amendments to be discussed at the following meeting. This means that if minutes are inaccurate or, even worse, falsified, it is impossible for minority parties to amend them. Beverley borough council was composed in August 1984 of 53 councillors, 36 of them being Tories with 11 Liberals, five Labour and one independent. Since 1974 the Tories at Beverley have been able effectively to prevent any corrections of minutes.

Clauses 3 and 4 deal with access to documents. I received a letter from Mr. Peter McBride of Tunbridge Wells in June 1984. He sent me a copy of a newspaper article from a publication entitled *News in Focus* of 3/4 April. The article described the Kent war emergency handbook, which has been produced by Kent county council and paid for by Kent ratepayers. It advises on what one should do in civil defence terms if, as it describes, "the bomb drops". It goes on to say, amongst other things, that a nice cup of tea will be needed. That is probably a slight underestimate of the response of most people in such circumstances and of the action that they would find appropriate.

Mr. McBride wrote and asked whether he could have a copy of the handbook referred to in the article. It was denied him on the ground that it was not for general issue and was only for those trained in civil defence. I have not read the handbook, but if one of its major conclusions stresses the need for a cup of tea, a kettle and social amenities in the shelters not much training can be required. Only investigative detective work by a reporter who eventually managed to get hold of the information and put it in a paper which was distributed freely led to the public being given the information that it should have had straightaway.

One could give further and worse examples. One such bad example involves the Labour-controlled Southwark borough council. It overcharged some of its tenants when they exercised their right to buy. It refused to publish or to divulge the names and addresses of those involved and it refused to tell those who had been overcharged. Former tenants had to guess whether they had been overcharged and write to the council. The council said that if they were right and they had been overcharged they would receive their money back. That is ludicrous. The information was made public only when the *South London Press* published on its front page a list of all the addresses, which meant that the malevolent as well as the aggrieved could discover who was about to receive a windfall, although in reality few people received any cash because the difference was made up using mortgages. It was left to the local paper to leak a so-called confidential document. The public cannot be expected to fully enjoy their rights when this sort of behaviour goes on.

Such behaviour does no good to local government. I hold no brief for the Labour party in Southwark; indeed, the contrary is true. Such behaviour, however, does no

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

good to the status of local government anywhere. I cannot believe either that it enhances the prospects of success for the majority party in such councils.

I shall concentrate on the clause which deals with access for councillors. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) has direct personal experience from his local council of further instances. The subject has been publicised recently since my colleague, the leader of the Liberal group on Hackney council, took the council to court because it refused to allow him access to information which he said that he needed. I refer to Councillor Gamper, a member of the housing services committee, the public services committee and chairman of the Shoreditch district housing committee. That was his status when he sought to see the minutes of the direct labour sub-committee.

Hackney borough council refused him access to those minutes and to the sub-committee's meetings. On 14 November Mr. Justice Lloyd, in a well publicised judgment, said:

"Hackney London Borough Council had acted unlawfully by denying the applicant, a Liberal councillor, access to the meetings and the documents of the direct labour organisation (DLO) subcommittees in that they had failed to ask themselves the correct question, namely, whether the applicant had a need to know information in order properly to perform his duties as a councillor and by denying the applicant such access the council reached a decision that no reasonable council could have reached on asking themselves the correct question."

That was a trail-blazing decision which has already had repercussions. David Gamper tells me that he has now been able to attend for the first time the direct labour sub-committee which has produced information which is useful to him. It is not all information that he can use to attack the council. For example, he has been able to establish that the council did what it was required to do in the tendering process by submitting 60 per cent. of its work to competitive tendering. He has also discovered that none of the non-direct labour organisations in fact tendered because they would have been required to use some of the restrictive practices operated by the direct labour organisation. In many ways Mr. Gamper is now in a better position to do his job and to advise people.

Mr. Ernie Roberts (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Hackney borough council has adopted a policy of decentralising housing management. That information is now readily available not only to all councillors, as it should be, but to the citizens because their housing services and conditions are affected. It is not good enough to argue that a councillor needs information in order to attack the council. That should be no reason for obtaining information. Information should be given for the purpose of assisting the council and the citizens to solve their problems.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Member is right. I hope that I made it clear that information is needed not only to make an attack on the majority party but so that individuals can be better represented.

Hackney has complied with the judgment and the committee is now open. The same pressure is now on elsewhere. In Newcastle the Liberal leader, John Shipley, acting in the light of the Hackney judgment, told the council that he would take legal action if it kept the policy and resources working group closed to all opposition members. I agree with his claim that he has a right to know. But the leader of the council refused.

The Bill is necessary because some authorities do not consider themselves bound by the implications of the judgment in the case of Mr. Gamper and Hackney even though there are examples of movement, as in East Devon district council, where the council has changed its rules in response to the judgment.

One important and worrying aspect has come to light. It appears that in Hackney there was pressure on the majority Labour group from the Tory group to appeal against the judgment. That is not the only example of conspiracy between the two largest parties to exclude other parties from knowledge. That is dangerous and equally undesirable. I am glad to say that Hackney resisted the pressure. It would be appalling if, to keep Buggins' turn by the two major parties alternating and being always in the know, the smaller parties and independents were denied access to information.

Many councils need a Bill such as this to make them do what we believe they should have done a long time ago to achieve open government. Sutton council is still not perfect even though the hon. Member for Hornchurch is in the vanguard and waving the flag. I am told that a submission from Sutton to the Department of Education and Science about the transfer of a nursery school to a Sutton infants school recently was not made available to the local ward councillor, to the leader of the opposition or to the opposition education spokesman. In Colwyn bay a ward councillor was not allowed to see documents or to attend meetings to discuss a waste disposal site in her ward.

There was a controversial battle in Cambridge for many years over the redevelopment of the Kite, an old part of the centre of Cambridge. The redevelopment scheme was never discussed in the presence of the leader of the opposition on Cambridge council.

The television programme "A Week in Politics", made after the Hackney judgment, rightly criticised other councils as well. It took examples from councils where each of the three major parties has failed. The programme revealed that the redevelopment plan for the heart of Bromley—a major and controversial proposal involving a relief road—was discussed at a meeting attended only by Conservative councillors and employees of the building firm Wimpey. The Tory leader of Bromley council had the effrontery to say on that programme:

"There has been no secrecy."

That was in spite of the fact that the council committee that agreed the town centre relief road document met in secret. That is unacceptable. A member of the Heart of Bromley residents' association appeared on the programme and pointed out that the people of Bromley heard only suspicions and rumours. They were given no facts. That is bad for democracy.

To show my impartiality, I will give an example from the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, where Labour is the largest party, but there is a non-Labour administration including two Liberals. The Labour party is excluded from the policy committee meetings that make many of the key decisions in Hammersmith and Fulham. If my persuasive powers have not yet managed to convince my two colleagues and the Conservatives on that council to change their ways, we need the Bill to make them do so.

The Bill is an attempt to correct many of the failures of local government over the years. Secrecy has become more prevalent and there are more tyrants in the town halls. Councillors were not elected to be tyrants. Every time that a decision is taken in secret, there are more rumours and more suspicions. The confidence of the electorate, reflected in turnouts at local elections, is further sapped.

All of us who support the Bill hope that it will have a speedy passage so that the concept that people in local government should be able to think that they were elected to govern in secret will be shown to be unacceptable. The law must make sure that such secrecy will be forbidden.

11.12 am

Mr. Charles Irving (Cheltenham): I apologise to the House for having been absent for part of the debate. My absence was in connection with substantial improvements in the catering Department which I am sure will be welcome to the House. Let us hope that those talks will be as fruitful as we hope that the Bill will be.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on having the foresight to introduce legislative proposals that are topical, sensible and, above all, conducive to much more openness in local government.

I had the honour to be a member of the Gloucestershire county council for 33 years and I have been a member of Cheltenham borough council for the past 36 years. So I can claim, with some modesty, experience of the different trends in local government over the years. I am glad to say that in my constituency, as in many others, there has been a vast improvement in the way in which the matters that we are discussing have been handled.

Although there have been many attempts since the 1960 Act to improve and tighten up the rules governing public access to local government meetings and documentation and, more particularly, the rules governing exemption and confidentiality, it is lamentable and, I believe, a self-imposed denial of the very freedoms that, as democrats, we claim to champion, that, in spite of consistent cross-party support, Parliament has failed to open up the functions and operations of both local and central Government.

With the exception of the improvements made in the Local Government Act 1972, the cause of democratic development of local authorities has ground to a halt. Indeed, in the absence of further legislation and guidance in these matters, there has been a temptation and a tendency in councils throughout the country to restrict the accessibility of information, to deny the public access to certain carefully defined meetings and to encourage the evolution of "political groupings" and so-called sub-committees, hidden from the public eye and often off limits to opposition councillors.

Decisions are frequently made behind closed doors and are often founded on information that is not made generally available. Those decisions are then rubber-stamped by committee and council meetings where opposition or even criticism is muted, if only because of a lack of knowledge or information relevant to those decisions.

President Madison of the United States said in 1822:

> "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

How right those words were and how relevant they are to today's debate.

I am reminded of the ring of confidence exuded by a councillor in a well-known seaside town who devised a novel way of making sure that the public and many of his colleagues were barred. He made all his decisions on the telephone. The committees never met, but the deliberations by phone were reported to the council and approved.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Irving: No, I never do. My hon. and learned Friend may talk to me on the telephone.

Nottinghamshire has 39 secret sub-committees and North Bedfordshire has 16. I do not cast any special indictment on those authorities. There are so many more, but I must not take the time of the House to list them all.

I am glad to say with some conviction that my own borough council has a comparatively good record, though, even there, some of our new committee chairmen find great difficulty in giving a consise answer to a probing question. Of course, that sometimes happens here.

In one authority in Wales, the straying animals sub-committee and the highly confidential slaughterhouse sub-committee conduct their interesting affairs in secret, protected from the outside world's prying eyes.

I do not know what the members of a slaughterhouse sub-committee do, but I imagine that they slaughter. I cannot see why they should have the temerity not to let people know whom they are slaughtering. It might make interesting reading. I am sorry that that is happening in Wales. It is such a lovely place. I do not want to get slaughtered there after making this speech. Perhaps I will keep away for a few months.

There can be no excuse in a modern western democracy for persisting with a cloak of secrecy around so much that need not be secret. We all recognise that there are highly sensitive affairs of state which, in the public interest, must be kept confidential. Those are properly protected in the Bill.

If we are to judge by the turnout in successive local elections, the public appear to be uninterested in who runs their town halls. The reasons behind moves to restrict access to meetings and documents seem in most cases to be extremely tenuous and such moves alienate the electors who feel distanced and irritated by secretative behaviour. That leads inevitably to suspicion and unease, and ultimately to a lack of confidence on the part of the public. Questions arise about councillors' motivations and intentions, and whether council meetings reveal the whole truth.

In supporting the Bill, I welcome particularly the "Reasons for Confidentiality" which form the schedule to the Bill. A clear and comprehensive list of rules relating to cases where meetings or documents should or may be restricted must be of vital importance, and is long overdue. If enacted, the regulations would make clear where people stand, and how far councillors may go in the area of confidentiality. It would remove misunderstanding and suspicion, which are currently the order of the day.

Equally important is the aim of the Bill to open up sub-committee meetings to the press and the public. It is the proliferation of those sub-committees — they may be

[Mr. Irving]

representative of or confined to one party — that has contributed to the ever-growing facade of secrecy that threatens to develop into a vicious circle or confidentiality trap into which councillors, through fear or mischief, may unwittingly or knowingly fall.

I recollect a letter that was sent to me showing that a certain authority had 34 sub-committees, none of which was open to the public and none of which reported to the council. They produced only unreported minutes. That was not a particularly good record. The proliferation of sub-committees, which may or may not be representative, is a danger. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) referred to one party in that respect. The practice may lead to the exclusion of factions that have a useful contribution to make.

The Bill is moderate and reasonable and should commend itself to most of the moderate and reasonable people in the House. I hope that it will have as much support as possible from the Government. In the long run there is nothing to be gained from secrecy in Government, and for those few areas where confidentiality needs to be maintained for reasons of law, public interest or personal privacy, it is essential that the credibility of local authorities should also be maintained. In my view, the key to that credibility lies in the maximum possible disclosure of the operations and affairs of those authorities.

I welcome the Bill as a measure that recognises the right of citizens in a democracy to learn about the activities of their local authorities. As democratic representatives and as a Parliament we have a duty to defend and promote the public interest. That is why I am more than glad to support the Bill.

11.23 am

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I can only echo the well-chosen remarks of the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Irving), although I shall not echo his refusal to be interrupted, or his propensity to speak on the telephone to the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn), lest any conversation be sexually misconstrued.

I echo the welcome to the Bill given by the hon. Member for Cheltenham, and the congratulations that have been extended by all the previous speakers to the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), not only on winning a place in the ballot, which requires no great skill, but on choosing to introduce a Bill dealing with access to information in local government. It is an extremely important issue, and the Bill, which is well-presented, deserves to pass on to the statute book.

The Bill, which finishes in Hornchurch, comes to us via Bootle and Bermondsey. Therefore, I widen my congratulations to include the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts). The Bill is important as a matter of principle, because open government is an essential right of our citizens. Obviously, that right applies to both national and local government. Open government —the right to know—is basic to democracy. I should like to see the principle extended to central Government. I regard the Bill as a trial measure advancing the cause of freedom of information in a practical and straightforward way.

The local power élite can be a very closed and secretive organisation; indeed, it can become a self-perpetuating and self-protecting conspiracy against the people. That can happen particularly where majorities are large and where it suits the convenience of the governing party. My remarks cover both major parties in this House.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey suggested that the right to know is encouraged only where there are hung councils. Hung councils operate under many disadvantages, particularly in regard to decision-making. Some rather sordid political manoeuvres tend to be involved, yet I have to admit that the pressure to make information public accumulates in regard to councils where the party balance is close. However, the principle of access to information should apply to all councils as a matter of right.

Local government is often more secretive than national Government, partly because there is not the same insistent pressure for information from the local media. At one time local newspapers were highly competitive in bringing information to the public. I recall the old joke about the visitor arriving in Bradford. Not being sure of the name of the local paper, he approached the paper boy and said, "Unfortunately, I have forgotten the name of the paper"——

Mr. Geoff Lawler (Bradford, North): The *Telegraph and Argus*.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentlman. I know the paper only too well. I was referring to my joke character. The visitor went up to the paper boy and asked for one of the local papers whose name began with an A. The lad said, "They all begin with t — there's t' *Telegraph*, t'*Argus* and t'*Observer*". They are now amalgamated into one newspaper. That is taking place everywhere. There is a local monopoly of news which has made newspapers less trenchant, less inquiring and less vigorous. It has had the effect of heightening the secrecy of local government. Information is the fuel of democracy. Therefore, it must be widely and freely available as a matter of right.

The prospects for the Bill appear to be very good and I wish it every success. It deserves to pass and must pass. It has the support of a large number of local authorities. In the document "Secrets File No. 9 — Central and Eastern England Edition", there is an impressive list of local authorities supporting the Bill. It is supported by 150 Members of Parliament. I hope that it will be encouraged on its way by the Government. It is good to have with us today the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), for whom we all have a high regard. So many angels hover around the head of this Bill that I have become a little suspicious. Is the legislation strong enough with that amount of support?

I should have liked the Bill's provisions to extend to the ad hoc authorities that cover many aspects of our lives and subjects of great importance to the citizen. The ad hoc authorities do not have a clear democratic base and, therefore, do not rest on the basis of public support. It is more important to know what the ad hoc authorities are doing and to have access to information about what they are doing. This is particularly the case with health authorities. It has been suspected that political appointments are made to health authorities, and that

suspicion arises especially when there is a purge of chairmen and they are replaced by former Conservative candidates. It could be thought that those appointments are made to further privatisation and to stifle the natural discontent that would be ventilated against any Health Service spending cuts or any failure to keep spending in line with the needs not only of medicine but of the population.

Often there is a fetish for secrecy within these ad hoc authorities which is inimical to the basis of democracy. For example, the Grimsby health authority proposed, for no good reason as far as I understand it, to make disclosure of confidential information a dismissable offence and to write that provision into the code of conduct and conditions of employment. It was as though the authority was trying to erect an Official Secrets Act. Such steps are being taken when we at the centre are trying to dismantle an Official Secrets Act which is far too powerful. That legislation is being used as a sledgehammer to crack a nut, and that "nut" can be interpreted in several ways.

I believe that it is totally undesirable to write into the conditions of employment of health authority employees an insistence on confidentiality, without defining what constitutes "confidential information". Is "confidential information" the condition of Mrs. Bloggs in ward 3? Are the internal arrangements an authority can make when allocating scarce resources or making cuts the types of matter that are best discussed publicly? Those matters are best known publicly so people can check on the authority's exercise of power. One cannot help but feel that the desire to insist on confidentiality in such a way is due principally to a wish to suit the convenience of the organisations and their officials. That is not right. We are using a blunderbuss when a slap on the wrist is all that is necessary.

The right to know about the activities of ad hoc authorities is as crucial as the right to know about the activities of elective local government. Unfortunately, the Bill does not deal with ad hoc authorities. It deals with elected local authorities. Indeed, if we go on at length talking about these elected authorities, we shall frustrate an attempt later in the day to open up the activities of the water authorities, and that opening up is certainly desirable.

The Bill poses no problems to people in Grimsby. I was happy to see Grimsby borough council's response to the "Local Government Access to Information Survey" carried out by the local government and health advisory group. According to the council's reply, and as I know from experience of the council, access to information is exactly what one would like it to be. There are open committees, and sub-committees are closed only on grounds that are permissible under the schedule to this legislation. That is the most for which we can ask. On the question about public access to minutes, the town clerk replied:

> "There is no provision under Standing Orders relating to public access to minutes, etc. A copy of the monthly minutes is, however, lodged with the Central Reference Library and is available for inspection on request. Additionally, copies may be had from the Town Clerk on request, on repayment; in fact, a substantial number of copies are supplied to regular subscribers on this basis. Copies of agendas (but not reports) are supplied to all members of the public attending meetings."

There is access to information and availability of information in the way required by this legislation. I am glad that this system operates in Grimsby and that the legislation's proposals will cause no problems to the town.

I support the Bill's basic principles. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said so eloquently, secrecy breeds uncertainty. Secrecy breeds rumours, circulates trivia and leads to suspicion, which is harmful to good and efficient democracy. Openness forces authorities to make better, more responsible and more clear-cut decisions. The most important aspect is the simple principle that democracy implies a right by the people to know what their representatives are doing on their behalf.

Providing open access to information might be an awkward task for councillors or, indeed, for the Labour party in local government, especially when Labour has a huge majority. I can imagine that open access to information would be frustrating for an incoming Labour Government if this legislation operated nationally, because powerful pressure groups would use that right to gather ammunition against the Government, just as awkward individuals and pressure groups are likely to use the right to know to gather information against a councillor or party of which they disapprove for political reasons. That will not be abuse of the legislation. It is an inevitable consequence, because we have to put up with and accept this principle which is so important, right and central to democracy.

I hope that other hon. Members will make briefer speeches than I have, because we shall have the opportunity today to strike two blows for open government. In a sense, Friday is the Back Benchers' playground, and words can expand to fill the available space. If they do so, we shall frustrate an important Bill on the water authorities. I do not wish to do so. If we are succinct and sharp and back this Bill to the hilt, we shall be able to achieve two major advances in one day.

11.38 am

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): This is one of those rare and agreeable occasions when there appears to be general agreement among all parties about the desirability of a measure. On looking back over some 50 years in public life, I am convinced that excessive secrecy is a major enemy of good government at any level. It militates against the development of a responsible democracy. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, it leads to suspicion, to misunderstanding and, perhaps most important of all to the communities local government serves, to bad decisions.

The Bill is concerned with access to information in local government. Reference has been made to the effect of excessive secrecy on central Government. I recall particular instances in my political life when central Government have inflicted great injury on the national interest and even on the national honour as a result of Ministers and civil servants keeping Parliament and, therefore, the people in the dark.

I have in mind two appalling cases where the deliberate suppression of facts had devastating consequences that could have been avoided — as those who took the decisions knew — had Parliament been made aware of them. One was the enforced deportation of hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens at the end of the war and for two years after to certain death or slavery in Siberian

[Sir Bernard Braine]

prison camps. Parliament was kept completely unaware of what was done and the civil servants responsible minuted that there would be a row if Parliament were told.

The other case was the knowledge of Cabinet Ministers that oil sanctions against Rhodesia were being breached and the concealment of that. The Royal Navy was made to stand guard in the Beira straits which gave the world the impression that we were doing our duty and preventing oil from reaching the rebel Smith Government when, of course, it was coming from elsewhere. As a result, the rebellion continued and led inevitably to a bloody civil war the consequences of which are perhaps not yet ended. I can think of other examples.

The Bill is not concerned with great questions of external policy, but the principle is the same. If we suffer from the British disease of excessive secrecy at the top, it is not surprising to find it throughout the administrative structure and operating at local government level.

The Bill has been needed for a long time. I shall not go over the case that was put so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and in the excellent speeches that followed. I am in broad agreement with everything that has been said so far. The best and most responsible people in local government in all political parties, dedicated to the service of their communities would also agree. I am delighted to find that three local authorities are already implementing the spirit of the Bill before it has been enacted by Parliament. The Conservative leader on the Bradford city council, Councillor Ronnie Farley, has said:

"Local Government should have nothing to fear from public accountability. Only the incompetent and prejudiced need lose any sleep over the Bill."

The Labour leader of the same council has said:

"I look forward to seeing Bradford going beyond the Bill and allowing the public, in certain circumstances, the right to speak at meetings in the near future."

In the rather odd circumstances in which Brent council finds itself — it is now Conservative-controlled — the Conservative leader, Councillor Bob Lacey, has said:

"Particularly where there is a large ethnic minority population, it is essential to have open government and easy access to files in order to allay people's fears that they may be discriminated against. We see the opening-up of files as a logical extension of democracy."

To show how impartial I am in all this, permit me to quote Councillor Bill Lithgoe, the Labour group secretary in Derbyshire:

"As far as I am aware the move towards formalising our position on open government in line with the Bill has produced no administrative headaches, practically no costs"—

that is a bonus—

"and no inconvenience in the first six months of implementation, and no request from a member of the public has made the transition unworkable."

Here is local government moving ahead of Parliament. We should recognise that and pay tribute to it. I am asked to say that Essex county council warmly welcomes the Bill. I am not surprised. I have been an Essex Member for about 35 years, and our county has been under both Labour and Conservative control. The council is extremely well and prudently managed. I am not saying that from time to time it is not open to criticism, because all local authorities are, but it has never been criticised by any Government for the management of its affairs or the way that it looks after its ratepayers.

Thus, the best of local government and the most dedicated of its elected representatives are asking us to pass the Bill. Of course we shall need to look at the Bill in Committee. I was delighted when my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch told my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), in respect of a point upon which the Association of County Councils was critical of the Bill, that that was a matter that was already engaging his attention and that he was sure it could be dealt with in Committee.

There are other measures to be brought before us today and other hon. Members who wish to speak so I shall not detain the House. We are grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch for using his good fortune in the ballot to introduce this timely and welcome measure. We are all agreed that this is one of the most important measures for the improvement of democracy at the grass roots that could have been brought before us.

The Bill will make for healthier and more open local government and, most important of all, it will encourage greater public participation. I hope that it will have a swift transition to the statute book.

11.48 pm

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): It is plain from what right hon. and hon. Members have said, and from the way in which they have nodded in agreement with various remarks, that the comment about information being the fuel of democracy is generally accepted. On that basis, it would be a welcome change in local government for the Bill to receive a swift Second Reading and to be enacted fairly quickly.

I speak with some experience of local government. I am still a member of Portsmouth city council and Hampshire county council, and have been since 1971. Portsmouth's motto is "Heaven's light our guide". The city has made great play of that, but the people of Portsmouth and Hampshire might as well look to the heavens for more information because they do not receive it from Portsmouth or Hampshire.

Those two councils are classic examples of a gradual but nevertheless progressive decline in the amount of information that has been forthcoming to the people of that city and county. The reason is that the city and the county have been run by pint-sized, mini-dictators. They see it either as an opportunity to boost their egos or to carry through matters that they have not been successful in doing in their various business enterprises. As a result, the city has suffered irreparable damage.

Information is not forthcoming. Hampshire county council has a committee called the land sub-committee. It sounds as innocuous as some of the committees that hon. Members have mentioned. That committee runs virtually all the affairs of the county council. It has direct control over all the assets of the county council and makes most of the major decisions. The committee is held in private, which has been the case since 1974. Its membership consists of all the chairmen of the county council and two or, sometimes, three members of the minority parties. The minutes of the committee are sometimes not available for public debate for at least two months after the committee meeting. That is ludicrous because on many occasions many of the items it considers deal with the substantial land holdings of the county council, in the form of homes and schools, which are of obvious interest to local residents.

For reasons best known to that committee — the standing orders of the county council have been engineered to make secrecy acceptable — information about those homes, facilities and resources has been denied to the people who must foot the bill and bear the responsibility for the decisions when they are implemented.

The same is true of Portsmouth, where ludicrous positions also arise. When decisions are being made whether to proceed with road schemes or to demolish homes, the last people to be told of such a proposal are those who live in the homes. I make no apology for saying that during the 15 years that I have been involved in local authorities I have deliberately given information to both the press and the people involved. I believe that they have a democratic right to know that things are being done which will affect their lives, properties and futures. Yet they are often the last to be told. If I had not disclosed the information, it would have been months before those people heard about the suggestions. In some instances, if the scheme had been dropped, they would never have known that their properties had been under threat of blight or even demolition.

All hon. Members must be worried about that. All hon. Members must want to expose and change that. We would be kidding ourselves if we were to suggest that everything going on in local government could easily be overturned by this measure, because it will not. I hope that this will be the first of many attempts to open up meetings, reduce secrecy and make information available.

I shall give one classic example concerning housing in Portsmouth. Three elected representatives of a large council estate had the temerity to ask for a report about the condition of the houses on the estate. The matter was of universal concern to everyone living on the estate. The report was produced at the instigation of the housing committee. One of the three elected members for the ward was a member of the housing committee. When the three representatives asked for the report, they were refused access to it on the ground that it would not be in the public interest for them to have it. It is ludicrous that a local authority can produce a report and refuse it to three members, albeit of a minority party, who needed it to act in the interests of the people who elected them. That is only one of many examples of what goes on in Portsmouth. I am proud to represent part of Portsmouth in the House.

There have been many such instances during the past decade. I am not proud to say that secrecy has become more acceptable in those two authorities because of the lack of will of some elected members to get involved. From what I have witnessed, it appears that the majority of the majority party on both councils are happy to pass the buck and the responsibility to a few members. They are willing to sit back and allow the chairman to assume an almighty powerful position, or the leader of the council to assume that he has a god-given right to negotiate on behalf of the whole council and to expect his decision to be rubber-stamped when he deems it the right moment to make it public. That is ludicrous.

I am the only member on Portsmouth city council who represents the alliance party. The council's standing orders were recently changed to prevent me from being able to move a notice of motion, which would have enabled me to prise out more information from the local authority. It was done along the lines suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). There was a conspiracy between the Labour and Conservative groups on the council. They did it because they genuinely like this cosy position, which allows them to carve up matters and to keep secret matters that they wish to keep secret. Recently, they changed the standing orders to prevent members who are in a minority from gaining access to information that they need to do their job.

I do not believe that an elected councillor has a roving commission to examine every file on every issue. However, I have a democratic right, which was given to me by the electorate, to examine any information that I need to enable me to vote and make the right decision. Time and again decisions are made by members who are totally ignorant of the facts. Portsmouth is to be rate capped. Most of the decisions about how Portsmouth will get itself out of the mess that the Government have put it in have been taken behind closed doors. The people will not hear the options that were considered by members of the council or of the officer corps.

In Portsmouth it is ludicrous that the chief officer's group considers a long list of available options to cut expenditure, while the councillors receive only the amended list. When councillors have the cheek to suggest that they have a right to know what was on the original list, we are told that it is of no interest or importance. How more stupid can it get than for a local authority to say to its members, "You are not entitled to know what each chief officer, whom you employ on behalf of the ratepayers, is talking about on behalf of the citizens of the city."?

Mr. Norris: I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's point. Those of us who have been and still are in local government recognise the circumstances that he described. Does he recognise that there are genuine difficulties in setting the parameters for publicity, especially in relation to the work of officers? Unless we are extremely careful in Committee, one of the difficulties that will arise from the Bill is that officers will not feel that they have the liberty to examine all the options. We would not want to deny them that. The hon. Gentleman should address himself to circumstances in which it might be desirable that officers at least should feel that they can discuss among themselves how they should approach a policy or initiative.

Mr. Hancock: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point. Officers must accept that they are as responsible to the citizens of the authority as elected councillors. They must be seen to stand by what they say and do as much as elected councillors. I am sick to death of the way in which local government officers want to hide behind the coat tails of elected members. They want to talk about matters and suggest that matters happen, and when they believe that the time or the political climate is right they want to expose their ideas to the inner caucus of the star chamber and say, "We believe this is in the interests of the city".

In the end, a stupid, small-minded council leader will say, "I will expose that to the public and take all the credit for it." What he does not understand are the inner thoughts of the officers behind it, who have no direct responsibility.

I am sick to death of the suggestion that local government officers are a breed apart and that they are

[Mr. Hancock]

above being criticised by the people who pay their wages. I have seen too many examples of lethargic, lack-lustre local government officers being allowed to reach the top in local government because they have been shielded for too long by the willingness of council leaders to accept that that is what happens in local government. I am sure that other hon. Members who have experience of local government are also sick of it.

On behalf of the people who elected me in Portsmouth, I hope that the Bill will be passed. It may not do much to help in authorities such as Bradford and Derbyshire, which have already accepted that information is critical to democracy, but it will go a long way to improving what I consider to be the dangerous position in my city and county. I hope that it will go a little way to exposing those pocket-sized dictators who believe that leading a council is something that they can do for ever without being exposed to public criticism.

With other hon. Members, I pay tribute to local newspapers and radio stations, which work tirelessly in trying to expose many of the incidents about which we have talked. Reports in my local newspaper, *The News*, have often been the first and only opportunity for local people to know what their council is doing. The newspaper could do that because people like myself, who are sick of the secrecy, allowed it to have reports that we were given by officers who were far from happy with what was happening.

I urge hon. Members to support the Bill.

12.1 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): For 10 years before my election to the House I worked as a journalist, and for most of that time I specialised in reporting local councils. In the mid-1970s, as municipal correspondent of *The Journal* in Newcastle, I reported on nothing else. Therefore, I have some experience of this subject and expecially of the inadequacies of present arrangements. I have no hesitation in supporting the Bill and in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on the work that he has done. My only criticism is that in some areas the Bill does not go far enough. However, given the trend towards liberalisation and freedom of information, I accept that the boundaries of the right to know can be pushed forward at a later date.

We should not underestimate the cunning and deviousness of vested interests in local authorities, which may be eloquent in public in support of freedom of information, but which in practice use every device to prevent contentious, embarrassing or even innocuous matters from being put before the public gaze.

In that context, I was not surprised to read the brief on the Bill from the Association of County Councils. It is headed, "Memorandum of Views", which should be translated as the case against. Paragraph 2 states:

"The Association has noted with interest the work of the Campaign for Freedom of Information and its broad objectives",

which I interpret as meaning that the ACC does not like what is being done. Paragraph 3 reads:

"The Local Government (Access to Information) Bill represents, therefore, one part only of the work of the Campaign"—

in other words, the unacceptable part. The end of the paragraph states:

"Considerable anomalies would be created by the enactment of legislation in only one area"—

in other words, please look elsewhere first.

Paragraph 4 states:

"The decision-making processes of local government as a whole are demonstrably the most open and publicly accessible of any Government or public sector body."

In other words, the association rejects the need for change. The paragraph continues:

"It is therefore, to some degree surprising that the first initiative has not been to tackle other areas where these procedures are not so well followed."

That is a clear attempt to persuade us to avert our gaze.

Paragraph 5 states:

"The Association has therefore suggested that, rather than the legislation proposed by this Bill, the better course might have been to prepare a Code of Practice which would be an effective means of securing the implementation of current good practice by all local authorities."

It will not have escaped the attention of the House that a code of practice has already been enshrined in a circular from the Department of the Environment some years ago. Nor will it have escaped the attention of the House that the code of practice puts no onus on local authorities to abide by its requirements.

Paragraph 6 states:

"However, the Association does not oppose the concept of this Bill, which is seen as being worthwhile."

It supports the concept, but, of course, it does not want the Bill to become legislation.

The memorandum ends with paragraph 8, which states:

"Finally, the Association would wish to draw attention to the fact that the precise meaning of the Bill may not be without doubt in some instances. If the Bill proceeds, it is urged that it should be considered in detail by the Parliamentary draftsman so that any ambiguities or obscurities may be removed, while preserving the intention behind the drafting."

Those acidic comments are the ultimate kick in the teeth. In code language, the ACC is saying that the Bill is meaningless and has been drawn up by amateurs.

That is the sort of language to which one is used in local authority documents, especially if one has reported local authorities for some time. It is an admirable example of bureaucratic obfuscation, but I am sure that it will not succeed in obscuring the issue for hon. Members. In any case, I draw some comfort from those remarks. The protestations of the ACC are a clear sign that the Bill would be effective and that it has county councils on the run.

Similar to the ACC brief was a letter that I received a few months ago from the chief executive of Tyne and Wear county council urging me to support the freedom of information campaign. I do not know whether the letter was sent tongue in cheek, but in reply I pointed out swiftly that more than 30 sub-committees, panels and working groups of that council were closed to the press, that every committee meeting was preceded by a meeting of the ruling group in order to make decisions, and that the history of the council was even worse. I did not receive a reply to my letter.

Such bodies will always support the principles of open government with their mouths, but we must not be fooled into believing that they will do so willingly in their minds. To illustrate the point, in 1975, Department of the Environment circular 45/75 was sent to local authorities advising them on how to behave with the press and public. It was a welcome, healthy and liberal circular which most local authorities proceeded to ignore. In addition to the statutory obligations which many councils only grudgingly

followed, that enlightened circular advised authorities to throw open the doors of all sub-committees unless there was an overriding reason for not doing so. It especially told local authorities to make available minutes and agendas before meetings.

At that time I was reporting on Durham city and county councils, and later on Northumberland county council, Tyne and Wear county council and Newcastle city council. I also covered the Northumbria police authority, the water authority and the regional airports committee. Comparison of the approaches of those authorities was interesting, and showed the marked inadequacies in the law and the shortcomings of codes of practice and mere advisory circulars. Some authorities took their responsibilities on information seriously. They had a principled stance, not only complying with circular 45/75, but going further. Northumberland county council was especially enlightened at that time. To show that I take no party political line on this matter, may I say that Durham county council—at the other end of the political spectrum from Northumberland — was also co-operative. With both authorities, most meetings were open, papers were made available in advance and chief officers were open and contactable.

I often felt that, on the latter point, Durham county was the most enlightened of the lot, possibly because it had no press office or public relations department to act as a buffer or screen. I often think that it is the supreme irony that many councils should find it necessary to build up huge press departments and then spend, in total across the country, millions of pounds of public money on telling the public what they think the public should know about the council's affairs, when it should be the public who are telling the council, through the democratic process, what the council should be doing, and the council should be responding to public demand rather than the reverse.

The period to which I have been referring so far is 1974 to 1980, but I no longer have the same close working knowledge of day-to-day practice in those councils. I accept that there may have been changes for the better, but the very fact that individual councils change their attitude on information supply from year to year is an illustration of the fact that the legal base is inadequate, and the onus of responsibility tends to rest on whim rather than on clearly defined approach.

It also unfortunately leaves councils free to punish the press by changing their policy if a line is taken by the local press with which they do not agree. During the years to which I have referred, the authority with the worst record was Tyne and Wear county council. At one stage—it was about 1977—I was able to produce a list of over 50 of its subsidiary bodies that effectively met in secret. Not only did they meet in secret, but it was even a secret where they met, and in some cases a secret that they even existed.

Yet some of the most vital issues which directly affected people in that area were discussed in that atmosphere, including the progress of one of the most important projects in the north-east for many decades—the metro rapid transit system—and only leaks revealed where faults were arising within the management of the construction of the metro project and on other areas of concern to the public.

Matters of local civic scandal or misconduct, too, emerged only through leaks rather than through the correct accountable process of committees and sub-committees. Press reporters discovered that the only way to find out about these anonymous and secretive bodies was to creep down committee room corridors, listen at doors and snoop around the printing and committee support units where agendas were collated.

No agendas were issued in advance, so it was difficult to know even if a major committee was meeting, let alone what it was discussing. Often, if one could find out, the committee closed itself to the press within a few moments of starting business and discussed reports that were then not made available. Many, in fact most, reports were stamped at the top "Confidential" and were produced on pretty coloured paper, and with monotonous regularity they were enticingly waved in front of the press before being locked away for ever.

So paranoid were the leaders of Tyne and Wear at that time that I experienced on more than one occasion the farce whereby copies of reports were painstakingly collected from councillors before they were allowed to leave a meeting for fear that one guilty member might become incontinent and leak the document to the press. The adverse publicity that such actions necessarily inspired served only to drive the council deeper into the fox holes. Newspapers which dared to print something in advance were punished by the discriminatory withholding of a press announcement at a later date. The war of nerves that followed illustrates exactly why it is not conceivably in the interests even of local authorities to behave like that.

Tyne and Wear got such a bad reputation that most press reports were unsympathetic. That reputation persisted and was not unconnected with later moves in support of the council's abolition. To put the matter in more direct language, I should say that failure to communicate and the withholding of information convinced many that the whole structure should be radically reformed. A more open approach from the outset would have engendered an entirely different atmosphere, so that that council would have been seen to be a positive force for the good of people in the area rather than—as it was widely regarded, and still is—a negative force. Thus, freedom of information is not just in the interests of the press and the public, though obviously it is. It is also in the overriding interest of the councils.

I am glad to say that the position partially improved in regard to Tyne and Wear, but that was thanks only to a persistent and highly effective campaign masterminded by Mr. Stuart Garner, then the news editor of the *Newcastle Journal*, which continually highlighted the secrecy of the council, and the council was eventually shamed by the public into reforming some of its procedures, which it did most unwillingly. Agendas slowly began to appear in advance and closed meetings, at least in some cases, began to be open to the press and public.

So far I have dealt with illustrations from the past, albeit the recent past. This year there have been three, even more concerning, examples of the results of secret government involving intimidation and threats. In two cases they involved Labour councillors within the ruling group of Tyne and Wear, so in highlighting those I cannot be accused of crossing the political barrier.

The first councillor, John Hodgson, was disciplined and threatened because he leaked to a Conservative colleague on the council, a Mr. Martin Callaman, a document about proposed increased council funding of the so-called Newcastle centre against unemployment. That subject should have appeared, and been discussed in full, before a public committee, but it was discussed only in secret,

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

with strict instructions that the matter should not be divulged and should not reach the ears of the public. He was told that his views should have been made known only behind closed doors, and he was disciplined for not abiding by that request.

The second councillor, George Elsom, was given similar rough treatment by the strong-arm leaders of his group who were trying to railroad policy through the council at that stage. Mr. Elsom had expressed some misgivings on the miners' strike.

One of the motivations behind the suppression of information preventing the public from finding out what has been discussed behind closed doors is the fear that political parties have — I do not point at only one political party because, varying from one area to another, all political parties have been guilty of this — that the public may discover that there are disagreements between councillors within that group, and the leadership, possibly from an underlying feeling of insecurity, is afraid to reveal to the public that there are disagreements on policy.

That is an incredibly short-sighted approach to take because it redounds to the credit of political parties and leaderships that there is informed discussion, debate and, at times, disagreement within the group. For the leadership of a group to try to suppress all signs of disagreement merely belittles the reputation and standing not just of the leadership but of all the members of the group, who are then believed by the public merely to be vote fodder and toadies rather than people who are capable of thinking in the interests, and representing the people, of their areas.

The third example is rather different, although it involves the continued harassment and intimidation of another councillor, Ken Buckingham, an independent who has fought persistently for freedom of information. Both Mr. Buckingham and a former councillor, Mr. Chambers, have even claimed that they were subjected to physical violence because they were prepared to speak to the press on matters about which the ruling group felt they should not speak. Such desperate acts are bred in an atmosphere of secrecy which can grow when no law defines clearly the responsibilities of local government on free information.

I do not pretend that the council that I have mentioned is the only or worst offender. Nor do I claim that there are not other bodies which are equally guilty of holding back information which should properly be discussed in public and by the public. Those guilty might include the Government. However, I do not wish to imply that all councils are as unresponsive as Tyne and Wear. Many are open and sincere in their desire to be more open with information and policy decisions. As in so many spheres, it is not sufficient, unfortunately, to rely on those with a generous spirit. The full power of the law is needed to give a shock to those who are lagging behind. I therefore support the Bill fully and wish it a swift and safe passage into law.

12.20pm

Mr. Ernie Roberts (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I support many of the proposals in the Bill, although it is a sad commentary on present day society that we should have to consider such elementary democratic principles, which ought to have been put into operation many years ago. However, it is perhaps understandable that we should have to discuss basic democratic principles when the Government are prepared, at a stroke of the law, to wipe out local government in the form of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. We have a long way to go to impress on the Government the need for democracy in local government.

Everyone has a right to know. I have received many complaints from constituents about secrecy over their medical records. I helped one woman fight to get information about her medical records for many years. I have received complaints from parents who have been unable to get records on their children and from homeless people who want to know why they cannot have a house, why they are where they are on the housing list and how the housing list is made up. I have also received complaints from people who cannot find out what planning proposals there are for their street. Most recently, I had a complaint from a person who could not discover the proposed location of caravan sites.

I was chairman of the Coventry city council finance committee for some years. There was far too much secrecy in drawing up budgets. Ratepayers have a right to know about budgets, as it is their money which is being spent. They have a right to know why and how their money is allocated. There was far too much obstruction from bureaucrats working on behalf of the council. I opened up information about tenders but insisted that information about how decisions were taken was made available only after the job had been given. It is perfectly true that some people take advantage of information to get rich quick at the expense of others. That is the nature of our society but it is no excuse for secrecy. People still have the right to know. If people behave wrongly, the law should take care of them.

There are many Committees of the House that are open to the public and they often deal with more sensitive issues than are considered by many councils in secret. The press and other media often have access when the public do not, but the media are not the public. They might claim to represent the public but nobody has elected them. They represent only their newspaper owners and the political views of their newspaper. If the press is allowed into a meeting, so should members of the public. The result would be much more accurate news.

Local authorities are the biggest employers in the country and should set an example in industrial democracy. In its exclusions, the Bill mentions:

"disclosure of terms . . . likely to prejudice negotiations . . . with trade unions".

In negotiations between the employer, the local authority, and its work force, trade union representatives, the facts should be put on the table. Both sides should have the information on which a decision must be taken. It is wrong that only council officials have information on the issue under discussion. The Bill will help that process and give a lead to private employers. In spite of what Conservative Members sometimes say, workers are not greedy, selfish and grasping, like some entrepreneurs.

I learnt about industrial democracy from my trade union. All of its members have the right to know everything. The rules provide that members can get any information and find out how anyone voted on any issue. They have real democratic control. There is much to be learnt from how trade unions such as mine operate.

Hackney borough council, part of which I represent, has decided to decentralise all matters relating to housing. It has opened its committees to the public so that they can

hear for themselves what is being decided. Hackney is determined to have open government for the good reason that it wants people to be aware of the difficulties facing it as a result of rate capping and other policies that the Government have forced on it.

It is right that people should be able to attend meetings. By doing so they will be able to see who is telling the truth: whether it is the representatives of the Government or the council and its local Government representatives. I hope that the Bill will have a fair hearing and a fair discussion and that many of its proposals will come to fruition. It will be another step forward in the interests of democracy in this country.

12.30 pm

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I seem to be making a habit, as a lone Scotsman, of opposing Bills that the English unwisely foist upon themselves. I am glad that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) is in the House. He said that the Bill was conceived and parturated by angels. There is a saying, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." But since in this case the angels are so anxious to tread all over it there is a new saying: "Wise men rush in to stop angels from their folly." I modestly claim the cloak of wisdom.

I notice that all the angels and archangels who have spoken in favour of the Bill say that they welcome it in its entirety. I am glad that they do, with the exception of the sponsor of the Bill, because I welcome more heartily than I can say on behalf of all my countrymen clause 8:

"This Act shall not apply to Scotland".

I caution my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) not to try in Committee to extend the application of the Bill to Scotland. It would be extremely unfair. My colleagues who represent Scottish constituencies have not been forewarned about any attempt to extend the application of the Bill to Scotland. I should regard that as constitutionally improper. It would be a most unfortunate precedent in terms of a private Member's Bill.

Mr. Squire: My hon. and learned Friend heard my explanation of the reason for Scotland's temporary exclusion. Will he nevertheless accept that the whole House will have the fullest opportunity, should the Bill proceed through its subsequent stages, to reject the inclusion of Scotland, if the Committee so determines? In doing so, all of my hon. and learned Friend's countrymen may mass and assemble in the way that they normally mass and assemble.

Mr. Fairbairn: With the greatest respect I do not accept that explanation, although I wish to pay credit to the civility with which my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch has replied to the criticism of his measure, which I make for the sake of England. I had no idea that anybody would attempt to put this curse upon archangels. If, however, the English wish to put a curse upon our heads they can always outvote us by 11 to one on the Goschen formula. I repeat that I believe that it would be quite improper if this measure were to be extended to apply to Scotland. Since I am the only Scot in the House today, undoubtedly there will be no Scots on the Committee. Therefore, it would be quite improper if the Bill were to be so amended in Committee.

The first point that I wish to make to the Government before I make my points to the angels—the Government are an archangel; I see that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby thought I was falling into a trap—is this. As I hope to explain during the course of my remarks about the details of the Bill, it would have massive manpower implications for local authorities. Very large, indeed impossible numbers of people to calculate, would have to be added to the work force of local authorities. Secondly, the financial implications of the measure are, as I hope to demonstrate, incalculable but inevitably huge. Here we have a Government struggling with the leviathan of public expenditure, which good-intentioned people such as the angels, the harbingers of the Bill, created in the welfare state and cannot control. It would not matter if there were a Labour Government. They would have the same leviathan which they struggled to control when they were in office and could not do so. Although they do not help us to do the same, they should, even in secret, understand the problem.

The second matter which I wish to put to those who propose the Bill in the liberal and democratic name of freedom of information is that the Bill is far from giving freedom of information; far from reducing the secrecy of which my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) spoke. I do not take the view that to relieve the frustrations of a reporter is a good motivation for legislation. I thought that reporters liked secrets that they could unmask. That certainly is my recent experience. The interests of journalists — I mean reporters; I am a journalist—should not be taken into account.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby gave an example. If we were to have a meeting of the local health board — that is not covered by the Bill although the hon. Gentleman thought that it should be—to decide who should be appointed to it, it might decide that it had found a gentleman—to reverse the hon. Gentleman's example — who was good at scuppering any attempts at privitisation and who was good at increasing the staffing levels of unnecessary clerks. The announcement of that Labour council, as it would be, would not be that three people were interviewed, that the board realised that Dr. Obstinate was the guy who could frustrate the purposes of the Tory Government and therefore it had appointed him to the health board. It would say that three people were interviewed and that the unanimous decision of the health board was that Dr. Obstinate should be appointed. In other words, the genuine reason would be inevitably hidden.

I wish to expound that by looking at the implications of each clause. Let me make it plain to the House and to the Bill's sponsors that I am not in favour of secrecy but I understand the benefits of confidentiality and trust. I do not think that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby meant it, but he suggested that somebody who had leaked information had done nothing wrong. A breach of trust is always a serious matter. Whether that trust ought to be there in the first place may be disputed, but a breach of trust is a serious matter in all circumstances.

I do not wish to frustrate the debate in any way and I hope that no sponsor of the Bill will think that, if I pay attention to its consequences in some detail, I am attempting to do so. I am not.

Clause 2 deals with the minutes of proceedings. It is essential, as all will agree, that there should be a right to prevent parts of certain minutes being available to the public. For instance, suppose a committee or sub-committee of the local authority were discussing the adoption of baby Cotton. I am sure that there will be

[Mr. Fairbairn]

minutes of that matter in the relevant local authority. Nobody will suggest that those discussions should be open to the public. Therefore, the question immediately arises of what should and should not be open to the public.

Mr. Ernie Roberts: Why should information not be given in the baby Cotton case?

Mr. Fairbairn: Perhaps baby Cotton is not an especially good example. So far we do not know the name of the parents, and nor do I think we should. In all adoption procedures the purpose of ensuring the anonymity of the real parents is to prevent the traumatic event of the child, in later life, discovering who its real parents were and the reason why it was discarded, if that is not too brutal a term, by its real parents.

I could give the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Mr. Roberts) 100,000 examples or reasons why certain matters should be kept confidential. The real reason for decisions being kept confidential when they involve members of the public is not to hurt those concerned. For example, if two school teachers discuss a pupil and the pupil is able to read what the teachers have said about him, it would be deeply distressing to him in some instances. However, two teachers should be able to make a genuine assessment of a child. The discussions of lawyers and clients seem to have a holy grail of protection for reasons that we understand, but there are many circumstances in life of the simplest sort in which people will not be frank with one another if they know that anyone can discover what they have been saying.

I shall give an example. If I told my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) what I genuinely thought of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, I would not have to say, "By the way, that is confidential." I would assume, on the basis of ordinary human trust, that she would not repeat my remarks. She would realise that they were so complimentary that to know about them would embarrass the hon. Gentleman. There are so many facets of human exchange, especially for those who have to take decisions and sit in judgment, that demand that the concept of confidentiality should be maintained.

Mrs. Rumbold: Has my hon. and learned Friend studied the schedule in detail? It seems that paragraph *(d)* of the schedule would cover adequately that which he is putting before us.

Mr. Fairbairn: I have studied the schedule in detail and one of the characteristics upon which I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) in preparing the Bill is that one is introduced to its horror in stages. It becomes worse and worse and the schedule is the worst part.

Clause 3 provides three days of notice. What will happen at Christmas time or new year, for example? Are we talking about dies non? Are we talking about Sundays or other days when the council does not meet? What is the notice that we are proposing to give? The complication is huge. Unless the council is prepared to go to the expense of sending minutes and reports to councillors by special delivery, councillors will receive such documents only after the press and members of the public are aware of their contents, including groups of disrupters, activists and who knows what. That would be unfortunate.

Clause 4 is appalling and execrable in every possible way. Those who support the Bill should understand its real implications. It is all very well saying that everyone should see everything but let us understand the real difficulties that will be faced by local authorities. The views which I am about to express have been put to me by the association that represents all Scottish local authorities and which is Labour-dominated. The House should consider its views with serious concern. What does clause 4 mean? Does it mean that any person has a right to search for documents or that he has a right to see a specific document that he can name? Does it mean that a person can say, "I want to see the housing file for 1948 to see whether I have been prejudiced in the way that my housing application has been handled"? Or does it mean that the person need only say that he wants to know why he has not been given a house?

If a person has smashed the last three houses that he lived in, has 19 convictions for robbery with violence and the importation of cocaine, and the housing manager has dared to put that in his file, the person could take the case to the European court on Human Rights and question whether that information should have been taken into consideration.

Mr. Squire: My hon. and learned Friend is pursuing a false hare on clause 4. Personal files are exempt from the Bill's provisions and even if they were not, the trigger for clause 4 is the appearance of a document on the agenda of a further committee so anything that dates back and is not on a future agenda is not covered.

Mr. Fairbairn: I did not mean to use my illustration to challenge the retrospective element, but in the year 2020 what happened in 1985 will be relevant. My hon. Friend's point is even worse than his Bill.

I shall read to the House a paragraph from the document composed by what is known by some as COSLA. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden that all initials should be banned and the use of them made a criminal offence. If my hon. Friend puts that in the schedule I shall certainly vote for it. I never know what anyone is talking about. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) will know better than I the tragedies and dangers of initials. We were on a Select Committee together and we never stopped using initials which nobody understood. I had to use initials to make words, such as COMEOFFIT — and rather better examples which I shall not give today for fear of frustrated reporters.

COSLA states—this is the point that I wish to put sincerely to those who believe that the Bill will end secrecy or clandestine behaviour—

> "It will mean the end of officers engaging in frank and meaningful written exchanges of view if they are to be the subject of public scrutiny. No officer is going to give a completely open opinion on a matter if he knows he may be called upon to justify his view in public or even in court."

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Irving) complained of a committee which always did its business by telephone so as not to commit its opinions to writing. My advice to every English local authority if this wretched Bill is passed is never to commit anything to writing—always do business on the telephone. The Bill will increase secrecy and cause nothing to be recorded even if it should be.

Let us take another example. Let us suppose that the planning department, the roads department and the public

amenities department have tripartite talks about whether a certain planning application should go ahead. If those interdepartmental committees report and their files have to be laid open to the public certain people will be at a great advantage.

Imagine what would happen about the Stansted development. By the way, if we all flew from Edinburgh and Glasgow, there would be no problem. I hope that Stansted is listening. Imagine how the objectors at Stansted would benefit if they could read week by week opinions expressed by officials in departments about the rights and wrongs and difficulties of various proposals. That is a good example of what could happen.

People could examine the work of the planning committee of Little Underhighbury and claim that it was at odds with the planning committee of Little Overhighbury. Wreckers would be given a special advantage.

Suppose that an officer said that a council had three options — to refuse planning permission, to list the buildings so that the owner was prevented from demolishing them, or to grant planning permission, subject to the condition that the owner did not demolish the buildings. If I were an unscrupulous owner I would read the minutes and demolish the building before it could be listed.

Such difficulties arise if we have the grand concept that confidentiality — what some people call secrecy — is wrong. I can think of several planning applications in Perth and Kinross district council that would have been affected in that way and many historic buildings — large and small, simple cottages and high streets of great value— would have been pulled down if the Bill had been on the statute book.

If advice to party political groups is to be exempt from scrutiny, surely some protection must be given in respect of similar advice to other groups. What is a party political group? If I want to get an exemption so that information can be fed to the public, all that I shall need to do is to ensure that someone in the room is not a party political person. The group would then cease to be a party political group.

Decisions would have to be made by an official or a committee on the status of internal papers in relation to the schedule of privileged documents annexed to the Bill. Let us think about that for a moment. Every document of every council in the land will have to be scrutinised to see whether it is legally permissible to publish the information or whether the information is defamatory or could give rise to a claim against the council. Who will do that work? Will it be a legal officer on £28,000 a year?

Hon. Members may not think that I am much of a lawyer. Perhaps I am not, though the sovereign thinks different—she made me one of her counsel learned in the law. But I would have the greatest difficulty if I were asked to write an opinion of counsel on which sentence and which document fell within any provision of the schedule.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): The hon. and learned Gentleman has just lost a lot of work.

Mr. Fairbairn: If the Bill goes through, I shall gain a lot of work. I should tell the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who has gratuitously removed my practice, that I do not like complicated law and I do not think that complicated statutes add to the liberty of people. On the contrary, they subtract from it. I believe that the Bill, well-intentioned as it is, will have that absolute effect.

May I say——

Mr. Hanley: In conclusion.

Mr. Fairbairn: I do not know why my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) should say "In conclusion". He is obviously in favour of the Bill. Not one hon. Member has pointed out the difficulties in the Bill, and the House should hear why the Bill is wrong. There is no need for my hon. Friend to give the baby another pat on its bottom; it already has 100 obstetricians delivering it.

A mother might go to a council because she wants to know why her child cannot be taken on the bus to school. A protester might go to a council and attempt to cause trouble. He might want to prevent the council from demolishing a building and erecting another one. In any such confrontation, an officer has to be competent to say which bits of which document the person concerned may see. He will have to be a fully trained defamation lawyer if he is to interpret properly the schedule to the Bill.

The manpower and cost implications of the procedures set out in the Bill must be considered. If files have to be separated, so that the relevant documents are not in numerical order, and with letters and replies spread over three different files, the council clerks will have great difficulty. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden referred to the difficulty that clerks have in writing reports in clear English. What a time they will have in writing reports in English that is good enough to get round the schedule. That is a matter at which the House should look with the greatest possible care. A filing system with separate categories such as "confidential", "doubtfully confidential" and "open", would be completely unworkable.

There is a ridiculous provision concerning the minutes of meetings. A council will be in defiance of the law if it does not provide copies of the agenda and reports to every member of the public attending a meeting. They have to be provided three days before the meeting. If I wished to interfere with the business of the council, I would get 3,000 of my friends to come to a meeting and complain that only eight copies of the agenda were provided. They could complain that, in regard to 2,992 of them, the law had been broken. The next week the council might feel it necessary to publish 5,000 copies. In that way the council could be forced to waste money, thus defeating the Government's attempts to curb local government expenditure. Economic policy could be frustrated in that way.

The Convention of Scottish Local Boroughs says:

"No organisation, whether a public body, Government Department, company or private business, could operate if the burdens associated with clause 4 were placed upon them."

I think that I have said enough. *[Interruption.]* I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch muttered the word freedom. I urge him not to confuse freedom——

Mr. Squire: In response to my hon. and learned Friend's suggestion that no organisation could possibly operate in such a way, I muttered the words, "Three do."

Mr. Fairbairn: I beg my hon. Friend's pardon; evidently I misheard him.

[Mr. Fairbairn]

It would be easy to drive a horse and cart through any of the paragraphs of the schedule from *(a)* to *(g)*. The words of paragraph *(c)* are:

"the disclosure of spending estimates for a specific item would be likely to benefit a contractor or supplier".

I know of no spending estimates that would not be likely to benefit a contractor or supplier. So that strikes out all spending estimates.

Paragraph *(d)* states:

"that disclosure would give access other than to the persons concerned to personal information or files on individuals".

Why should the "person concerned" be allowed to see confidential information about himself? I would be absolutely appalled if I thought that I could go to my doctor and see his file on me. Imagine what would happen if a mentally ill person were allowed as the "person concerned" to ask his doctor whether he could see a file which said, "This nitwit is a schizophrenic, and is likely to remain so. His paranoic fantasies are interrupted by moments of sanity when he sees the lunacy of the Local Government (Access to Information) Bill." I would be very upset if I were allowed to see a teacher's assessment of me which was hostile. It does not matter how unjustified or justified the assessment is.

I do not believe that people should be able to read on file what officials doing their duty have written for the benefit of those who are elected to local government. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby said that those who are elected should exercise their power accountably. I agree that they should do so. The Bill will make it impossible for them to exercise their power accountably, and that is why I oppose it on principle. As all the obstetricians gather around this moribund—I hope—child, I say please do not foist this on Scotland as foster parents.

1.1 pm

Mr. Steve Norris (Oxford, East): Despite the blandishments of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn), I remain convinced that the House should congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on his luck in getting this measure placed so high on the list of private Member's Bills. My hon. Friend brings to us a measure which is, despite the suggestion by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross, about the sustenance and enhancement of democracy and the democratic process.

Surely we do not need reminding that democracy is not simply a concept that we can trot out on election day once every three, four or five years. It is a concept that embodies a continuous right to know how decisions are taken, who is making the decisions and, most importantly, what facts those taking the decisions employ in their armoury when they decide on our behalf.

I am disappointed by the fact that the Conservative party has not as wholeheartedly supported the freedom of information campaign generally as it should have. Freedom of information is vital to the democratic process, and all parties should embrace it wholeheartedly. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, that sort of information and type of freedom are often inconvenient to councils. However, we should never allow ourselves to believe that on that basis we should ignore freedom of information measures.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) referred to the disdain that is clearly evident among the public in their attitude towards local councils. That attitude is reflected in the pathetic turnout at local elections, despite the importance of the decisions that are made on electors' behalf. Surely all hon. Members have asked themselves from time to time why, when a county council, district council or London borough can make more relevant decisions about government than a Back Bencher, there is such a pathetic turnout at local government elections. That is due in no small measure to the fact that the public say, "What is the point?" The paternalism and the we-know-best attitude, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) referred, are so prevalent that people feel that there is no point in bothering to try to influence decisions which they know will be taken by a cabal or caucus behind closed doors.

I am a member of Berkshire county council, one of the local authorities on the list of those that support the Bill. We feel there, I think unanimously, that we have always endeavoured to use the schedule of reasons for confidentiality as the benchmark of whether items should be in part 2 of our agenda. I believe that that has stood the council in good stead and has improved the quality of its decision making.

There is more that Back Benchers can contribute on this occasion than merely, as my hon. and learned Friend the member for Perth and Kinross suggested, a further pat on the bottom on a baby who is already obviously assured of many admiring godparents. We have an obligation to study some of the more involved aspects of the Bill because there are items about which we should be careful. One is the matter to which my hon. Friend the Member for Morden and Mitcham referred briefly and on which I intervened—whether there is a place for confidential meetings of party groups.

I should be surprised if we did not all share the view that the arrangements for councillors' remuneration in local government are unsatisfactory, to say the least. We neither agree to pay them a realistic salary nor accept the idea that there should be no payment. Those options have a number of difficulties that we should not debate today. One of the results of that was that Berkshire county council, by a majority—by no means a unanimous vote—decided that there should be standing sub-committees of the policy committee, labelled for convenience A, B and C which, because they are official standing sub-committees, are eligible for allowances. They have the services of the officers of the secretariat and of any other chief officer whose attentions might be needed.

Those arrangements are solely to enable those party meetings—because that is what they are—to take place in a more organised framework than would otherwise be the case. They are sub-committees which meet in secret now and which should able to meet in secret in the future because of the kind of decisions and discussions that will take place at such meetings.

There are Liberal, Labour and Conservative group meetings. They all work in the same way. That stresses the importance of distinguishing between discussions about how to develop a policy and discussions on facts. With respect to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross, who has now left, that was a distinction about which he was not entirely clear. Discussions will take place among individuals of the same political

persuasion as to how they will tackle political or other problems. It is utterly naive to imagine that such discussions will not take place in private, however we legislate. Of course they will, and it is entirely appropriate that they should, and it will only further democracy if such discussions can take place between people of like mind. That is one side of the argument.

On the other side, we have the magnitude of the events to which my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) referred, the possibility — albeit he was referring to Government circumstances many years ago —that important matters of information and fact will be denied to members of the public or, worse, to minority council groups because such facts and information are regarded as inconvenient. That is wholly indefensible, and the Bill strikes at the heart of it.

Let us hear no more of the nonsense that the Bill will prevent discussion, or of the nonsensical idea that as a result of the Bill it will not be possible for groups of Labour, Liberal, Conservative, SDP or any other councillors to talk amongst themselves about how they wish to tackle an issue. Let us nail once and for all the appalling concept that we should allow to continue a system whereby one group of councillors can deny information and knowledge to their colleagues on the council or to the general public.

Despite the blandishments of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross, it is evident that all that is needed to make the Bill work is a change of heart and mind. I say that secure in the knowledge that three councils already utilise the provisions of the Bill and, surprise, surprise, are able to live with them. They have recognised that intention and bona fides will make it work.

It has been suggested that one could circumvent even the schedule relating to confidentiality. That is an important point, and it is true. I should be surprised if a local government officer or an astute local government group leader could not find a way of ensuring that almost every item on the agenda either prejudiced

"the Council's position in negotiations concerning land, property, goods or services or with trade unions",

as provided in paragraph *(a)* of the schedule, or would be likely to have an effect on a contractor or supplier if someone wanted to talk about what the council thought it would spend on a particular project. It would be easy to hide behind paragraph *(f)* of the schedule and say that the disclosure of an employee's salary or conditions of service would infringe personal privacy. If a council wanted to bury a quite proper discussion about why a particular officer was in its employ and what on earth he was doing there, it would be easy to do so. Let us not fall into the trap of imagining that the Bill will, of itself, prevent any of the abuses which some councils appear to be hell-bent on continuing, because it will not.

I hope that the Bill will be enacted, and I hope that we shall come to see it in the same context as other pieces of legislation, such as the Race Relations Act 1976 and the equal opportunities legislation. On all sides it is accepted that those pieces of legislation have established a benchmark of standards and made it clear what the criteria of local councils should be. That is the value of the Bill.

We should ask ourselves as local councillors and hon. Members whether there is a good reason why the interests of ratepayers or constituents will be prejudiced by the disclosure of information or the opening up of a discussion. There is all the difference in the world between the public interest and the interest of the public. We would do well to bear that distinction in mind.

My final point is on the detail of the Bill. It may be better considered in Committee, but it is one of which I have experience and which I hope to draw to hon. Members' attention for future reference. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross said that there would be a large cost element in the Bill. I am not sure that I see it as a huge and major cost element. However, clause 3(1) refers to

"payment of a reasonable fee"

for agendas and reports. Clause 4(1) refers to members of the public copying "at their own expense". In other words, the elector would be charged by the local authority or would use his own photocopier. Given that it is unlikely that he would bring his own photocopier into the building, he will probably want to use the council's. Although the point may seem small, I have seen it arise in two other contexts—in the Consumer Credit Act 1974, and in the Data Protection Act 1984. Both Acts embody requirements about the fees that members of the public should pay to companies and statutory bodies for information about them.

In the Consumer Credit Act there was a clear acceptance that such charges should always be moderate and reasonable so that it would never be a bar to the acquisition of information that it was likely to cost too much. If I am right—my hon. Friend the Minister, who I am sure has the figures in his head, will correct me if I am wrong—the present fee under the Consumer Credit Act is £1 for every submission. Interestingly, when the Data Protection Act comes into force, if a member of the public wishes to see an extract from his personal file, he will have to pay a fee of eight or nine times as much.

I counsel my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch to ensure in Committee that proper account is taken of the fact that it would be possible for a local authority to demonstrate that the cost of providing information on a complex issue ran into hundreds of pounds. It would be unreasonable to ask a member of the public to pay that sort of fee, even if the local authority could say, "We must employ so many people for so many hours photocopying documents and researching, and at their current rate of salary, it will cost several hundred pounds to get together the information."

An option that my hon. Friend must bear in mind is the idea that there should be, as under the Consumer Credit Act and the Data Protection Act, although the latter is a larger sum, a standard maximum fee which members of the public must pay on every occasion that they wish to acquire information. If that is done, it may be necessary to consider the impact of such an arrangement on the financing of local government. We must be careful not to ensure that local authorities, whose resources are already under considerable pressure, are put in an even worse position as a result of the Bill by having to provide many more services and much more information out of their existing budgets.

None of my reservations about the practicability of the schedule of reasons or about costs is a reason for opposing the Bill—far from it. The Bill is a small brick in what all of us hope will be a large building. It points the way to a new and much healthier attitude in local government that might, in part, lead to local government restoring its

[Mr. Steve Norris]

credibility and prestige, the lack of which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and others mentioned.

I welcome the Bill. I am sure that its passage through the House will be rapid and expeditious, and that we shall come to regard it as a benchmark for standards by which local authorities will not only be able to judge themselves but will have advanced the cause of those whom they represent.

1.17 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on his luck in the ballot and on his wisdom in choosing this measure. I also congratulate those who have sponsored the Bill. My hon. Friends the Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) — the Opposition's local government spokesmen — who are attending a local government conference in Birmingham starting later today, wish me to say that they too, support the Bill. I assure the hon. Member for Hornchurch that his Bill has unanimous support from Opposition Front and Back-Bench Members.

I am glad to note the resolutions of unconditional support that have been received from the Greater London council and the Association of London Authorities. Conservative Members may allege many things about the GLC, but they cannot allege that it has not been open. Indeed, it has probably opened itself to much criticism by being so frank.

One's endorsement of the principle of the Bill and wholehearted support for its Second Reading does not mean that every detail of the measure is correct, as the hon. Member for Hornchurch has recognised. For example, he agrees with the mild criticism of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to the effect that the Bill should not prevent the urgent conduct of business at short notice and in good faith. I emphasise "in good faith" to ensure that urgency is not used as an excuse for secrecy. It is clear that matters should go on the agenda if they are topical, even if they come up at short notice.

An example of that occurred in my constituency. Last weekend we read about a siege at a house in Streatham. Police surrounded the house, in which was a man who was wanted in connection with a number of armed robberies. It was clear that the police regarded him as a dangerous criminal. The street was cordoned off, as a result of which a number of people who had gone to work in the morning found that they could not get back to their homes at night. There was splendid co-operation between the Metropolitan police and the London borough of Lambeth, and homes were provided overnight for more than 100 people.

If there had been a meeting of the social services committee—or even if there had been a sub-committee meeting open to the public the next day — it would clearly have been in the interest of topicality that that urgent item of business should be reported, with what had happened on that occasion being made known to the citizens of Lambeth. It would have been only right for the matter to be discussed by a Lambeth borough council committee. I am sure that the hon. Member for Hornchurch would not want to exclude such matters of urgency and topicality.

We need a comprehensive definition of a member's interest, as provided for in clause 5, because I understand that there are differences between authorities in that respect. The sooner there is a simple and comprehensive definition of "interest," the better.

Based not on personal experience, but on the experience of some of my local councillors, I have a nagging reservation about the provision in clause 6 relating to addresses. I am in favour of the names of councillors being known and the wards that they represent and the addresses where one can communicate with them. I have been a councillor in Lambeth for six years and have been told that on occasions councillors there and elsewhere have had their privacy invaded in an unacceptable way because their addresses were known to the press and other organisations. There have been occasions in my borough when councillors have been picketed outside their homes because of decisions that they had taken or were likely to take in relation to their public duties. There have been other examples of harassment, with the daubing of councillor's houses and so on.

It is difficult to find a balance between public accountability and the desire of most councillors to have their addresses known, so that people can readily communicate with them, and the activities of those who, unreasonably, use the public knowledge of councillors' addresses to harass them and even do damage.

Mr. Squire: The Bill does not say "domestic address," and I do not know whether I need say more. It is a matter into which the Committee can look. At that stage we can consider whether the measure should specify "domestic address," though as advised, I understand that it would not necessarily have to specify that.

Mr. Fraser: I am grateful for that assurance. The point needs to be made clear so that the interests of the public can properly be balanced against the need for privacy and security of those who hold public office.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Some of the disturbance about which my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) has been speaking, which is absolutely monstrous, arises often from the monopoly of the local press when a newspaper conducts a deliberate vendetta against a local council—for example, *The Standard's* vendetta against Islington. Perhaps the Bill could improve the situation by shifting the focus on to important information about the way in which the council works and the decisions it takes and making that available, rather than by leaving the situation as it is, with it being focussed all too often on trivia and personalities.

Mr. Fraser: My hon. Friend is correct, though I must emphasise that, in the cases in Lambeth about which I have been speaking, there was harassment not by the local press but by anarchist groups and the like. Some incidents affecting local councillors have been quite unacceptable.

Following the passage of the 1960 Act, with access to council committees, there has been a tendency on the part of some local authorities to shift business to sub-committees to avoid the need for public presence and scrutiny.

There is always a danger that decision-making in local authorities could be further removed by committees or sub-committees delegating matters to the chair's action, which would not be covered by the Bill. Decisions that are

delegated to a chair, and therefore the information involved, can be just as important as those reached by the committee. There is something to be said for important decisions that are reached by chairs, when authority is delegated to them, being announced publicly. For a while, I was a sub-committee of one of the Lambeth borough council's planning committee. I thought that was a desirable arrangement, because it meant that I could expedite planning applications. There is far too much delay in processing planning applications—it holds up builders and developers. I used to sit with a few council officers deciding on those fairly trivial applications, but there were hundreds of them. I would have been happy to have made those decisions in public. There is something to be said for considering that aspect.

The case of baby Cotton has been mentioned recently. When the matter came before the court, the President of the Family Division of the High Court properly deliberated on personal and private matters in his chambers, but he made himself accountable to the public by reading his judgment in open court on the following Monday. There is no reason why chairs who reach important decisions that have been delegated to them should not do so in a way which allows for public access.

The Bill is entitled "Local Government (Access to Information) Bill", but it does not cover every aspect of access to information. A large part of my work as a Member of Parliament is involved in dealings with Lambeth borough council. People who have waited between six months and one year for a decision about the granting of housing benefit are entitled to have access to information on why those decisions are taking so long. I should like the Bill to be extended to afford access to information in those cases.

In October 1984, a constituent came to see me after she had spent seven months as a single person in homeless accommodation. She believed that she had rights under homeless persons legislation. She felt that seven months was far too long to be in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I wrote to the homeless persons unit of Lambeth borough council on 30 October 1984 asking when she might get a reasonable offer. I received no reply. I wrote again at the end of November 1984, sending a copy of my previous letter, and received no reply. I wrote again on 10 December — 10 months after the lady went into homeless persons' accommodation—and again received no reply. In January, I wrote again to the housing allocations section, and received no reply. I then wrote to the director of housing in Lambeth asking for a reply to my three previous letters, but received no reply. Indeed, we no longer have a director of housing in Lambeth. I wrote to the chair of the housing committee towards the end of January and, so far, have received no reply.

In case the Minister thinks that things are at all amiss at Lambeth borough council, I must tell him that, on the whole, I get extremely good, conscientious and constant service from most parts of that housing department. However, the fact remains that the lady who came to see me has now waited almost 12 months to learn her status as a homeless person. It is worth adding that the bed-and-breakfast accommodation is costing a lot of money. If, as a Member of Parliament, I cannot obtain access to information about that person's rights as a homeless person, she is even more disabled when trying to obtain that information. I believe that a Bill which deals with access to information ought to deal with individual cases —people who want to know about their rights.

Another example is the correspondence for six months with my local authority about the inter-borough nomination scheme. After five months I received a letter which said:

> "The situation outlined above has unfortunately led to the accumulation of a backlog of outstanding members' inquiries. Consequently the answering of members' inquiries from central allocations will be actioned on a date order basis until the backlog has been reduced."

I should have been a little more reassured if I had not discovered subsequently that the letter had been printed on a word processor and that the same letter was being sent in answer to all sorts of inquiries something like six months after they had been made. Matters relating to homeless persons under the inter-borough nomination scheme cover the legal and administrative rights of citizens who are entitled to information about those matters.

In general, I am in favour of the Bill. I should like its provisions to be extended. In the words of the Maud report, the more the proceedings of an authority are open to public scrutiny, the more obvious will be their probity and the more difficult it will be for any irregularity to remain hidden. Only if the procedures of an authority are reasonably visible and intelligible to the public can there be real public confidence. That requires much more than observing the letter of the law or the admission of the public to meetings. A centuries-old slogan is that there should be no taxation without representation. I believe that there should be no rating without the right to be present at meetings of committees and sub-committees, to listen to the decision of the chairman and to hear how individual applications are proceeding.

The Bill is so deserving, beneficial, obvious and just that we do not need to waste a great deal of time upon discussing its contents. I hope that as soon as possible we shall be able to give a Second Reading to it.

I hope that the principles of the Bill will also apply to water authorities—a matter that the House will have an opportunity to discuss later today. The principles enshrined in the Bill certainly ought to apply to urban development corporations. The London Docklands Development Corporation exercises many of the functions of a local authority. It has planning and land acquisition functions and a housing investment programme allocation that is about three times as large as the allocation of the surrounding authorities. It stands at present at £73 million, as against one quarter or one third of that figure in the case of some of the surrounding authorities. It reaches extremely important decisions about the lives not only of those who live in the area of the development corporation but of those who live on the edges of its area. Therefore, I believe that the same principles that apply to local authorities ought to apply with even more force to the development corporation. At one time the leaders of the three surrounding local authorities were appointed as ex officio members of the development corporation. With the passage of time, only one of those leaders now serves on that corporation. At the very least its proceedings ought to be open to the appointed leaders of the surrounding authorities. Indeed, it ought to go much further than that: the proceedings ought to be opened up altogether.

I wish to comment upon the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn). I

[Mr. Fraser]

thought that his opposition to the Bill was synthetic and that he was discourteous to the House. Having spoken as a Scotsman upon a Bill that does not concern Scotland —having spoken for over half an hour—he ought at least to have had the courtesy to stay and listen to the speech of the hon. Member for Oxford (Mr. Norris) who followed him.

The hon. and learned Gentleman's argument against the Bill in principle had no substance. He mentioned its manpower and financial implications which, he said, were of incalculable proportions. The answers to his questions are to be found, in part, in those local authorities which already put the provisions of the Bill into practice and which suffer no adverse financial or manpower consequences.

As for personal privacy, the hon. and learned Gentleman had only to read paragraph *(d)* of the schedule to the Bill to see that his fears were groundless. The hon. Member for Cheltenham referred to what was said about secrecy by an American President. Perhaps I could adapt for the benefit of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross a quotation from Abraham Lincoln, who said:

> "His argument is as thin as the homeopathic soup which was made by boiling the shadow of a pigeon which had been starved to death."

Perhaps it might be the shadow of a grouse which had been starved to death. There was very little substance in the remarks of the hon. and learned Gentleman.

I support the Bill because secrecy at its worst is the sponsor of corruption, oppression, injustice, inefficiency and deception. We have seen that from as long ago as the Star Chamber up to the decisions of post-war Cabinets. There have been disgraceful Government decisions, such as that to hide from the House of Commons, as the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) said, the deportation of people to Soviet Russia. We have also had recent disclosures of the hiding of expenditure on and the implications of the development of the hydrogen bomb. No matter what feelings may be about those issues, those issues should be open to public scrutiny.

The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross said that the Bill will inhibit officers in writing reports which might be open to public scrutiny. That is the test of conduct. If it is known that decisions and what is written on a factual basis will be open to public scrutiny, writers will think of the interests of the entire community and write in a way that can be justified to all those who are likely to read what is said and be affected by their decisions.

Openness makes for efficiency and removes corruption and oppression. I wholeheartedly support the Bill.

Mr. Merchant: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I draw to your attention a matter which may constitute an abuse of the customs of the House? While I was in the Chamber earlier I was passed an envelope by one of the Messengers, which I believe was one of a number, containing a duplicated letter headed "Northern Liberal Party", from an obscure address in Cleveland and signed with a squiggle, "pp Mrs. Fletcher". The messenger service is hard-pressed at the best of times to pass messages between hon. Members, and I should be grateful if the matter could be looked at because the acceptance of large batches of duplicated letters from outside the House overloads the system and constitutes an abuse of a custom.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I shall have the hon. Member's point looked into.

1.37 pm

Mr. Geoff Lawler (Bradford, North): I do not wish to detain the House long. First, I apologise to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who is not in the Chamber, for ruining his joke earlier. He said the line with such seriousness that I honestly thought that he was in difficulty. I could not believe that someone could arrive at Bradford and not know the name of the local newspaper. That should ensure me reasonable coverage at least.

Bradford has a proud tradition of firsts in many things. For example, it was the first authority to have free school meals, to promote an industrial and urban area as a tourist area—something that it is doing successfully—and to have amended, in May 1984, its standing orders to allow for the provisions of the Bill. In November 1984 the Bill's provisions came into effect and since then Bradford has advocated the very thing that the Bill is aimed at—freedom of information and open government. I am proud to say that it was a forward-thinking Conservative administration that introduced that, with all-party support —much like the Bill which is introduced today by a forward-thinking Conservative Member with all-party support.

Bradford started from the admirable position that one should take the view that all meetings and documents should be open unless there is a good reason to the contrary —not the opposite view, which has so long existed in local authorities, Government and other public authorities, that everything should be hidden unless there is a good reason why it should be made open.

The system is operated in Bradford by agendas being made available in seven libraries throughout the city. On the agendas is the name of a person whom a member of the public may telephone to find how to obtain access to reports relevant to items on the agenda. The papers can be inspected and photocopied at the expense of the member of the public. That is an important point. The estimated expenditure of the Bradford open government policy is estimated to be a mere £2,000. Some of the fears of hon. Members are therefore somewhat exaggerated.

Another factor to be taken into account is officer time. However, it is the council's view, and mine, that the time that is spent by officers informing members of the public of the council's decisions is worth while. Bradford has tried to market its open government policy. It has made the public aware of it through the press and by issuing brochures. The public are used to council secrecy and are suspicious about what goes on behind the large closed doors of city halls and council offices. It will take time for them to become accustomed to access to meetings and documents. The open government has been operating for a mere two to three months in Bradford and as time passes I am sure that the public will become more aware of it, will become used to the idea and will make greater use of the facilities that have been made available.

A woman came to my surgery last Friday on behalf of a number of tenants living on a council estate. The tenants were objecting to a planning proposal to erect a community centre on some green land opposite their

homes. They did not know that the planning sub-committee was meeting on Wednesday to discuss the proposal and that they could attend the meeting, listen to the arguments there advanced and read the background papers. They attended the meeting and I am sure that they read the background papers. The sub-committee's decision may not be any more to their liking but at least they will know why the decision was taken and why the project was proposed. They will be in a position more effectively to argue their case at subsequent meetings.

Bradford has been operating a freedom of information policy and it has worked. The city has not suddenly become ungovernable. Some officers, through natural conservatism, have tended to label more documents "restricted" than perhaps was necessary, but through the pressure of other officers, council members and members of the public I am sure that their approach to the marking of documents will be relaxed and that more and more documents will be derestricted. When documents are restricted there is provision for members of the public and councillors to make an appeal for the documents to be declassified and made available to the public.

The citizens of Bradford have true open government and I am sure that the council's policy will go a long way to abolish suspicions that undoubtedly exist among the public towards local authorities. They regard local government as a monolithic institution. Perhaps they perceive it as one that is trying to conspire against their own interests. All these myths and cobwebs can be blown away in Bradford and, once the Bill is enacted, in local authority areas throughout the country.

I have the honour to represent part of a city which has been forward-thinking enough to implement the policy that is advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire). I commend the Bill to the House and I look forward to the day when other cities can have the same system of local government that Bradford is fortunate to possess.

1.43 pm

Mr. Michael Knowles (Nottingham, East): One of the criticisms which has been expressed by a local government organisation contains a germ of truth which those who support the Bill—and I am one of them—will have to take on board. The criticism is that there is no greater practitioner of the mushroom approach to the supplying of information than the Government when dealing with Back Benchers on both sides of the House. The lack of information in local government is as nothing compared with that in central Government. We have heard several examples of what has happened in national Government over the years.

The Bill is designed to try to make authorities justify secrecy and confidentiality, and secrecy is endemic in our system. That is certainly true of our governmental system, both local and national, and in our social systems as a whole. It has bedevilled industrial relations on occasion. Decisions are handed down in the absence of any discussion.

This secrecy affects many people and not only the employees of local authorities. When I was the leader of a local council I tried to have printed in the newspapers the schools examination results. That seemed to me to be a straightforward policy.

I thought that that would be of interest to parents who were deciding where to send their children to school. The teachers fought me tooth and nail for the same reasons that others fight for secrecy—paternalism and the belief that they know best. It is the attitude of the nanny state. Pupils are the children of teachers' paymasters. The ratepayers pay teachers' salaries. Regardless of that, the teachers said that the results had nothing to do with the parents and that they knew best. I confess that we did not win the battle.

The same attitude can be found in most professional groups in local government—the teachers and the social workers. No one is allowed to interfere with what they want. Possibly the worst is the education lobby, which believes that it has a divine right to ransack the public coffers. That belief has been around for the past 30 years and has had some success.

We are not only tackling local government in the Bill, but we are taking on a wide aspect of our society which affects all kinds of relationships. A cost is involved in breaking down that system. I do not mean a monetary cost, but society will be changed. The "Nanny knows best" attitude has grown up over 500 or so years. It is the inheritance of an agricultural society with the lord in his manor and the peasants being told to do as they are told. That attitude still bedevils many of our systems.

If we are to change it—I believe that we should—we must accept that we shall change many other things. We are after changing people's hearts and minds. Three councils may already practise that which is proposed in the Bill, but that means that 450 do not. Many councils will see the Bill as another pain in the neck shoved on them by unfeeling parliamentarians who do not practise what they preach in their own place of work. That will be the reaction.

If we do not convince people that we want to change society, that reality of power which has gone from committee meetings to sub-committee meetings will disappear into working groups. Caucus meetings have already been discussed. Unless people are convinced that that change is for the good of society, no matter how many Bills we pass, it will make no odds.

Many problems are the result of local government being given too much to do. The machine is not suitable for the tasks imposed upon it, particularly in the post-war era. The massive growth in spending has caused its own problems. With that growth came a change from the old-fashioned relationship, which one could liken to the American constitution with the officers acting as the executive and the councillors acting as the legislature and keeping an eye on them. With the growth in democracy came a belief in a more parliamentary style of system so that the majority party in a council runs that council in the way that the Government run Parliament. That means a hard and fast division on party lines.

The savagery of politics in many local battles makes this Chamber look tame. The bitterness and depth of feeling is often much greater than it is in the House.

Mr. Norris: And that is only among Conservatives.

Mr. Knowles: Yes, only among Conservatives. We have not spoken about the others.

Corporate management has been mentioned. Local government has inherited a medley of federal structures. To turn that into more of a unitary system and to enforce management disciplines on those entrenched professional groups has caused many a long battle in many a council. In the first 18 months after I became leader of Kingston

[Mr. Knowles]

council, 12 of the 13 senior officers left the council for one reason or another. That is not an unusual story. Such things have happened throughout the country.

It has been claimed that many virtues will follow from the passing of the Bill. I believe that it is right in itself. It is said that the Bill will help to avoid another Poulson case, but the system in the United States is much more open than our system, yet is the local government less corrupt? I believe that generally it is more corrupt. The Bill is justifiable in itself. It is a good thing.

Reference has been made to insane little committees in local government. I remember that when I first went into local government my council had a sub-committee on books. Some pressure groups wanted to ban books. When I was leader of the council I toured our public libraries to make sure that there were Noddy books in every one. We got rid of the books sub-committee. It was not only councillors who wanted to ban books—"Read it one more time and then we'll ban it"—because many other groups with crackpot ideas try to bring pressure on councils.

It has been claimed that if information is made available the public will be convinced of the rightness of decisions. I am not sure that that follows. If a council wishes to close a school, no matter how rational and justified the decision may be, parents will not accept it. The idea that making documents available to the parents will convince them is mistaken. However, people may come to realise that hard decisions and hard choices have to be made. It is difficult to get that message across in politics, and it would be a good thing if we could bring that home.

My hon. Friends the Members for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) and for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) mentioned political group meetings and how they are tied into the official structure. That presents difficulties. The group meetings could be made sub-committees of the council, but that would bring worries in its wake. There could be a one-party committee, as we had in Kingston, with no executive powers, but there are obvious dangers in that. Alternatively, there could be a system in which there was no link between the officer structure and the majority party and councillors in general. The two worlds would be separate. I do not think that that would be acceptable either. We face hard choices, and anyone who says that solving those problems will be easy is deluding himself.

I support the Bill, but I do not share the belief of those who think that it will bring a host of solutions to other problems in its wake. It is justifiable in itself.

1.53 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on his good fortune in the ballot and on presenting a Bill that has great support across party boundaries and throughout the country.

My hon. Friend is following the precedent of our right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) who introduced a similar Bill 25 years ago, and who can say what will be the status of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch in 2010? Perhaps he will be leading the nation then. If he is ever in a position of patronage, I hope that he will remember what I have said today.

I welcome the Bill wholeheartedly, not only because I believe in any sensible attempt reasonably to remove the veil of secrecy in government, both local and national, where those secrets are unnecessarily classified as such, but because I believe that knowledge is power and secrets are the building blocks of that power. However, secrecy is often an abuse of power and tends to show evidence of a lack of self-confidence by Governments and authorities which, paradoxically, reduces their standing in the eyes of those for whom they have a responsibility. Strength can come from a self-confidence in one's own policies that openness of government helps to produce. The Bill will be a valuable but modest step towards the desirable openness that I hope will become more prevalent.

The Bill is supported by many disparate groups—local authorities, trade organisations, local groups and Members of Parliament. My local council of Richmond-upon-Thames fully supports the Bill. Indeed, in several respects the council is already acting in accordance with the provisions of the Bill, including the opening to the public of sub-committee meetings, and the specification of the reasons for committees or sub-committees conducting the whole or part of their proceedings during the exclusion of the press and the public. The chief executive and town clerk informed me this morning that, while it will be necessary to consider the Bill and all its ramifications in much greater detail—by, no doubt, the whole council—at the general purposes committee on 29 January the principle of the Bill was accepted nem. con.

My hon. Friend mentioned some of the local authority meetings that are held in secret. He mentioned the Stevenage decision as to the choice of the colour of roses. That meeting was held in secret, as was a meeting dealing with the colour of the dye for maggots acceptable for fishing. Of course, both such matters should be discussed in public. Wars have started over the colour of roses, and the public need information of impending warfare. So far there have been no wars following the choice of the colour of maggots, although wars followed the Diet of Worms.

On a serious point, what is more essential to those who go fishing than to know the nature of the dyestuffs? Some of them are rumoured to cause skin cancer among those who handle the maggots. Therefore, fishermen should be able to hear such discussions so that they can judge rumours for themselves. It is vital that such discussions should be open to the public.

In reply to the criticisms of the Bill, I point out that the cost is minimal in comparison with the value; indeed, with a change of system some savings might be possible in certain councils. I do not believe that it is a matter of too far too soon, or too little too late. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch I believe that the Bill is basically very well constructed, with occasional tiny blemishes, and wholly necessary for the good of democracy.

1.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): It gives me very great pleasure to say that I have enjoyed the debate. There was a colourful contribution by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn), who has asked me to say that he has an urgent engagement north of the border and that is why he is not present.

It cannot be disguised that there has been near unanimity in the debate. What I have to say will not seriously disturb that unanimity. The Government

welcome the Bill. They welcome particularly the spirit in which it was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire). I congratulate him, as others have done, not only on his good fortune in the ballot but on his choice of subject and on the way in which he has presented the Bill.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend has been realistic about the complexities of some of the issues involved. I think that it is right for me to put on record some of the doubts and matters which will have to be discussed seriously in the Committee stage that I hope that the House will grant to the Bill.

We are often teased by the fact that what are always described as the "Conservative-led" Association of District Councils and the "Conservative-led" Association of County Councils have criticised some measure introduced by the Government. The position has been a little different today, in that the objections of those two bodies have been brushed aside with a great deal of forthrightness by some of my hon. Friends and by some Opposition Members. I shall remember that in future in other contexts.

I remind the House that the ACC and the ADC have serious doubts about clause 4. That clause is wholly unacceptable to the ADC, while it is merely unacceptable to the ACC. Those matters must be seriously discussed in Committee. I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch said that those issues must be examined properly.

Unfortunately, in the time available to me, I cannot comment in detail on all the admirable speeches that have been made, but I shall try to touch on some of the main points. We need to examine clause 4 and paragraph *(g)* of the schedule. My hon. Friends the Members for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) and for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) have given the reasons why we should examine that paragraph. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden said something that cannot be true. She said that the schedule could cover all the interests of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross. I do not believe that all those matters could possibly be written into a schedule to any legislation.

A serious problem arises in clause 4 and paragraph *(g)* of the schedule. For the first time, we will write into legislation provisions giving greater protection to the information going to party groups and to officers serving such party groups than will be available to officers serving the properly constituted committees and sub-committees of the councils. I do not say that that would be wrong in all circumstances, but I believe that we should note what was said by the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles), because he has great experience in this regard. Perhaps these measures are correct, but let us not charge too lightly into a move to include for the first time in legislation provisions about which many people have serious doubts. Hon. Members have expressed those doubts today.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced the establishment of an independent impartial inquiry into the procedures of local government in the modern age. I hope that he will soon announce the names of the members of the inquiry. A number of hon. Members have said that the great growth of local government, the wider range of tasks local authorities perform and the much greater discretion they have, make local government a different animal from what it was. Perhaps it is right that some of those practices should have grown up, but we should examine them carefully before building into an admirable Bill provisions that may not have been fully thought through. I hope that the Committee will consider those aspects seriously.

The Committee should also consider a number of lesser matters. With respect to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross, I think that we should consider whether the Bill's provisions should be extended to Scotland. I believe that the Government would welcome that move. Unfortunately, there were no Scottish representatives in the Chamber today to urge that course on us.

It is unlikely that the provisions written into any schedule in any one year to define limits and exclusions will remain in that form for the rest of time. I suggest that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should have the power by order to amend the schedule from time to time. I believe that the Bill's sponsors should consider that point.

A number of other practical and sensible points were brought home to the House. I believe that hon. Members and the members of the inquiry which my right hon. Friend will set up will want to read the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East and of the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who made a positive and interesting speech.

The hon. Member for Norwood and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) said that the load placed on hon. Members in extracting information from local authorities — that is the duty of all hon. Members — might be lightened if we managed to get across to people the idea that direct access should be more readily available in the first instance. That would benefit us all.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Norwood for welcoming the Bill in general terms. He pointed out some of the matters that must be examined carefully.

I was alarmed to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch say that he was a moderate. He was then followed by the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts), who said, somewhat unconvincingly, that he was an extreme moderate. The final superlative came when the Bill was supported by a member of the Liberal party.

The Bill has genuine cross-party support. That is why I am pleased to say that the Government broadly welcome it, with the proviso that we must study clause 4. Some hard things have been said against it by the local authority associations. We must also look hard at paragraph *(g)* of the schedule.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch rightly said—this point was re-emphasised by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) — that secrecy in central Government is a separate issue. No one would suggest that the House or its Committees should go into secret session, except in time of war. My hon. Friend made it clear that the issues have different origins.

I was proud to note, when the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that there had been three crucial steps on this subject—the Prime Minister's Act in 1960, the Local Government Act 1972 and now this Bill—that all three steps have been led by the Conservatives. That is something of which the Conservative party can be proud.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby made a point with which I sympathise. It is a matter about which he can

[Mr. William Waldegrave]

speak with some authority—that the Bill's success for the public will depend upon the behaviour, capacity and skills of the local press and how it presents the measure.

There has been a terrible degradation of journalistic standards since Watergate. No journalist now thinks that any story is of interest unless it has been leaked. It is becoming a well-known joke in Whitehall — and doubtless in local government—that the only way to get the local press to pay attention to anything is to say that it is secret and to release it. The matter is then put on the front page. If it is put out as a press notice, no interest is shown. I make what might have sounded like a frivolous point in all seriousness. The success of the Bill will depend upon the hard slog of ordinary, professional journalism, not the type of journalistic pornography that relies only upon the excitement of leaks and betrayals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) made a powerful speech. We all listen to my hon. Friend when he speaks on such matters.

I hope that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) will not feel that I am being patronising or rebuking him, but there was a feeling in his speech that the subject of information and the importance of being beastly to bureaucracy had recently been invented by him in Portsmouth. When an hon. Member is speaking in the presence of someone like my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point, it is worth remembering that some have been at this game for a long time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) put the journalists' point of view forcefully. He showed how difficulties could be put in the way of serious journalists. He spoke about his news editor conducting and following through a serious campaign about information in local government. The Bill relies upon that type of serious approach.

Other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South paid glowing tributes to their local newspapers. That may not be unrelated to their reporting of this debate. I join them in paying tribute to the Bristol newspapers which cover local authority matters seriously.

I hope that I have shown that, although serious doubts have been put forward—the ACC and the ADC, which I have quoted, have voiced their doubts—strong voices have said that something along the lines of the Bill can be made to work. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Lawler) described what is successfully taking place in Bradford, under outstandingly able Conservative leadership. That should encourage us all, as should the news that it can be done without excessive cost.

I hope that the progress started in 1960 by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and carried forward by the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) between 1970 and 1974, will be taken a further step forward, thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch. I do not wish to minimise the volume of work that he and the Committee still have to do. To make the Bill practical and acceptable the Committee will have to tighten up the drafting and deal with some of the points of principle that have been raised. If that can be done, there is no reason why a satisfactory Act should not reach the statute book.

The difficulties should not be minimised. The matter is not over bar the shouting today. It is necessary to get round the problems in clause 4, the difficulty in paragraph *(g)* of the schedule and what appears to my legal advisers to be a problem in clause 5—that the clause may diminish existing rights of councillors under common law. The Hackney case, referred to today, reminds us of existing rights under the common law. It would be sad if, inadvertently, we narrowed them in any way. Therefore, we must get that point right. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch nodding. I know that he is taking those points on board.

With those serious, but not terminal, provisos, the Government welcome the Bill.

2.10 pm

Mr. Squire: I wish to make the briefest of responses because I am aware that hon. Members have gathered for a subsequent debate. I warmly thank almost all hon. Members who demonstrated a great depth and range of knowledge about local government, on which I hope the Committee will be able to draw during its deliberations. It was generally agreed that no one party can claim that all councils controlled by it are free from any of the allegations of excessive secrecy. I hope, therefore, that we can approach the Committee stage in an all-party atmosphere.

I particularly thank and accept the point made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), which I should have made in my speech. I thank the officers of Brent and Bradford council who have spent and no doubt will spend considerable time travelling the country and explaining how the system works in practice.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) has perhaps made the most serious possible charge against all Scotsmen. The gist of his comments was that while English and Welsh councils can operate the Bill at a minimal cost, and have said so publicly, the Scots, of all people, are faced with spending lots more money. He has thus dented for ever their reputation among those of us from south of the border for the careful way in which they husband their resources.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

Water Authorities (Meetings) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.12 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is short, its terms and conditions are summed up in three clauses, and it has considerable and widespread public support. Clause 1 provides that the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 should simply apply to the water authorities. Hon. Members heard comments about that Act earlier today. Clause 1(2) repeals part of the Water Act 1983, which made the right of the press to attend water authority meetings discretionary. Therein lies the history of the matter. From 1960 water authorities happily held their meetings in public and both the public and press could attend. There was nothing secret about them, and information was readily available. The provision of information lies at the heart of this and other Bills. I have never understood the need to be secretive about whether an authority wishes to put a sewer down Smith street in Browntown, for the sake of argument. I do not understand why such a decision must be cloaked in secrecy.

Until 1983, water authority meetings were open and there were no problems. However, schedule 5 of the Water Act 1983 provided that the reconstituted water authorities should have the discretion to exclude the press. The nine English authorities and the Welsh authority met. The Welsh authority did not worry about the press and the public attending its meetings and said, "We shall carry on as before." To its eternal credit, its latest decision has been to continue the policy of open meetings. There are no problems with regard to secrecy in the Welsh water authority. Journalists can turn up, find out what is going on, ask questions and receive answers.

However, the English authorities decided to meet behind closed doors. Almost every newspaper in the land has thundered against that decision, because the public have a right to know what happens at water authority meetings. We are told that water rates will increase by an average of 12 per cent. this year. The North-Western water authority has said that there will be a 40 per cent. increase during the next three years, and the Thames water authority has said that water rates will increase by 29 per cent. during the next three years. But the public do not know why.

The English water authorities argue that they provide adequate briefings, and that after each board meeting a member of the board, usually the chairman or his secretary, will chat to the press. The authorities seem to believe that that is adequate consultation, but journalists can ask questions only about what they have been told will happen. Journalists are not mind readers. They cannot know what has happened behind those closed doors, and if they hit upon the right questions, it will only be a matter of luck. The Welsh authority does not have that problem, and has no difficulty in communicating with the public.

I hope that we shall have time today to hear the Minister state the Government's attitude to the Bill. I have my suspicions as to what it will be, but I should tell the House who is in favour of the Bill. It is not only the press; we seem to have gathered a bandwagon of supporters——

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): A water wagon.

Mr. Bermingham: It may prove to be a water wagon that drowns the opposition to the Bill. We have support not only from hon. Members on both sides of the House, but from the other place, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of District Councils and the Association of County Councils. For once, councils at all levels are united, because they believe strongly in the Bill, as do trade unions such as the National Union of Public Employees, the National and Local Government Officers Association and other major unions. We are also supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Country Landowners Association — a Bill that is supported by both NUPE and the Country Landowners Association has about as wide a spectrum of support as one could achieve—the Institute of Journalists, the National Union of Journalists, the National Federation of Old Age Pensions Associations, the National Federation of Anglers and the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses. Every sector of society supports the Bill. The only body that has spoken against the Bill is, believe it or not, the Association of Water Authorities. I wonder why?

To hoist the Home Secretary on his own petard, I remind the House that recently, in the Select Committee on Home Affairs, in answer to a question from me, the right hon. and learned Gentleman agreed that a lack of knowledge gave rise to speculation, often ill-informed speculation, that in a democratic society things should be open and above board and that it should be one's right to know. On that occasion the Home Secretary was speaking on the more controversial subject of the special branch.

Today we are talking about water authorities, which are taxation-raising bodies. They can raise taxes from every householder with a water supply, so that their activities apply to 99·9 per cent. of the population. Yet for some unknown reason there is a desire for those bodies to meet behind closed doors. Why? What has happened to the water industry since 1983? We are told that it has changed its format and shape and that it is more like a nationalised industry which has undergone a reduction in the size of boards, the members of which have a more managerial type function. That is all a load of baloney.

The water industry is a national asset which is divided into nine areas, and those areas are arbitrary in their format and layout. Before 1983, local authorities had an input into those boards by way of the members they appointed or sent as representatives to their meetings. By that means we had a degree of accountability and knowledge.

At the heart of this issue lies a simple principle. If an organisation has the right to raise taxation—call it rates or whatever—it must be accountable. The only way it can be accountable is by being open, honest and above board in its dealings with the public. That means letting the press and public know what is being done. If decisions are justified publicly, there can be no ill-informed speculation and people are saved unnecessary worry. Against that background, I commend the Bill to the House.

2.22 pm

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) on his success in the ballot and on the way in which he moved the Second Reading of his Bill.

The question of the admission of the press to meetings of the boards or water authorities was discussed fully on the Floor of the House and upstairs in Committee during

[Mr. Ian Gow]

the passage of the Water Act 1983. It is all very well for the hon. Member for St. Helens, South to call in aid the Home Secretary; my right hon. and learned Friend supported the provisions of that Act.

These issues were debated thoroughly at the time, and the hon. Member for St. Helens, South rightly acknowledged that, since the passing of the 1983 Act, the boards of water authorities had become much more streamlined. Because they now act as executive boards, the necessity that some hon. Members thought used to exist for admitting the press and public to their meetings is no longer justified.

The new streamlined water authorities contain members, all of whom are appointed by Ministers, who in turn are accountable to this House for the appointments they make. Every member of a water authority is appointed by my right hon. Friend. In addition the authorities are subject to ministerial direction and financial controls, a matter to which I hope to return on Thursday. We have created boards that are executive in style, like those of other nationalised industries and private sector companies. The hon. Gentleman referred to the ability of water authorities—he did not mention it but the same is true of water companies — to levy charges that are payable in law by their customers. The same is true of those who impose telephone charges and charges for gas and electricity.

We recognise that the press and the public have a right to know about the activities of water authorities and the decisions that they take. That is why we have provided safeguards. The hon. Gentleman did not refer to the code of practice which has the approval of the chairmen of water authorities. It sets out in para 1.2 the information that must be provided to the press and says:

"A list identifying items for discussion at the press conference will be circulated in advance."

Section 7 of the Water Act 1983 requires each water authority to draw up proposals for representing consumers' interests in their areas. This was a new departure for the water industry but it has been a success. A further safeguard was provided in the code of practice.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gow: I have only five minutes. I shall gladly give way to the hon. Gentleman in Thursday's debate.

The water authorities have found that their ability to meet in private——

Mr. Rooker: Chicken.

Mr. Gow: I promise to give way to the hon. Gentleman on Thursday.

Mr. Rooker: But that is a quite different debate.

Mr. Gow: I shall not give way now.

The chairmen have told me that their boards are now able to hold much more searching discussion of issues. They have found that their freedom to discuss matters in an untrammelled way without being inhibited by the presence of the press or the public has helped them to get to grips with difficult issues without being tempted to play to the gallery. Some water authorities have from time to time reconsidered their decision whether to meet privately. They have concluded that the advantages to business efficiency of meeting in private, and hence the gain that accrues to their customers, outweighs any disadvantages that some press commentators read into their actions.

Mr. Rooker: Will the Minister give way on this point?

Mr. Gow: I have just told the hon. Gentleman that I shall not.

The chairmen believe that those advantages would be diminished if they allowed the press into their proceedings. The water authorities' chairmen do not hold those views because they wish to hide behind a veil of secrecy. On the contrary, they have assured me that they wish to be as open as is consistent with the proper running of their businesses. They have told me that they have been pleased to find that the journalists who attend their press conferences are now better informed on water matters then when they were simply able to attend board meetings.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): If the water authorities think that journalists are much better informed, do the journalists agree?

Mr. Gow: More journalists turn up to press conferences held by chairmen after the meetings of boards than used to turn up to the meetings of the much larger boards.

During the past few months we have done our utmost to ensure that there is much more open debate about environmental pollution issues as well, through the implementation of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. We have provided for public involvement in the granting of discharge consents. From yesterday, all new discharges having an appreciable effect on the receiving waters have to be advertised. There are now opportunities for public representations and there is power for the Secretary of State to call in applications.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gow: No.

Last autumn, we undertook public consultation with a view to requiring water authorities to maintain, with effect from 31 July this year, public registers of effluent discharge and consent conditions attached to them. We intend to proceed with the proposals and I expect to lay the necessary regulations before the House shortly.

The material on public registers will be comprehensive and will be available immediately. The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, when considering confidentiality in its recent report——

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I beg to move, That the Question be now put.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am not prepared to accept that motion.

Mr. Gow: The opening of authority meetings to the public is an irrelevance——

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 22 February.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

CONTROLLED DRUGS (PENALTIES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

LEASEHOLDERS (CHOICE OF INSURERS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

FABRIC ORIGIN MARKING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 April.

PROHIBITION OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Second Reading what day? No day named.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Town and Country Planning (Compensation) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses, and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.*

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. John Maxton be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Dr. John Marek be added to the Committee. —*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That Mr. Ray Ellis be discharged from the Select Committee on European Legislation and Mrs. Ann Clwyd be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That Mr. Stuart Bell be discharged from the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and Mr. Stuart Randall be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital, Greenwich

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Archie Hamilton.*]

2.31 pm

Mr. Guy Barnett (Greenwich): I am grateful for the opportunity in an Adjournment debate to raise the subject of the Dreadnought seamen's hospital. This is not the time to speak at length of the fine tradition of service of this hospital, stretching back into the last century, towards British seamen and seamen from overseas. Suffice it to say that we in Greenwich are proud to have this hospital in our borough and that nearly 300 people are currently dependent upon the hospital for jobs. However, it has had to face uncertainty about its future over almost the whole period that I have had the honour to represent the constituency of Greenwich. It faces that threat today from the proposal that is currently out for consultation that the facilities should be moved to St. Thomas' hospital and the Dreadnought hospital should be closed down.

At the outset I should remind the Minister of the commitment that was made by the then Minister for Health on 10 June 1981:

"The Government is committed to retaining the Dreadnought on its present site as a separate hospital for seamen and its future is in no way threatened".

The proposed transfer arose as a result of a request from the National Maritime Board. Consequently, the future of the hospital has again been thrown into doubt. The National Maritime Board has a specific responsibility—to ensure that proper facilities for seamen exist. As I understand its position, its members have never been happy ever since the decision was taken, when the National Health Service was reorganised in 1974, that the seamen's hospital should become the responsibility under that reorganisation of the regional area, or, later, the district health authority.

The Minister will recognise that the Dreadnought is a national institution with national and, indeed, international functions and responsibilities. It is therefore not appropriate, to say the least, that it should have to compete for funds within the district or the region, whose responsibilities are local and regional. The previous Minister, the hon. Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan), recognised that. On 19 January 1981, when he met the National Maritime Bord, he agreed that the Dreadnought needed a separate and identifiable budget and promised further consultation on that point.

I would at this point urge that those consultations should proceed. The future of the hospital cannot be assured unless and until separate funding is accepted. What is more, extra funds, voluntarily contributed by maritime interests, seamen's unions, or other sources are, to a degree, dependent upon the donors being assured that their contributions are being wholly devoted to the Dreadnought. Whether that is now the case or not is not the point. People and organisations will not contribute unless there is a separate budget and they can see the benefits which their contributions are providing for seamen.

The Minister should be aware that the balance of opinion in the National Maritime Board has changed since that board considered the possibility of the move to St. Thomas'. The board is made up of 50 per cent. shipping companies and 50 per cent. employee organisations. Today, only one employee organisation supports transfer. Nevertheless, I understand that there is a petition in existence, signed by 9,000 members of the Merchant Navy and Air Line Officers Association, in favour of retaining the Dreadnought on its present site. I have heard recently that the Royal Navy Association, particularly the Dartford branch, has formed the same opinion.

But on the employers' side I gather that a number of shipping companies are now concerned about the transfer proposals. I have copies of a number of letters from shipping companies which make it clear that they entertain serious doubts about the viability of the proposed transfer and its effect on the future medical treatment of seamen. I would gladly pass them on to the Minister if he would like that because I am certain that he wants his final decision to accord with the views of the majority of interests which are directly affected.

Why has anxiety been expressed in so many quarters about the proposed transfer? I could speak at length, from personal knowledge, of the unique services which the Dreadnought currently provides and which are geared to the occupational needs of seamen. The staff of the hospital, apart from being dedicated people themselves, have inherited a long tradition of experience in this specialist field. They are experienced in the details of the comprehensive maritime fitness protocols. Their investigation and treatment of patients are established around those regulations.

The proposals for transfer imply redundancies for practically the entire staff and therefore the loss of all that expertise. At no time has the staff at St. Thomas' made any attempt to study those matters and discover whether they are or could become competent to undertake those responsibilities.

Meanwhile, the staff of the Dreadnought have sought independent medical opinion. They approached Sir Reginald Murley, the former president of the Royal College of Surgeons. In a full reply, he says:

"I intend no disrespect to St. Thomas' hospital in stating that seamen are most unlikely to get as personal and prompt a service as the Dreadnought has provided. The medical gain for the small percentage of seamen who may require more elaborate investigation and/or treatment will not compensate for the loss of facilities, geared to their special needs, which the majority of seamen now enjoy."

As I have said, merchant seamen's medical management is a specialist topic. Therefore, it is unlikely to have the attention paid to it in a large hospital with consultants and a rotating junior staff who are all too likely to resent that small group of exceptional patients who do not come into any clear category of management, who are non-medical emergencies, and who yet should have priority over every other kind of patient.

Indeed, it is likely that, within a short time of transfer to a wholly NHS hospital, compromises will be made over the management of those patients, resulting in increased redundancies for seamen, longer periods off work and a dislocation of the routine of the shipping companies and their medical officers. Dreadnought gets seamen back on ship and fit for work. As a result, many of its patients' jobs are salvaged in the middle of their working lives.

The future of Dreadnought is up for consultation and, therefore, it may not be thought an appropriate time to raise this issue in the House. I do so because I think that the Minister should be asked to intervene to get the consultation withdrawn. He will recall that he had

correspondence on this subject with councillor Glyn Williams, the chairman of the Greenwich community health council. It has been put to him that under the terms of circular HSC (IS 207) it is necessary for a district health authority, when issuing a consultation document which may lead to a closure, to be aware of the implications that such a change would have for the patients. It is apparent that this was not the case.

Both my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and I were present at the meeting of the district health authority on 13 November when the decision was taken. It became clear that the members had not seen a copy of the operational policy document of the West Lambeth district health authority, though it is conceivable that the chairman may have had sight of it. I submit that the terms of the circular have not been fulfilled and that the consultation document should therefore be withdrawn.

In the letter that the Minister wrote to Councillor Williams, he claims :

"neither the Department nor the Greenwich health authority has been shown a document of the Price Waterhouse Report."

I have been categorically assured that such a document was sent to the Minister. I have mentioned the report in the House and the Minister told me that he was looking forward to reading it. I shall be glad to send him a copy together with a second report, which should be complete during next month, to ensure that their contents are fully understood within the Department. This is by no means the only communication about Dreadnought that appears to have gone astray within the Department.

The first Price Waterhouse report dealt with costs and savings arising from the proposed move. That is a matter of central importance. The Minister accepted the findings of the feasibility study on 6 June 1983 and so initiated local consultation. That study estimated the savings to Greenwich district as £1·2 million. In the latest consultation document the district health authority admits that the savings would now amount to only £690,000. The difference is considerable.

The Minister wrote to the chairman of the Greenwich health authority saying that he agreed with the authority's figure. That is surprising, as the regional health authority stated in the document issued in December 1983 that there would be a £900,000 surplus to Greenwich if the move took place.

It is ironic that we should be considering the possibility of closing a hospital which makes special provision when other European countries such as Holland and Norway are opening them. Apart from our needs as a seafaring nation, we have international responsibilities to fulfil. We should continue to fulfil them in the only hospital that we still possess that is capable of discharging them. Above all, I am worried, as I am sure the Minister is, about the uncertainty for the members of the staff, which is demoralising for them. They are a dedicated staff in a fine hospital. I hope that the Minister will use every effort to bring the uncertainty to an end and ensure that Dreadnought continues to fulfil the functions that it has carried on for so many years.

2.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): I am pleased that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Barnett) has secured this Adjournment debate on the future of a long-standing and important hospital. I appreciate the way in which he has raised his arguments on behalf of the staff, the hospital itself, its traditions and, most of all, the patients. When we are considering changes in the pattern of service—old hospitals shutting and new ones opening and services being switched from one place to another —it is terribly easy to lose sight of the purpose that staff and buildings serve and of the needs of patients. I think that the hon. Gentleman kept his eye very much on the needs and interests of the patients rather than on buildings, for example. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about that. The future of the hospital is close to his heart, judging from the anxieties that he has already expressed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health and myself and to the Greenwich health authority. I am also aware of early-day motion 94 which has attracted wide support. I understand that 117 hon. Members have signed it.

I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the excellent work that has been done for so many years by the staff at the Dreadnought Seamen's hospital. The staff is backed by the local community, the friends and relatives of present and former patients and the Royal Naval Association.

The anxiety is caused by the Greenwich health authority proposal to close the hospital and to transfer medical services for seamen to a specially designated unit at St. Thomas' hospital. The health authority issued a consultative document on its proposal last November and consultations will continue until 28 February. As consultations are proceeding it is not appropriate for Ministers to intervene. I shall try to explain the reasons, although I do not think that they will satisfy the hon. Gentleman.

I shall first explain briefly the procedures that health authorities must follow when they wish to close or change the use of a building permanently. The hon. Gentleman seems to be familiar with the process so I shall not describe it exhaustively, but I shall put it on the record and explain the arguments for and against the proposal.

The appropriate district health authority is required to prepare a consultative document. Comments on the proposals in the document are invited within three months from such bodies as the local community health council, the local authorities, joint staff consultative committees, family practitioner committees, local advisory committees and the general public. If the community health council objects to the proposals it is entitled to submit to the authority a counter-proposal. If that counter-proposal cannot be agreed and the local and regional health authorities want the closure to proceed the case is referred to Ministers for decision.

I shall not go into detail about the issues in this case, but in my experience it is at that stage that arguments to try to reconcile different sets of figures arise and different facts are debated by those who object to the closure. That is the stage at which Ministers should intervene, to try to weigh up the evidence and to act in the impartial and quasi-judicial manner that all health Ministers seek to act.

We have made it clear that when proposals are made to us Ministers will not agree to closure or change of use unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the closure or change of use is in the best interest of local health services

[Mr. John Patten]

and the community or unless savings will result to finance developments in under-target districts and so enhance the nation's health care.

We take the consultative process seriously. After the consultation process is over and the hon. Gentleman wants to see the Minister for Health or myself he has only to ask. We shall be pleased to see him again to discuss the arguments in detail. That is an open invitation. In this case not only local interests are at stake. The Dreadnought is a hospital with a special dimension.

Successive Governments have long recognised that seafarers have special medical needs, the nature of whose employment makes it difficult for them to join hospital waiting lists. They require quick treatment, rehabilitation and discharge, so that they can rejoin their ship at the right time and place.

We remain committed to the provision of adequate medical services for seafarers. The issue is how those services can best be provided—whether in the existing hospital in Greenwich, which the Dreadnought has inhabited since 1870, when it came ashore from the hulk that it had prevously occupied in the Thames, or in a new facility in St. Thomas' hospital.

The idea of a move came in 1981 from the National Maritime Board, which represents the interests of shipping industry employers and the seafarers' union. A unanimous request was made to the then Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) that a new site be found for the Dreadnought. Since then, opinions have gone backward and forward, but much of the present situation derives from that request by the NMB.

My hon. Friend the then Minister for Health agreed to consider the request and to look at alternative sites, but the NMB itself entered discussions with the West Lambeth health authority, which manages St. Thomas' hospital, on the possibility of a transfer to that hospital. We asked the South-East Thames regional health auhority to carry out a feasibility study, which was completed in 1982. We accepted the findings of that study and in July 1983, my right hon. and learned Friend the present Minister for Health asked for local consultations to be carried out. They were completed in West Lambeth in January 1984, but are continuing in Greenwich.

I understand that the National Union of Seamen, one of the constituent bodies of the NMB, changed its policy last year, some time after the initial request by the NMB, and now opposes the transfer of the Dreadnought—and we shall have to take account of that fact. I wish to emphasise that the proposal for the transfer was originally made by the National Maritime Board. It has been said that the then Minister for Health undertook in June 1981 that the future of the Dreadnought in Greenwich was secure. However, notwithstanding that undertaking, I do not believe that we could have ignored the request for a move made by the NMB. That would have been wrong.

The consultations on the proposal are in train and will conclude by the end of this month. As the West Lambeth community health council has already opposed the proposal, my judgment is that it is most likely that the matter will be referred through the regional health authority to Ministers for a decision, at which stage all the points raised in this interesting debate can be dealt with.

I cannot give any indication of what our decision is likely to be, but there are arguments for the proposal as well as against it. It is certainly arguable that a higher standard of treatment could be provided for seafarers if the Dreadnought is associated with the specialised facilities of a major teaching hospital. I appreciate the quotations from a distinguished medical source that only a minority of patients would benefit from a closer association with acute facilities and that much might be lost in terms of continuing care, interest, reservoirs of experience and the atmosphere of the Dreadnought. We all know that buildings and hospitals have their own atmosphere and traditions. The balance will have to be struck by Ministers if the matter lands on our desk for determination.

Because of the historic decline in the size of the British merchant fleet, only about half the bed capacity of the Dreadnought is used for seafarers. It is important to make that point.

If seafarers need a unit of about 60 beds—the size of the unit proposed for St. Thomas'—it might well be provided more economically there than at Greenwich. I am not prejudging the issue; I am trying to put the other side of the case as I picked it up by reading the correspondence that I have had with the hon. Gentleman, among others. There are two sides to the question. I am simply saying how difficult it will be for my right hon. and learned Friend to take decisions should the matter reach us.

West Lambeth and Greenwich districts, like other London districts, need to rationalise their acute services. The Dreadnought transfer might help them to do that. The particular needs of seafarers have to be set against the particular needs to rationalise acute services in London.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall consider the proposals in the interests of the Health Service as a whole but bearing in mind, of course, the tradition of the hospital and the particular service that it gives.

2.56 pm

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): I apologise to the Minister, having heard only his last few comments. I should be grateful if he would consider two further points. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Barnett) will have put all the pertinent points about the hospital. At the conclusion of his remarks the Minister said, without any equivocation whatever, that there was a need for rationalisation of acute beds. I submit to him that in all the regions, especially the one with which he is concerned here, there is an argument about the need to rationalise.

Bearing in mind the specialties of the Dreadnought hospital, rationalisation could well mean a diminution in facilities. A press report this week spoke of the large number of problems arising from rationalisation where resources are cut. As a result, there is a shortage of certain specialties. When we talk of acute, chronic or geriatric beds, we are giving blanket definitions.

The Minister would appear to be prejudging the case. Although he rightly says that he does not have to judge the case until such time as it arrives on his desk, he also says that there is a need for rationalisation of acute beds in the region. That is an arguable statement. He cannot reasonably say that a case has been fully made out for the rationalisation of acute beds.

I ask for the indulgence of the House, not having been present for most of the debate. I think that the Minister acknowledged that a hospital has its individual

personality, ambience, tradition and culture. Too often, on purely financial and economic grounds, after a hospital has developed its own personality and served certain sections of the community for decades, as the Dreadnought has done, it is argued that, provided the necessary technical equipment is available, it does not matter whether a hospital remains as a viable living unit, with its medical and paramedical staff, its culture and tradition. It is entirely wrong that the only considerations should be material ones. I know that the Minister thinks clearly on these matters, and I hope that he will consider the points that I have mentioned.

2.58 pm

Mr. Patten: By leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to respond to the two points made by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt). I thank the hon. Gentleman for his compliment. We always consider the virtues of particular hospitals and their traditions.

Without trying to introduce a partisan note, I would say only that in my concluding remarks I was not trying to prejudge the issue but simply attempting to set the particular issue of the Dreadnought hospital and its future against the overall context of health care in London. That policy has been advanced by successive Governments since 1976. The then Labour Administration said that acute services needed rationalising and that redistribution of resources should occur. I was seeking to set the particular case of the Dreadnought hospital against the needs of health care in the capital as a whole.

I look forward to getting a chance to discuss the issue further with the hon. Member for Greenwich, who raised this important subject, should it come to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State and myself for determination at a later stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 4 February 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

DARTMOOR COMMONS BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Association of Metropolitan Authorities

1. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends meeting representatives of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have any immediate plans to meet representatives of the AMA. I meet them as necessary from time to time on matters of mutual interest.

Mr. Davies: Will the Minister or her Secretary of State seek a meeting with the AMA? If she were to do so she would find from the urban areas of Britain a reception as hostile as that which she received from the rural areas, particularly Wales, on the proposed legislation on buses. Will she advise the Secretary of State that if such a meeting were held it might provide a convenient opportunity for the right hon. Gentleman to reconsider his proposals, to climb down and perhaps save what little face he has left?

Mrs. Chalker: As I said, I meet the AMA from time to time, particularly its members in the different authorities, and that includes members from the metropolitan county councils, who have been present at a number of meetings where this issue has been raised. I accept that many people are scared about what will happen, but that is a result of scaremongering and the failure to face the fact that competition has always brought about a better standard of service for the passengers. It is about time that we organised Britain's transport on the basis of the needs of passengers rather than of those who would administer it.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: When my hon. Friend meets the AMA, will she confirm to it, as to the House, that although rear seat belts may be desirable, she as no intention of making them compulsory?

Mrs. Dunwoody: That is matter for the House.

Mrs. Chalker: I am surprised that that should arise on this question, but one gets used to any subject coming up. We are studying carefully the Select Committee's recommendations and, as the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) says, whether rear seat belts should be made compulsory would be a matter for the House and not for Ministers.

Mr. Alton: When the Minister meets representatives of the AMA, will she meet the Merseyside representatives and discuss with them the decision to close the link between the Isle of Man and Liverpool, a 150-year-old service, which the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company decided to terminate precipitously and arbitrarily on Friday last, putting people out of work and massively inconveniencing people who live on the island and on Merseyside?

Mrs. Chalker: That is not a matter for the AMA. From my reading of the newspapers, that service is not to be terminated but its destination point changed from Liverpool to Heysham. Obviously that is a matter of concern to everyone in the Liverpool area, but there must be good management reasons for that. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can draw some of his own conclusions.

Buses

2. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what further responses he has received to the White Paper, "Buses", Cmnd. 9300.

7. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what further representations he has received concerning the White Paper, "Buses".

15. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what response he has so far received to the White Paper, "Buses".

20. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what further representations he has received concerning the White Paper, "Buses".

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I received nearly 8,000 responses to the White Paper and the consultation documents which were issued subsequently.

Mr. Waller: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that those who genuinely wish to make a constructive contribution to the creation of a more appropriate framework for buses are becoming increasingly frustrated and irritated by the exaggerated claims and the distortions of those who are opposed to any change whatsoever? Does he agree that, far from abolishing standards, the Bill, with its many clauses, will reinforce them?

Mr. Ridley: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and I am grateful for what he said. Standards are important and, now that the Bill has been published, the House will have had the chance to see the statutory provisions that we propose to improve standards. Where there has been total deregulation in the long-distance coach industry, standards have improved enormously because operators realise that if they are to attract more customers it is in their interests to provide high standards.

Mr. Pike: Will the right hon. Gentleman accept the serious concern expressed by many people who use public transport and many who run public transport that if the Bill goes forward as published it will be disastrous for off-peak services, rural services and concessionary fares? Will he take into account the views expressed at the seminar held today by Transport 2000?

Mr. Ridley: I beg to differ. The purpose of the Bill is to improve the matters which the hon. Gentleman listed. I assure him that I would not be seeking to legislate to make services worse. I believe he will discover that the effect of the combination of tendering for services, the rural bus grant and the new flexibility which the provisions of the Bill allow will be that rural services will improve very much. The hon. Gentleman ought to be very careful before suggesting otherwise from his rural area of Burnley.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Secretary of State aware that the Bill —a cowboys' charter—with its proposals to end internal cross-subsidisation, taken with the effects of the abolition of the West Midlands county council and other county councils, puts at risk up to 30 per cent. of services in Coventry and the rest of the west midlands? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his vague promises about the protection of pensioners' bus passes fall on stony ground, because it is no good having a bus pass if Sunday, evening and other services do not turn up at the bus stop?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman has gone no further than obtaining a copy of the Bill. He clearly has not read it. If he had, he would know that if off-peak services are not provided by the operator—and I think that in many cases they will be—they can be provided by the local authority, which can put them out to tender in the way described in the Bill. That is also the case with concessionary fares. If those fares end in Coventry, the hon. Gentleman will know who to blame. It will be his own local authority and not me.

Mr. Beith: Regarding the tender proposals, how can a local authority receive realistic tender proposals for a route on which the operator could face competition from another operator who is prepared to take only the profitable part of that route?

Mr. Ridley: It would be a strange competitor who, without subsidy, challenged a subsidised operator on a route which had been genuinely uneconomic and had been put out to tender. The circumstances suggested by the hon. Gentleman seem to me extremely remote. However, if the position outlined by the hon. Gentleman occurred, I suggest that there could be a break clause in the contract and everybody would be pleased to know that part of the route that had been subsidised did not need subsidy, and that would save some money.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: When my right hon. Friend studies the responses to the White Paper, I hope that he will also study the report by Bristol university, which appeared in the papers today and confirmed that the Hereford experiment had been excellent and beneficial to consumers. Does my right hon. Friend agree that as a loss-making publicly owned line in a rural area in my constituency can be replaced by a private, unsubsidised service, that shows that there is plenty of scope?

Mr. Ridley: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, though I have not yet had time to study the Bristol report. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary talked to well over 60 people on the buses in Hereford and found none who had anything but praise for the new system. Their only fear is that the deregulated system might be taken away from them, to their very great disadvantage.

Mr. Holt: Has my right hon. Friend had any responses from, or discussions with, the Bishop of Durham, who is this week addressing a political meeting in Cleveland at which all Conservative and alliance Members have been refused the opportunity to speak?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman talking about buses?

Mr. Holt: That is exactly what my question is about.

Mr. Ridley: The dreadful thing is, Mr. Speaker, that my hon. Friend was talking about buses in connection with the bishop. However, if the bishop is interested, I should be very happy to meet him and to take him through the Bill clause by clause.

Mr. Cowans: Might it not be in the interests of the House, and certainly those of the Secretary of State, if he could substantiate his case—if, indeed, he has one—by publishing all the responses and placing copies of them in the Library, so that we could see all those who are in favour of the proposals, all those who are against and the reasons why? The right hon. Gentleman should have nothing to fear if people support him to the extent that he claims.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that if responses are sent privately to me it would be quite wrong to publish them without first gaining the consent of those who wrote them. Anyone who wishes to publish his response to a consultative document is at liberty to do so himself.

Mr. Tracey: I am sure that most people will welcome the policy of added competition if it follows the example of Hereford, as outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) and by the article that appeared today in *The Times*. However, may I urge my right hon. Friend to reconsider greater competition for hire cars in the London area?

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. I am acutely aware of the point that he raised. It is a difficult issue, with arguments on both sides, but we can debate it at length in Committee. I do not have a closed mind about it.

Mr. Stott: The Secretary of State must be all too painfully aware of the representations that he has received on the content of the White Paper from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of District Councils, the Womens Institute, Rural Voice and the Taxi Drivers Association. If he had any sense he would listen to them instead of dispatching the Under-Secretary of State to travel round the country wining and dining local newspaper editors in order to create propaganda in favour of his Bill.

Mr. Ridley: If the hon. Gentleman had any sense he would listen to the voices of the consumers, to those of the National Consumer Council and to the people on the buses in Hereford. He would also stop taking the side of vested interests and come down on the side of the customer.

Later——

Mr. Holt: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it directed to questions?

Mr. Holt: Directly, Mr. Speaker. May I apologise to you if I shouted and did not make it clear that the public rally to be addressed next week in Cleveland by the Bishop of Durham is exclusively to do with buses and has nothing to do with religion?

Mr. Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman if I queried his question. I am glad that the matter is now straight.

3. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has for his assertion that safety standards will be improved by implementation of the White Paper, "Buses".

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): The provisions in the Transport Bill reflect the Government's determination to maintain and tighten safety standards.

Mr. Madden: Is not the truth of the matter that the claim that deregulation will lead to better safety standards is as bogus as the claim that deregulation will lead to cheaper, better and more efficient transport services? Is it not about time that the Secretary of State, who is generally seen as a walking disaster area for good transport, tore up the Bill and allowed public authorities the proper level of resources to run improving and expanding public transport services?

Mr. Mitchell: Deregulation itself does not affect the safety level. We have never suggested that it would lead to higher safety standards. We have said that we shall put extra resources into ensuring that safety standards are properly maintained even though there may well be more operators than at present. The hon. Gentleman referred to better and cheaper services, and I should point out that our experience of the test areas is that deregulation produces more, better and cheaper services, and is liked by the customer.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend confirm that at the last count 60 per cent. of National Bus Company buses had failed the first test? Will he also confirm that Lancashire county council is needlessly worrying many people by publishing figures that will frighten them off the buses? Will he further confirm that many of the representations that he receives are merely in the form of cut-out bits from newspapers that are paid for with £135,000 of ratepayers' money?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend has got the figures slightly wrong. Perhaps I can help her and the House. A total of 60 per cent. of the National Bus Company's buses passed on their admission, but 56 per cent. of the private sector buses passed—slightly less than for the National Bus Company—and 47 per cent. of London Transport buses passed, which is substantially less.

Mr. Strang: Does the Minister understand that his Bill is bound to lead to cowboy operators with clapped out buses driven by part-time non-union drivers racing from stop to stop? Does he agree that that is bound to lead to lower safety?

Mr. Mitchell: The experiment in Hereford and Worcester shows that as soon as unsafe vehicles appear on the road they are put off by Department inspectors. We shall devote adequate resources to ensure that that system continues and is dealt with effectively. The Bill contains powers to deal with racing.

Mr. Gregory: Will my hon. Friend assure the House that under the Bill there will be more safety checks, because 2,300 buses and coaches failed their special inspection test in 1983-84, and at the annual inspection a staggering 21·4 per cent. failed? Will he assure the House that the consumer will have better safety protection?

Mr. Mitchell: We are taking the necessary steps to ensure that adequate resources are available for the task. I have not said that there will be a significant improvement in existing standards, but steps are being taken by most operators to improve the level of passes. There are some unfortunate gaps. A recent chance survey of 5 per cent. of London Transport stock resulted in half the buses being put off the road immediately.

Mr. Stephen Ross: When the Minister visited Herefordshire, did he discuss the many complaints about parking offences, the allegations about wilful damage to coaches and the allegations about coaches operating without proper licences granted by the chief constable? Did he discover why such complaints were not followed up and why prosecutions were not followed through?

Mr. Mitchell: I went to hear the views of the county council, the city council and the users. Their views were clear and emphatic. The county council is well pleased with what it has. The Liberal city council adopts the somewhat illiberal view that it does not like a lot of buses in the city centre. The customers are thoroughly pleased with what they have and do not want to go back to the previous system.

Mr. Roger King: Will my hon. Friend note that some of the buses that we saw in Hereford last week on our recent trip with the independants, were more modern than the equivalent National Bus Company buses? Does he agree that there was strong evidence to suggest that existing safety standards and inspection were biased towards the independants, and not against the National Bus Company, which has been guilty, perhaps, of just as many misdemeanours?

Mr. Mitchell: I travelled on as many bus services as I could and I found better standards in the private sector than on some of the Midland Red buses operating in the town.

Mr. Snape: Nonsense.

Mr. Mitchell: If the hon. Gentleman goes there he will see that what I say is so. Moreover, the customers seem to like the softer seats and the greater comfort in the private sector coaches.

Mr. Park: Will the extra resources to which the Minister has referred enable private operators to purchase buses which have the same ease of entrance and exit as public service vehicles?

Mr. Mitchell: The ability of private sector operators to purchase buses and to dispose of them is unaffected by the Bill. The requirement in law already is that buses have to be submitted for tests and that the operator cannot operate without an operator's licence with all its conditions.

Mr. Maclean: Will my hon. Friend take it from me that private operators come to my constituency surgeries urging that the measure be passed? Is he aware that in view of their high standard of excellence and the high standards of private enterprise activity in my constituency, they resent Labour Members referring to them as "cowboys"?

Mr. Mitchell: I note my hon. Friend's point. I am sorry that the word "cowboy" has been coined, because it

seems to be applied only to operators starting up new businesses. I should have thought that the House was interested in seeing more people having the chance to start businesses, so creating employment.

Mrs. Dunwoody: If the hon. Gentleman resents the use of the word "cowboys", perhaps he will say how he would describe a Hereford operator who maintained his buses in a lay-by and an operator who had his licence taken away because 47 immediate dangers were found. How will the Department be able to monitor safety standards when he is reducing the number of people involved in examining vehicles and when the number of traffic commissioners is being reduced from three to one?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Lady is wrong to say that we are cutting down on the numbers. The number of faults found in the case of the Hereford operator to whom she referred is an indication that the system is working effectively. *[Interruption]* Those vehicles were stopped, were identified as being inadequately maintained and were put off the road. That is what the House should want in the interests of safety.

Trunk Roads (Inquiry Procedures)

4. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his response to the proposals for improving and accelerating trunk road inquiry procedures contained in the recent report on the subject by the National Economic Development Council.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment are considering the Civil Engineering Economic Development Committee's report and hope to give their response by the spring.

Mr. Hughes: Should not the findings of all public inquiries be published at the earliest possible moment? Why is the Secretary of State sitting on the report on the Severn bridge relating to the proposal to increase tolls by 150 per cent.? Will the Minister take note of the Prime Minister's recent assertion that direct questions need direct answers?

Mrs. Chalker: I shall do my best to give the hon. Gentleman a direct reply. He clearly does not understand the system of or legal background applying to public inquiries; otherwise, he would not ask for the publication of reports at the earliest opportunity. They are often weighty tomes, as we have seen in recent years, and all the elements with which the inspectors deal in them need careful consideration, and that we certainly give to them.

My right hon. Friend is not sitting on any report, and nor am I. The inspector's report on the Severn bridge tolls increase was received in November. We are working on it. When we are ready to make a decision, a decision letter will be issued, followed by the matter being advertised in the local press and the laying of the necessary order signed by the Minister and subject to the negative resolution procedure in this House.

Mr. Higgins: Any move to improve and accelerate trunk road inquiries procedures is to be welcomed. Does my hon. Friend agree that a sufficient number of inquiries need to be completed so that, if additional resources become available, work can go ahead without being held up by planning considerations?

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. In addition to the 55 schemes currently under construction and two at public inquiry, 273 schemes are in preparation, so creating a shelf of schemes which can be brought forward when resources permit.

Long-distance Coach Industry

5. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the percentage increase in passengers that has taken place since the deregulation of the long-distance coach industry.

Mr. David Mitchell: Comprehensive statistics are not available, but the number of passengers carried on NBC's National Express services, which has about 70 per cent. of the market, increased by 45 per cent. between 1980 and 1983. As independent operators undertook very little long-distance coaching before deregulation, they must have increased their carryings by an even greater figure.

Mr. Atkinson: Is it not a fact that deregulation has produced cheaper fares, better services, more passengers and more jobs for the British long-distance coach industry? Is that not evidence enough to suppose that the same will happen to the British bus industry, given the safeguards and standards contained in the Transport Bill?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is perfectly correct in his catalogue of the benefits that have come from deregulation of long-distance coaches. Similar benefits came from deregulation of long-distance internal air services. The principle seems to hold good.

Mr. Dobson: What has been the parallel reduction in NBC services over and above the 42 million passenger miles by which they were reduced in the first year after the deregulation of long-distance coaches came into operation?

Mr. Mitchell: What we have seen has been a change in the pattern. The overall effect has been to satisfy more people because more people are using the services than before to a very substantial extent—rather more than 40 per cent.

Airports Policy

8. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's airports policy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Michael Spicer): When my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Transport announce the decision on the Stansted/Heathrow terminal 5 planning inquiries, we intend also to make a statement dealing with some wider aspects of the Government's airports policy.

Mr. Adley: I welcome that comment. In the light of the rejection by the House of the Eyre report, will my hon. Friend make it clear that in future decisions on airports policy in this country will be made as a consequence of, and not as a motivating factor in, regional and economic planning policy? Does he accept that other transport infrastructure developments such as rail links to Heathrow are part of the environmental price that we have to pay for trying to civilise air transport in this country?

Mr. Spicer: I agree entirely that regional airports should be developed as fast as demand in the region

allows. The regional airports have become a great success story. As a whole, they are now in profit and the Government have made capital expenditure allocations of above £30 million this year and next year. We intend to build on that success.

Mr. Alfred Morris: In view of the rejection of the inspector's recommendations on Stansted by so many Members on both sides of the House in last Wednesday's debate, is there any action that the Minister can take to stop cross-subsidisation of Stansted airport by the British Airports Authority? Is he aware that that unfair competition causes not just exasperation but anger among other airport authorities?

Mr. Spicer: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are very much aware of the representations that have been made and the feelings that have been expressed, but these matters will have to be part of the total decision taken as a result of the report.

Mr. Haselhurst: Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that the current review of tourism policy will not take place in isolation from consideration of airports policy?

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend has made his views on the promotion of toursim in relation to aviation policy very clear and I am sure that his views are being well noted.

Mr. Kennedy: With regard to airports rather further north than Stansted, does the Minister agree that the Government's recent climb-down after their abortive efforts to sell off the civil aviation airports in the Highlands and Islands shows the strength of local feeling and the effectiveness of the CAA's campaign, the level of public support for the socially crucial airports of the Western Isles and the Highlands generally and the fact that blind pursuit of dogma favouring privatisation where it is clearly not applicable makes no sense at all?

Mr. Spicer: We received several offers for those airports but none met the criteria that we had laid down —that the airports should continue to meet the social needs. Nor did they contribute satisfactorily to reducing the current annual subsidy of £3¼ million.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Will the Minister make it clear that there is no question of the House having rejected the Eyre report? Does he agree that it would be tragic if the Government abandoned progress on Stansted and other developments because of a procedural vote representing a minority of the House? Is he aware that many Members of Parliament and many people in Essex would regard it as a tragedy if the Stansted proposals were abandoned?

Mr. Spicer: My right hon. Friends will take into account all that was said in the Stansted debate, but they will have to make their own judgments.

Mr. Snape: Does the Under-Secretary accept that, despite the views of the exiled and Southend-based Scotsman who has just spoken, a majority of the House will not sanction a third London airport at Stansted or anywhere else, but will demand that a greater share of Britain's financial resources be put towards the development of regional airports?

Mr. Spicer: I have already answered the point about regional airports. With regard to the decision on Stansted airport, the hon. Gentleman, I am afraid, will have to wait for my right hon. Friend's decision.

Nuclear Electromagnetic Pulse

9. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information and assistance has been supplied to the shipping, aircraft and motor industries on protective measures against the effects of nuclear electromagnetic pulse.

12. **Mr. Couchman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he gives to local authorities to ensure that their essential transport for emergency purposes will not be affected by nuclear electromagnetic pulse.

Mr. Michael Spicer: A report by an interdepartmental working party on the effect on communications will be available to Ministers later this year. Advice about measures to counteract electromagnetic pulse is given to shipowners by the Ministry of Defence, to airlines by the Civil Aviation Authority and to local authorities by the Home Office.

Mr. Bowden: Will my hon. Friend ensure that there are places available on training courses so that those who are concerned with those matters may have an opportunity to learn about the effects of nuclear electromagnetic pulse?

Mr. Spicer: I shall certainly consider that matter and perhaps write to my hon. Friend about it later.

Mr. Councham: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that local authorities which have declared themselves nuclear-free zones in the misconceived notion that they will escape the holocaust will take the advice that is given to them about safeguarding their vehicles?

Mr. Spicer: The advice that local authorities take and the giving of advice to them is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

A127 and A13

10. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the peak hours traffic density on the A127 and the A13 in the latest year for which figures are available; and how these densities compare with those on similar trunk roads in conurbations elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Chalker: Average peak hour flows on the A13 and A127 inside Greater London are 4,000 and 3,700 respectively. Those densities are comparable with those for similar trunk roads in conurbations.

Dr. Clark: Are there any long-term plans for a motorway to serve south-east Essex, bearing in mind the high traffic density on the A13 and A127? Can my hon. Friend assure the House that the dualling of the A13 will be speeded up and that some attention will be given to the London end of the A13 and the A127, where traffic congestion is unacceptable?

Mrs. Chalker: There are no plans for motorways in Essex in the way that my hon. Friend describes. However, we are conscious that until the M25 is fully open there will continue to be usage of the A13 and the A127 by traffic which might otherwise use the M25 and other routes. There are plans to improve the A13 at its junction with the A117. That was added to the programme in May 1983. At the moment we are checking over alternative routes at Rainham on the A13 to try to help the congestion that

occurs in the narrow areas of the A13 where it has not yet been dualled. Further than that, we have plans, but they will gradually come together over the coming months, and when the review of the trunk road network is complete I shall have more information for my hon. Friend.

Road Crossings

11. **Ms. Richardson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department is looking into alternative road crossings to subways.

Mrs. Chalker: Alternative road crossings, including footbridges, pelicans and zebras, are available, and the choice is for the highway authority depending on the local circumstances. The matter is kept under constant review.

Ms. Richardson: Is the Minister aware—I am sure that she is—of the great fears experienced by many people, especially women, when they use subways, where violence, muggings and so on might occur? Will the hon. Lady instigate a survey into the extent of the problem? Does she agree that the provision of surface crossings and the cost of planning and producing them is negligible by comparison with the protection of women and elderly people?

Mrs. Chalker: I share the hon. Lady's concern about what sometimes goes on in subways, where not only women are affected. The policing aspect is a matter for the Home Office. In recent years, we, for our part, have done what we can to improve the design of subways. I shall send the hon. Lady the design specifications for new subways, but I agree with her that the cheapest form of helping people cross the road is an island in the centre of the road, followed by zebras, pelicans and footbridges, all of which work out more cheaply than subways, but sometimes are not a feasible answer in view of the land in the area and the junctions near the main crossing points used by the local population.

Mr. Stern: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fashion for building subways, particularly as pedestrian crossings on busy suburban roads, has now largely passed, but that many local authorities are left with these landmarks to past theory? As a consequence, will she make the advice of her Department available to those authorities which, over the next few years, would like to replace these white elephants but are to some extent concerned about the cost of doing so?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend raises a valid point. Advice on subways already exists, and I shall send him copies of it. Sometimes it is almost impossible to widen the entrances to subways or to straighten existing subways, and in those cases local authorities may need to look at surface crossings, as the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) intimated in her supplementary question.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

North London Polytechnic

49. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Attorney-General if, pursuant to his reply of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *191*, he has any information as to whether the officers of the students' union of the North London polytechnic have now given any undertaking regarding their readiness to comply with the injunction granted by the High Court on 11 December 1984, restraining them from making or authorising payments from the funds of the students union to striking miners; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General (Sir Michael Havers): The officers of the North London polytechnic students' union offered to give certain undertakings and at the same time asked for a revocation of the orders made by the court restraining them from doing certain acts and appointing a receiver and manager of the union funds. Their application came before the court this morning. While accepting the officers' undertakings, the court considered them insufficient in the light of the officers' past conduct and it therefore ruled that its previous order appointing the receiver should remain in force for the time being.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. and learned Friend join me in welcoming the restraint placed by the law upon the students union officers of the polytechnic of North London from giving a further £10,000 of public money out of student union funds to the striking miners? Will he use every means that he can to recover the £3,000 already wrongly applied by the same people to the same cause and in defiance of their charitable status?

The Attorney-General: The purpose of my application to the court for the appointment of a receiver was to prevent the misuse of union funds. I prevented the payment of two cheques, each of £5,000, although in one case £2,150 in cash was drawn by the officers from the bank and handed over to a particular miner. Previously, another sum of £1,000 was handed over. It may be that the court will order them personally to seek to repay that.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Attorney-General not accept that members of a student union or any other democratic organisation have a right to express their support for those who are fighting for their jobs and communities and that there have been an unwarranted and unfair series of press attacks on the leadership of the polytechnic of North London students union because of this matter, not least by the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway)?

The Attorney-General: If, of course, these people wish to use their own money no one will complain, but they are trustees of large sums of public money given to them by the Government, and that can be used only for the purpose for which it was given.

Coal Industry Dispute

50. **Mr. Adley** asked the Attorney-General how many cases are still outstanding in the courts in relation to offences alleged to have been committed in relation to the miners' strike; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: During the period from 14 March 1984 to 29 January 1985, 7,653 persons were charged with a total of 9,901 offences alleged to have been committed during the course of the current miners' dispute. Of these, 4,874 defendants have been dealt with and the cases of 2,779 remain to be heard.

Mr. Adley: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for those figures. Is it not a fact that had there been no foregathering of members of Arthur Scargill's private army at many of the coal mines, intent on intimidating those who merely wanted to work, there would have been no need for the police presence in the first place? Does he

therefore agree with this morning's statement by the leader of the Social Democratic party, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), that this sort of thuggery should have no part whatever in industrial relations organisations in this country?

The Attorney-General: I have no hesitation in agreeing with that. Picketing, as approved by the TUC and as part of the miners' own rules, is limited to six. If there are hundreds or, indeed, thousands of pickets, at best it is a demonstration and, at worst, a riot.

Mr. Barron: Will the Attorney-General tell the House how many of the 4,874 miners who have already been dealt with have been found not guilty? In Rotherham magistrates' court 75 per cent. of cases in which miners have been charged have been dismissed by the magistrates.

The Attorney-General: The total number acquitted by all the courts trying miners is 1,169.

Mr. Spencer: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that recent experience tends to show that those whose cases still remain to be dealt with will get a fair hearing by magistrates or juries, and that, if the evidence is sufficient, there will be a conviction and that otherwise there will be an acquittal? Does he agree that the criminal justice system is sufficiently resilient to deal with violent pressure put upon it, no matter who exerts the pressure?

The Attorney-General: I do not doubt the independence of the courts or the juries which try these cases. Many of the cases still awaiting trial will be heard in the Crown court.

Mr. Mason: Will the Attorney-General, in concert with the Home Secretary, call upon the chief constables in the coalfields to have the fingerprints and photographs of the 1,169 miners who were arrested and acquitted of all charges erased from police records, in order to clear the records, reputations and characters of those miners?

The Attorney-General: I shall make certain that that comment is passed on to my right hon. and learned Friend. It cannot be a matter for me.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that, as the strike peters to an end, if and when violence increases in certain areas within the coal mining areas, the most vigorous action will be taken to ensure that the public are protected and that the cases that are brought before the courts are dealt with as quickly as possible?

The Attorney-General: Obviously, it is desirable that there should be the least possible delay. It is equally desirable that those who are awaiting trial on cases unconnected with the miners' dispute should not lose their place in the queue. This is a matter entirely for the chief constables, as they are absolutely independent of the Government.

Mr. John Morris: Without having to repeat to the House my view of 19 December, that everyone who breaks the law must be answerable for it, will the Attorney-General consult the Home Secretary about the extent of the damage that has been done to respect for the law in the mining communities, arising from the fact that breaches of the law have not been entirely one-sided, and arising from such things as the operation of restrictive bail conditions and the stopping of innocent travellers on their way to work, which has left considerable bitterness? Will the Government consider how they intend to rebuild confidence in the law in those areas, and will they encourage everyone within the Government to be particularly sensitive to that aspect in handling their legal responsibilities in mining areas?

The Attorney-General: I accept that there will be many wounds that will need healing. I suspect that there will be an equally large number of wounds that need healing between working and striking miners. If one considers the endless demonstrations, which amount to intimidation, and the various charges that have been brought, it seems ridiculous to put any blame for that on the police.

Legal Aid

51. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Attorney-General what arrangements Her Majesty's Government have made to monitor the effects of the means assessment and contributions system introduced into criminal legal aid by the Legal Aid Act 1982.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Statistics returned by magistrates' courts will now include details of contribution orders made by the courts.

Mr. Dubs: Although I welcome the decision to begin to monitor these arrangements, will the Solicitor-General tell us in more detail how the monitoring will be carried out, bearing in mind that many believe that means-testing is a waste of time because the high administrative costs involved exceed any savings that may be made?

The Solicitor-General: The principal way in which the monitoring is being carried out is through the more accurate and simpler form of return that has been in use since 1 March last year. The magistrates' courts are returning those forms, but unfortunately we do not yet have all the forms for last year. However, the courts are providing better information. My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor is also considering the use of survey research over relatively small areas.

Mr. Ryman: Is not an enourmous amount of public money wasted by giving legal aid to wealthy criminals who say that they cannot liquidise their assets between committal and trial? Would it not be fairer to give money to poor defendants, who genuinely cannot afford legal representation, and to force rich defendants to pay for their own defences?

The Solicitor-General: Although I have much sympathy with the underlying thought of the hon. Gentleman's question, it would probably be impossible to devise a legal aid scheme which could be operated with absolute certainty that there was no waste. Since legal aid is as much in the interests of justice because it enables the court to do its work efficiently, we must err on the side of liberality. However, I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's question is brought to the attention of the Lord Chancellor.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

54. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are Her Majesty's Government's plans for long-term development aid to Ethiopia.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): I consider that the World Bank and the European Community, to whose aid funds we contribute largely, are in the best position to provide appropriate long-term development aid to Ethiopia. We shall also be considering what we can do bilaterally, but meanwhile we shall constinue our plans to support education and training.

Mr. Chapman: In view of the still urgent need for immediate help to Ethiopia, does my right hon. Friend agree that long-term funding and sustained aid to that country must remain a foremost priority of our overseas aid programme? Essential to the success of such aid must be the co-operation of the Ethiopian Government. Does my right hon. Friend believe that the Ethiopian Government are providing the necessary co-operation?

Mr. Raison: No one can doubt the need for long-term development in Ethiopia. However, we must recognise that it will not be easy to achieve, partly because of the raging civil war in that country, and partly because the Ethiopian regime has collectivist ideas about agriculture and other matters, alongside which it may be difficult to work.

Mr. Barnett: Does the Minister recognise that often in the wake of famine people who are directly affected are much more likely to listen sympathetically and encouragingly to the idea of development on new lines that will make their position more secure? Therefore, in view of British expertise in tropical agriculture, will the Minister consider seriously the possibility of a well-mounted bilateral programme?

Mr. Raison: Under the pressure of the appalling circumstances in Ethiopia, a more open-minded and receptive approach may develop in its Government. I hope that that will be so. But we must consider carefully how much of our effort can be done bilaterally and how much of it through the multilateral agencies. A large proportion of our aid programme goes to those multilateral agencies.

Mr. Bowen Wells: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if there is to be long-term development in Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa the co-ordination of all aid givers will be essential, together with political and economic reform? In that case, does he agree that the World Bank and the special fund for Africa are the obvious means with which to effect that objective? How then can he defend Britain's position in Paris on Friday in not contributing to the special fund?

Mr. Raison: I fully agree that co-ordination and policy reform are essential. We have told the World Bank that we shall make available £15 million a year for five years, which will be used to work closely with its special facility and with exactly the same objectives as the World Bank has.

Mr. Alton: What best estimates can the Minister give about the numbers of refugees who are likely to be in danger of their lives as a result of the continued famine in Ethiopia? What representations have Her Majesty's Government made to the Ethiopian authorities about the firing of shots at refugees trying to flee the country?

Mr. Raison: It is difficult to give figures about the numbers of refugees who might leave Ethiopia in the coming months. When I was in Ethiopia I made it clear to the Ethiopian Government that we believe that they must do all that they can to allow food to reach those who need it. We are also talking to the International Red Cross to see whether it can take steps to bring about some further relaxation of the hostilities which are making the transmission of food more difficult than it need be.

Sub-Saharan Africa

55. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently received about further aid for sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr. Raison: I continue to receive many such representations.

Mr. Canavan: In view of the weekend report that as many as 34 million people in 20 African countries are at risk of dying from starvation in what has been described as potentially the greatest catastrophe ever to have visited this planet, and bearing in mind that in response to the Ethiopian appeal the great generosity of the British people was not, unfortunately, matched by the British Government, will the Minister ensure a far more generous response to the World Bank's special fund for Africa, along the lines of early-day motion 323, which has the support of over 100 Labour Members?

Mr. Raison: Nobody would deny the gravity of the situation in central, eastern and southern Africa, although happily in southern Africa there has been an improvement in the rainfall. I wholly reject the suggestion that the British Government have not made an adequate response to the problem. We have given large quantities of aid, both before October last year, when the television films brought to everybody's attention what was happening in Ethiopia, and since. We shall continue to play a full part in this.

Mr. Baldry: Why is it that the Government are prepared to give funds to run alongside the World Bank programme but not to give funds to the World Bank programme? That distinction has escaped a large proportion of hon. Members.

Mr. Raison: Both my right hon. and learned Friend and I have often said that we are anxious to maintain within our overall aid programme a fair share of the bilateral element, and that is essentially what this is about. We are prepared to work for the same objectives, but on the other hand we wish to keep this within the bilateral framework and to make certain decisions ourselves rather than hand them over to the World Bank. We should be able to come up with a successful scheme.

Mr. Anderson: What will history make of a Chancellor who considered the billions spent on the mining dispute as a good investment, but at the same time refused $50 million a year to avert the human catastrophe in Africa? Will the Minister confirm that there is not one penny of new money in the £15 million that he has mentioned, and that we, alone in Western Europe, have not contributed to the special fund?

Mr. Raison: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The arrangements which Japan and Germany are negotiating are similar to the arrangements which we are discussing. As to the new money, in planning ahead in our aid programme we made special allowance for exceptional contingencies and disasters, and we would be foolish not to do so. Whether this is new money or not is an abstraction. The important thing is to provide effective aid.

Sudan (Drought)

56. **Mr. Mark Robinson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further action Her Majesty's Government are taking to assist drought victims in the Sudan.

Mr. Raison: Some 15,000 tonnes of our own cereals aid will shortly reach Port Sudan through the world food programme, and we expect the European Community, which has already committed 51,000 tonnes, to allot further substantial amounts from the 1·2 million tonnes agreed at the Dublin summit.

From our bilateral programme £7·5 million has been provided to the international refugee organisations and to voluntary agencies working in the Sudan, either in food or in cash. I have today agreed a further £500,000 to assist the Save the Children Fund, one of the British voluntary agencies working in both east and west Sudan.

Mr. Robinson: I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. He will be aware, from the television coverage over the weekend, of the problem of refugees coming from Ethiopia into Sudan. Will he consider visiting Sudan to ensure that the assistance being given is used in the most effective manner?

Mr. Raison: I am very much aware of the great public concern about the situation in the Sudan, and I intend to visit the Sudan this month.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the right hon. Gentleman share the obvious disappointment of his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, who said in the House last week that the Foreign Affairs Council had not met anything like the target that it had in mind for helping these areas? Given that view, will the right hon. Gentleman, as a Minister, add his support to the voice of the British public in saying that they will not accept that the food mountains are growing and that we are not making the contribution of which we are capable?

Mr. Raison: The contribution agreed by the European Community is a very substantial one, because 1·2 million tonnes of food grain is a very large amount. What remains to be done is to make sure that that food aid is allocated to those places where it is most desperately needed, rather than be used somewhat indiscriminately, as has sometimes been the case.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: By leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the four motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the draft Amendments of the Potato Marketing Scheme 1955, as amended, be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Potatoes (Assured Markets) Order 1985 (S.I., 1985, No. 63) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Potatoes (Protection of Guarantees) Order 1985 (S.I., 1985, No. 64) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Tay Road Bridge (Scheme) Approval Order 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Opposition Day

[7TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Speaker: We now move to the Opposition Day and the important debate on the coal mining dispute.

Some 43 right hon. and hon. Members have written to me asking whether they may take part in the debate. I propose to invoke the 10-minute limit on speeches between 6 o'clock and 10 minutes to 8, but I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members who speak in the debate will take that as an indication of the length of speeches to be expected today so that not too many right hon. and hon. Members are disappointed.

3.32 pm

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I beg to move,

That this House condemns Her Majesty's Government for their public and private activities to impede progress towards negotiations in the mining dispute, despite the massive costs to the nation of prolonging the strike; welcomes the decision of the National Union of Mineworkers to seek an immediate resumption of negotiations with the National Coal Board without pre-conditions; and demands that the Government takes a positive approach by urging the National Coal Board to settle this long and damaging dispute forthwith.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Orme: It is evident that the Government do not want an acceptable settlement negotiated between the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Coal Board but that they want victory over the NUM and especially over Mr. Arthur Scargill. The Government engineered the situation hoping that today there would be a massive return to work—[HON. MEMBERS: "There has been."] The NCB said that there had been a massive return to work today, but there has not been, and I remind the House that there are still more than 130,000 miners on strike. Despite the Government's engineering, they have not succeeded and they will not succeed. The only answer to end the dispute is a negotiated settlement between the NUM and the NCB.

The role of the Prime Minister in the dispute is evident for all to see. One has only to read her statements in recent days. She now leads the campaign against the NUM. It is a campaign that goes back to 1981. At that time the Prime Minister accepted "Plan for Coal". However, she started then to plan for the present dispute.

We should remind ourselves of why the dispute began. On 6 March 1984, the NCB announced that it intended to cut capacity in the coal mining industry by 4 million tonnes. On 7 March, *The Guardian* reported that announcement as

"The daunting prospect of a loss of at least 21,000 jobs in the next year".

That was the announcement which precipitated this long and damaging dispute. That was the announcement which breached prior agreements with the trade unions and which undermined established and effective procedures, including "Plan for Coal".

Mr. Tim Eggar (Enfield, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Orme: No. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop the case a little. This is an important debate. I want to make my case, and I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members want to listen to the debate.

The NCB's announcement was a unilateral action which provoked the strike. The NUM had no demands on the table. It was the action of the NCB nearly one year ago that has led to the present circumstances. It is clear why the announcement resulted in the vast majority of miners taking industrial action. They are worried about their immediate jobs and about the threat to entire mining communities which are in socially and economically deprived parts of the United Kingdom. They are worried about their jobs now, about jobs in the future and about mining communities throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Orme: No.

We now have an independent analysis which shows that, if the NCB's policy was carried through, 70,000 jobs and 70 pits would go in less than five years. That represents nearly 50 per cent. of the work force.

The levels of unemployment are already incredibly high in the coalfields. Such areas already suffer the despair and deprivation that comes from the loss of jobs and incomes. I refer to south Yorkshire, Scotland, south Wales and the north-east, where unemployment continues to rise. In each of those areas, two people out of five have been out of work for more than one year. In the face of that, miners and their families have used their only weapon to resist the destruction of their collieries and communities and to save the coal mining industry.

Mr. Rost *rose*——

Mr. Orme: Offering decent redundancy payments can never be a substitute for guaranteeing employment now or in the future. We hear a lot from the Government about their generous schemes for paying compensation to those who give up jobs in coal, steel, shipbuilding, the motor industry and in the docks, but when will the Government announce that an industry needs an extra 20,000 workers? Where are the new jobs in Merthyr, Barnsley and Fife to come from?

After 11 months of the Government waging a war of attrition, after 11 months of the Government using every weapon in their possession against the miners, the strike has not collapsed. After 11 months, the Government think that the defeat of the NUM is in sight. This is a dangerous and short-sighted attitude, but whatever happens the Government are the losers. Their inflexible attitude has created bitterness among the work force upon whom the nation's energy prospects depend. A bitter, defeated work force is not productive. The Government's desire to humiliate the leaders of that work force will result in rancour and ill feeling towards the management of the industry. However, in my opinion, the Government will not bring about that defeat by the policies that they are pursuing.

Mr. Rost: Would the right hon. Gentleman please tell us whether the official Opposition support the view of the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers, that no pit should be closed upon economic grounds in any circumstances?

Mr. Orme: I shall answer that central point during my speech. In the last few weeks, the Government have dismissed the prospect of talks with contempt, as a waste of time. A campaign has been mounted and led from Downing street by the Prime Minister's press officer, Mr. Bernard Ingham, that is aimed at personalising the dispute. This campaign has been followed up by Mr. David Hart, who has acted covertly, shuttling between No. 10 and the National Coal Board, attempting to prevent a settlement. However, he has gone public now. An article appeared under Mr. Hart's name in *The Times* on 26 January 1985. If Mr. Hart has got nothing to do with this dispute, it is interesting that an article appeared in the *The Times* that has behind it the authority and backing that we know it has.

Mr. Hart said:

"Any true negotiation now would represent defeat for the Coal Board and the nation . . . The time for negotiated settlements is past".

Is that the policy of the Government? Is that the policy of the Prime Minister? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Is that what the Prime Minister wants—victory? Is this the Falklands factor coming into play? Is that what the Prime Minister wants? The Prime Minister will not answer. This type of action is in direct contrast with the actions of the Opposition. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members can laugh, but the Opposition have argued consistently that this dispute can be ended only by negotiations that produce an honourable settlement that is acceptable both to the National Union of Mineworkers and to the National Coal Board.

Mr. Eggar: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Orme: No. Unlike the Secretary of State, I have made every effort over a period of 11 months to bring about those negotiations.

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): They failed every time.

Mr. Orme: I can tell the hon. Member why they failed. The hon. Gentleman's Government made sure that they failed. I am confident that, if negotiations had started with the full executive of the NUM, without preconditions, a settlement would have been arrived at.

But we know the reasons why this has been prevented. The Government and the NCB have taken the extraordinary and unprecedented step of demanding written assurances from the NUM before negotiations can take place. No trade union will go into negotiations having first signed away its right to take action against management decisions with which it disagrees. No trade union will sign a document allowing for carte blanche cuts and job losses. No trade union will sign away its birthright in that way.

I have looked at the precedents. The last time that happened in Britain was in 1922, when the engineering employers locked out the engineering unions for nine months. They were then forced back to work on the terms that the Government are asking for at present. No trade union will make such a concession before negotiations have even started.

Mr. Eggar *rose*——

Mr. Orme: When one looks at statements made during the dispute by the chairman of the NCB, it is even more extraordinary that the NUM's proposals for the resumption of negotiations without preconditions have been rejected. I remember Mr. MacGregor saying to me on one occasion that he was ready for negotiations without preconditions, and the Secretary of State said the same. He is on record as saying the same. Now that is apparently no longer acceptable. Why?

I think that we have the answer if we turn to what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said on 30 October 1984:

"The House should be in no doubt whatever but that the Government are prepared to pay the cost of resisting this strike, however long it lasts".—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1984; Vol. 65, c. 1184.]

That is the British taxpayer underwriting the cost of the fight that the Government are putting up against the NUM.

That sums up the Government's attitude throughout—they are prepared to pay the cost. The direct cash cost to the Government of this action is now about £2·4 billion. It is estimated to be running at £80 million a week. That is mostly made up of extra costs to the CEGB of burning oil, losses to the NCB, lost taxation and losses incurred by British Steel, and the costs of policing and social security. The Government are indeed willing to pay any price to break the strike. That is evident from their present attitude.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Newport, West) *rose*——

Mr. Orme: Will the Secretary of State confirm those figures? If not, will he give the Government's figures of the present cost to the nation? It is the taxpayer who will have to bear the cost. Already the dispute, created and prolonged by the Government, has played a major part in the removal of a surplus on the balance of payments as expensive oil is burned instead of coal. There is also a direct link with the collapse of the pound and the rise in interest rates. It is obvious that foreign speculators have seen the continuation of the mining dispute as a major factor in the confidence in sterling. That was confirmed the week before last by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) during the debate on unemployment.

We all know and recognise that the Government's attitude to the dispute has little to do with energy policy—if the Government have one. The strike has exposed the fact that they are without any strategy or consistency in their approach to the nation's energy resources or needs. Commentators have become increasingly aware of the lack of any planning or foresight. One has claimed that he went looking for Britain's energy policy and found that there was not one. That he described as the Secretary of State's "pipeline to nowhere". That is the Government's approach during the whole of the 11 months' dispute.

If the Government had an energy policy, they would be eager to find a settlement to the dispute. Indeed, if they had an energy policy that recognised Britain's long-term needs, there would have been no demand for the cuts in capacity that the NCB outlined last March.

Mr. Mark Robinson *rose*——

Mr. Orme: I have given way once, but I want to spell out our case and I know that many hon. Members wish to take part in this important debate. Therefore, I shall give way only to Ministers.

The House of Lords Select Committee has judged that, by the year 2000, coal demand in the European Community will have risen to more than 400 million tonnes and that reserves of coal in the United Kingdom will last for 260 years. A report from the Policy Studies Institute and the Royal Institute of International Affairs

[Mr. Orme]

forecasts that Britain could be importing up to 40 per cent. of its energy needs by 2000 unless our coal production expands. All that coal—yet we face the prospect of importing nearly half our energy resources. Surely even the Secretary of State can see that it makes sense for us to have a thriving coal industry.

The Secretary of State is more likely to be interested in today's balance sheet than in the survival of our resources for the future. However, even his approach to the balance sheet is short-sighted and faulty. We have argued that there is no case for closing pits on the narrow, short-term criteria used by the Government and the NCB. Even those narrow criteria are being challenged by leading academics.

The *Financial Times* world accounting report said:

"The profit and loss accounts of the UK's coal pits are too arbitrary for the National Coal Board to be able to know from them which are its 'uneconomic' mines. This is a startling conclusion since plans to close 'uneconomic' pits are at the centre of a dispute between the NCB and the National Union of Mineworkers".

The report continues:

"Assuming the . . . analysis is generally correct then either the NCB's accounting information has been used to identify the pits to be closed and thus the decisions are based on inaccurate information, or alternatively the closure decisions have been made on grounds which have not been made public and the accounting information has simply been used to publicly legitimise the closure decisions."

The NCB has loudly criticised that article but has failed to answer any of the points in it.

The argument about whether a colliery can be deemed economic has raged on, but there has been a notable absence of informed public debate. My hon. Friends know that in this argument, investment—particularly in old pits—oil prices, the exchange rate and many other factors have to be taken into account.

Let us look at the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers agreement. The Prime Minister said:

"Unless the NUM is prepared to discuss the closure of uneconomic pits in accordance with the NACODS agreement, the next round of talks will founder as well." — [*Official Report*, 31 January 1985; Vol. 72, c. 436.]

First, there is no reference in the NACODS agreement to uneconomic pits. As the Secretary of State knows, a large part of the agreement was about working conditions, the closed shop and many other factors. There were discussions about the 6 March proposals and the five pits, but it is important to note that the union reserved the right to oppose pit closures if the new advisory machinery failed to get an agreement between the unions and the NCB.

The Secretary of State will also be aware that the NACODS executive met last Friday afternoon and sent a deputation to the NCB to see Mr. Spanton this morning. It told Mr. Spanton, in effect, that if the NCB went ahead and demanded a written undertaking from the NUM about pit closures, the NACODS agreement would be valueless. That is what it said.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Peter Walker): Is the right hon. Gentleman willing to recommend that the NUM should accept the NACODS agreement?

Mr. Orme: This morning, Mr. Spanton was asked a question—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] This morning, Mr. Spanton was asked a question by the general secretary and the president of NACODS. They were not speaking on behalf of the NUM, but he was asked whether the Coal Board would still demand a written undertaking on uneconomic pits if the NUM said that it would accept the NACODS agreement as a basis for talks. Mr. Spanton refused to answer that quesion, and that is the answer to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Peter Walker: Will the right hon. Gentleman say whether or not he is willing to make that recommendation?

Mr. Orme: This morning, NACODS asked the NCB to withdraw the preconditions in order to allow talks to proceed. Indeed, NACODS said that, if the NCB would not do so, it would be violating the NACODS agreement, and consequently that agreement is not worth the paper that is is written on.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): My right hon. Friend has touched on an important point. Will he invite the Secretary of State to say in his speech whether he can answer the question that Mr. Spanton failed to answer when he was asked it this morning by the NACODS leaders? Does not the Secretary of State recognise that No. 10's insistence on the conditions now being applied to the NUM can be interpreted only as a breach of the agreement reached with NACODS?

Mr. Orme: I hope that the Secretary of State will answer that point, as it is central to this issue. At the moment, the NACODS agreement is in jeopardy. This morning NACODS told me that because of the lack of assurances from the NCB, it now felt that its agreement would not be acceptable within the industry. NACODS has raised this point, and until we receive some clarification we will not answer the Secretary of State's question. It has nothing to do with the matter. You are the Government, you are the Secretary of State——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Orme: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State is responsible, and he must answer that point.

The NUM has been asked to sign a statement before negotiations begin that will allow the NCB to close pits that it classes as uneconomic. Furthermore, NACODS has evidence that the NCB and the Government are trying to rewrite the NACODS agreement. What price then the value of such an agreement? On that basis, I shall not underline or underwrite an agreement until the Secretary of State answers that question.

I come to the second round of talks on the agenda. The original talks between Mr. Heathfield and Mr. Ned Smith led to an agenda that was acceptable to both sides and could have led to direct negotiations. It was an agenda and not preconditions for talks or a written undertaking. They both took that agenda back to their respective bodies. Indeed, I have seen the agenda. *[Interruption.]* I have seen the agenda of the talks between Mr. Heathfield and Mr. Ned Smith. Can the Secretary of State tell the House what happened between those talks and the further talks between Mr. Heathfield and Mr. Spanton? Why did the coal board suddenly change tack? Why did it not go for negotiations?

The centre of the issue is the changing role played by the coal board—in my opinion carrying out the Government's policy—in recent days. Direct negotiations could have been started last week. If the Government believed that the NUM was not genuine, they and the

whole nation could have tested whether it was. However, the Government refused to allow the negotiations to go ahead.

As the *Financial Times* explained this morning, the Government are preventing talks on the basis of the coal board having a written undertaking that it is free to close pits, irrespective of negotiation and in contradiction of the NACODS agreement. The NUM is prepared to go to talks without preconditions. That means that any aspect and any subject can be discussed, including uneconomic pits. The NUM has a valid point. It also wants to discuss social factors. It wants to discuss investment, employment and all the central issues. Why should it not be able to discuss those issues? Why should it be faced with a counter-productive ultimatum?

We believe that if talks and direct negotiations were started a settlement could be arrived at. The union's decision to talk about the issues that I have mentioned on an open agenda is positive. The full executive would be present. Mr. MacGregor has said to me that he wants to talk to the full executive. This is his opportunity. Genuine negotiations could take place and we could achieve a settlement of this tragic dispute.

The miners have been out for 11 months. Families have suffered in the interests of what they believe to be the preservation of their communities and their industry. They have fought gallantly and they will not be forced back on their knees. They will not accept that.

If the Government would allow direct negotiations, the matter could be settled. The Secretary of State used a different emphasis at Question Time the other day. He said that he wanted a negotiated settlement. Every sensible person knows that a negotiated settlement is the only way out of the dispute. If the union were to ask its members to go back after 11 months on the basis of non-co-operation there would be chaos and anarchy in the industry.

This is an industry which the nation needs. Its people have served the nation over a long time. We need the wealth from the mines, now and in the future. We need the jobs in the mines, now and in the future. We need the miners with their skill and dedication, now and in the future. That is the reason for the Opposition motion today.

4.4 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Peter Walker): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"deeply regrets the damage done to the coal industry, miners, miners' families and the mining communities by the unnecessary industrial action of some sections of the National Union of Mineworkers; recognises that this action is totally unjustified since this Government have provided more capital investment for the industry than any previous Government, far in excess of that provided by the last Labour Government, and substantially exceeding the scale of investment envisaged in 'Plan for Coal'; recognises it is also unjustified in the light of the National Coal Board's extremely generous offer on pay, early retirement and voluntary redundancy terms, and on the creation of a scheme designed to bring new enterprises and job opportunities to mining communities; notes the acceptance of the Board's offer by the industry's other two unions, and the refusal to strike by those sections of the National Union of Mineworkers which in that union's normal tradition decided to hold a ballot; deplores the Opposition's failure to persuade the National Union of Mineworkers both to arrange a national ballot and to use methods of picketing complying with National Union of Mineworkers and Trades Union Congress guidelines on picketing; regrets the National Union of Mineworkers leadership's intransigence, displayed in seven rounds of negotiations, including with the Advisory, Concilliation and Arbitration Service whose compromise proposal was accepted by the Board but rejected by the National Union of Mineworkers; and expresses the hope that this intransigence will now cease so that a realistic settlement can quickly be achieved which recognises that the cost of production is an important factor in securing a good and prosperous future for the industry."

I am sure that the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) is sincere when he says that he wants a negotiated settlement. Like most right hon. and hon. Members he very much regrets the appalling 10 to 11 months of misery that the industry has suffered. However, the impression that he tries to create, that this is a dispute that the the Government required or relished, is totally contradicted by all the facts.

The tragedy is that 11 months ago there could have been a settlement without any form of industrial action. Let me remind the House of the proposals made by the National Coal Board at the beginning of March. The proposals that it sought to have discussed first at a regional level were open to further negotiations and discussions and they included proposals for higher investment and new marketing initiatives. But the National Union of Mineworkers decided to manipulate a national strike, not by a ballot and not—as we know, now that the facts of the meeting have come out—with the approval of the majority of the executive.

The right hon. Member for Salford, East knows that, had the NUM acted in accordance with the normal tradition of that union, had it acted as the Leader of the Opposition suggested privately and quietly that it should, the need for mass picketing, for mob violence and for any of the ghastly impact of the dispute would not have arisen.

Let us also recall that when Mr. Scargill decided to handle his executive in such a way that there would be no ballot, one third of Britain's coalfields decided in the normal tradition of the union to vote. Let the right hon. Gentleman never forget that the 68,000 miners who decided to vote last March voted overwhelmingly against strike action. However, they never had any support from the Labour party for the way in which they voted. In areas such as Nottingham, where the majority voted not to strike without a ballot, the deputy leader of the Opposition said that he would go against the majority of the voters and support the strikers.

What has been the basis of the strike? It has certainly not been a strike over pay. As the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) knows, this Government paid miners rather better than he did when he was Secretary of State. It was certainly not a dispute over investment, because, as the whole country knows, in our first five years this Government invested not only much more than the Labour Government but much more than was envisaged in "Plan for Coal." In the negotiations last March the miners knew that another £3 billion of investment was to go into the industry. It was certainly not a strike about the guarantee that there would be not one compulsory redundancy in the industry.

The reason for the strike—and the only reason given by Mr. Scargill—was his demand that there should be no pit closures on economic grounds. That has been the basis of the strike from beginning to end. Mr. Scargill made that the reason because he knew that no Government and that no coal board could ever accept that proposal. We have known throughout, from the remarks of previous general secretaries of the NUM, that in the past no leader of the mineworkers' union has ever made such a demand.

[Mr. Peter Walker]

We know from "Plan for Coal" that it was clearly envisaged that there would be closures of pits on economic grounds.

If one wants to be absolutely certain of the position of the last Labour Government, one cannot do better than look at their Coal Industry Act 1977, the sponsor of which was the right hon. Member for Chesterfield. One of the main operative clauses of that measure reads:

"The Secretary of State"—

at the time the right hon. Member for Chesterfield—

"with the approval of the Treasury may, out of money provided by Parliament, make to the Board such grants as in the opinion of the Secretary of State will further assist in the re-deployment of the manpower resources of the Board and the elimination of uneconomic colliery capacity."

[Interruption.] Those words appeared in the one major Act on the coal industry of the last Labour Government.

To bring ourselves up to date, we have the words of the Leader of the Opposition last week, when he said:

"As always, you must include commercial considerations in deciding on pit closures."

Not once during this dispute has Mr. Scargill said, "You must take commercial considerations into account when considering whether to close a pit."

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I am sure that the debate, if not the right hon. Gentleman's case, will be assisted if he quotes me in full. I said:

"I want an honourable settlement; and I want one which will ensure that foolish decisions about colliery closures are not taken. That they're taken on the proper grounds of exhaustion and safety, yes, including commercial considerations, has always been the fact before under the colliery review procedure; always will be in the future. But it's got to be an honourable settlement, because a blank cheque enabling people to close down whole communities on the basis of one or two years' accountants' figures, simply isn't a proper way to regard Britain's basic energy industry."

If only the Secretary of State would apply the colliery review procedure—if only he would value coal properly —this question would simply not arise and we would continue, as Mr. McNestry said last week, as we always have, successfully.

Mr. Walker: That is the most total contradiction of the Scargill case that we have ever heard. *[Interruption.]* At last during this phase, when clearly the majority of miners are going against the strike, we welcome the conversion of the Leader of the Opposition, although it is rather belated.

When the history of this matter is written, the lack of leadership by the right hon. Gentleman throughout the dispute—*[Interruption.]*—will be remembered. It will be remembered how he agreed to the change in the voting procedures on having a ballot, and then did not say a word when Mr. Scargill failed to have a ballot. His humiliating appearance at Stoke will long be remembered, when throughout he listened to the demands of Mr. Scargill saying, "We will never agree to a pit closure on economic grounds," and that remains the position of Mr. Scargill today.

Rather than any reluctance to have talks, there have already been seven rounds of talks, all with no preconditions. There were talks at ACAS, with an ACAS compromise proposal. Then there were the negotiations with NACODS, and the House will have witnessed the manner in which the right hon. Member for Salford, East failed totally, as the Labour party has always failed, to say that they considered that the NACODS agreement should be acceptable to the miners.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The Secretary of State said that the Leader of the Opposition was sticking to the Scargill line. It seems that the Minister, and many of his supporters, are not aware of what the NUM is saying at this time. It may assist if I quote from a letter that was received on Friday by the coal board:

"The Union's proposal takes account of the Board's own suggestions when we met with ACAS. This would provide for all matters relating to the future of Collieries/Units to be dealt with in accordance with the procedures operating prior to 6th March 1984."

It went on to say that the NUM accepted in principle the third party review. How can the Secretary of State stand at the Dispatch Box and mislead the House on this issue?

Mr. Walker: In all the wordings that have been used and in all the negotiations on an agenda that have taken place, the NUM has totally refused under any circumstances to consider the closure of uneconomic pits. *[Interruption.]* That is absolutely true. Had the NUM wished, it could have agreed to an agenda which would have dealt with the issue last week, and it could have done so in negotiations.

Mr. Hardy: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I am associated with NACODS. Will he clear up the point that I raised in an intervention when my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) was speaking? NACODS does not see how the agreement which the Secretary of State has accepted, and which he referred to this afternoon, can hold water, given the demands now being placed on the NUM. Will he now answer the question that Mr. Spanton did not answer this morning?

Mr. Walker: NACODS was told clearly this morning by Mr. Spanton that the agreement with NACODS applied totally and completely, and Mr. Spanton made it clear at the same meeting that if the NUM wished to accept it, it could have a settlement today or tomorrow — *[Interruption.]*—and, therefore, there is no question of the NACODS agreement being other than available to NACODS and being available to the NUM. The whole House knows that when the NACODS negotiation was completed, it was the perfect basis for the NUM to come to a settlement, but throughout it has resisted doing that, and that remains the position today.

Mr. Orme: With or without a written undertaking? Is the Secretary of State saying, in effect, that the coal board still wants a written undertaking?

Mr. Walker: I am saying that during the course of last week—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]—the NUM was offered an agenda as a result of which that could have been discussed, but it refused it. It was offered that agenda without a written agreement, but it refused to have it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] That is the answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Orme: Will the Secretary of State now answer the question that was put this morning? Do the Government still insist on a written undertaking, apart from accepting the NACODS agreement?

Mr. Walker: I am saying that last week — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Walker: I am answering the right hon. Gentleman. My answer is that not only this morning, but before this morning, the NUM was offered an agenda, through the TUC, which it refused to accept.

Mr. Kinnock: Now answer the question.

Mr. Walker: The more that the NUM refuses to accept any such reasonable proposal, the more one can suspect that when it comes to a negotiation—*[Interruption.]*—in the same way that it always has, it will stick to its present position.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) was heard in silence.

Mr. Walker: I repeat, in relation to NACODS, that that agreement is available and has always been available to the NUM, but the Labour party has always failed to give it any support. Had it done so, there might have been a settlement long ago.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): If that is so, will the Secretary of State confirm that negotiations can take place without any written affirmations beforehand? Will he give that assurance?

Mr. Walker: I give the assurance that what is required is an agreed agenda for such discussions. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman consults the TUC about its unsuccessful attempt to get an agreed agenda.

It is important to understand the history of this dispute, which has done so much damage to miners and mining communities in the past 10 months. First, it was a dispute without a ballot, and those who were balloted were against it. Secondly, the speech of the right hon. Member for Salford, East today contained not one word of criticism of Mr. Scargill or the way in which he has conducted the dispute. One of the reasons why the dispute has gone on so long is this second failure of the Labour party. At no stage did the Labour party ever condemn the manner in which the mob was used to try to put an end to the dispute.

The use of the mob has been an important factor in the dispute. When one third of Britain's coalfields balloted to continue to work, the mob was organised to close those pits, but it failed. It was then mobilised to try to close the steel industry—first at Llanwern, then at Ravenscraig—but again it failed. Then, at Orgreave, a massive mob tried for 11 days to close one cokeworks to show that the mob could succeed, but once again it failed.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): The Secretary of State seems keen to talk about failure and the way in which history will view the dispute. How will history reflect on a Government who said last year that they intended to save £275 million in so-called losses by the NCB and have spent £5·5 billion in 11 months trying to achieve that? Does he agree that it will be clear in the history books that the aim was to destroy the NUM, not to save money?

Mr. Walker: It is a remarkable way to try to destroy the NUM by offering a £3 billion investment programme, a massive pay increase, a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies and the best early retirement provisions of any industry in the country. The person who has done most damage to the coal industry is the leader of the NUM. He has conducted a campaign that has divided mining communities and the union from top to bottom, with an £8,000 loss of wages for every miner, and destroyed markets for the industry. History will show that no one has done more damage to the miners than Mr. Scargill. The tragedy is that throughout the dispute the Labour party has apparently given him every support.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the Secretary of State return to the crucial issue of the debate rather than rehashing his old speeches? Does he admit that the agendas to which he referred required a written agreement? If not, is he now saying that negotiations can take place without a written agreement and that everything can be discussed without preconditions?

Mr. Walker: Last week the TUC approached the NCB to try to get negotiations started. In the first instance, the NCB said that if the TUC could persuade the NUM to come forward with the wording for an agenda that would include discussions on the crucial issue of the dispute it would carefully consider those proposals. The TUC, however, had to come back and say that it could not get any such proposal for an agenda in writing from the NUM. The NCB then put into writing its suggestion for the item on the agenda to deal with that problem. The NCB has heard nothing from the TUC since, but so far as we know the NUM has not agreed that that should be the No. 1 item on the agenda. That is why no talks took place last week.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): I am sure that the Secretary of State does not wish to deceive the House. I was present at the meeting with the TUC. The right hon. Gentleman's resumé is quite different from what actually happened. The question at issue was that of economic pits. The NUM said that it would meet without preconditions and it has set an agenda, with which I shall deal in winding up the debate.

Mr. Walker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for confirming that there was an opportunity to have the crucial issue of the dispute on the agenda but that the NUM refused. He has confirmed exactly what I said. That shows that the Opposition's attitude is utterly bogus. Throughout last week, the NCB and the TUC patiently tried to get talks started again but the NUM refused, as it has done since last March, to move an inch on the fundamental issue of the strike. Until it does so, there can be no settlement.

Mr. Kinnock: A week ago last Thursday, when the NUM national executive committee was meeting, the NCB issued a press statement saying that it required undertakings in writing. That changed the whole course of events the week before last, as everyone clearly recalls. Is the Secretary of State now saying that during the discussions between the NCB and the TUC last week the NCB at any time conveyed to the TUC that it was withdrawing the request, requirement or demand for a written undertaking about uneconomic pits or anything else? If that is so, the news was certainly not received by the TUC or anyone else.

Mr. Walker: It was certainly received by the TUC because the TUC received an item which, if the NUM agreed to it as the No. I item on the agenda — *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members cannot dodge this. Last week the NCB made an offer that something should be the No. 1 item on the agenda. The NUM, as always, said no and will probably continue to say no. If the NUM continues to say no on that issue, there can be no

[Mr. Walker]

agreement because, as the whole House knows and as the Leader of the Opposition belatedly admitted last week, the reality is that pits always have been closed for economic reasons.

The whole purpose of this battle has been to have an issue upon which there could be no settlement. That is the issue that Mr. Scargill has kept to the fore throughout the dispute. The reality is that as a result the mining industry has lost considerable markets. Pit faces have been lost at pits that had a good future, and £700 million of investment that could have gone into the industry last year has not been able to go into the industry due to the dispute. What is now on offer is a programme for the coal industry that is better than anything that has been offered since nationalisation.

I should like to say a word, too, about the alternative of keeping a pit open when it is very uneconomic, in order to keep to the Scargill demand that the pit remains open until the last tonne of coal is extracted, a demand that he has repeated at rally after rally and meeting after meeting. If anybody believes that that provides a good future for mining communities, every miner knows that he is wrong. That is why, during 11 years of Labour Government, 330 pits were closed by Labour Governments. If we closed pits at the rate the Labour Government closed them, there would be no pits left in five years. In reality, during the whole of the strike there has been on offer an investment programme and, for the first time, a positive programme for communities that have to face pit closure.

In its amendment, the alliance suggests that more money should be put into the enterprise company to assist mining communities that face pit closure. That is the first time that the coal board has created such an instrument. When it originally financed it, it found that the number of potential inquiries was encouraging and felt that it would quickly get through its initial capital. The capital was then doubled to £10 million. At the time of making that announcement, the NCB made it clear that when further resources were required, they would become available. The company has now appointed a chairman and a chief executive and is dealing with many inquiries already. I assure the leader of the Social Democratic party, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), that there will be no lack of financial and management support for the enterprise company to see that a much better, more positive approach to the problem is made as opposed to the absurd approach of saying that every uneconomic pit should not close.

Therefore, I wish to say to the House that throughout the past 10 months we have had a miners' leader who, in seven negotiations, has made only one boast—that he has not moved an inch. He has rejected a decent proposal put forward by ACAS. He has rejected, and will not accept, the proposal negotiated by NACODS. As a result of his action, miners' families, mining communities and the future of the industry have been put in jeopardy, and the tragedy of the dispute is that the Labour party leadership has never had the guts to say so. We saw the way in which its party conference was dominated by Mr. Scargill. We have seen the way in which the Leader of the Opposition has always refused to demand that a ballot take place. We have seen the actions of the spokesman for energy—the right hon. Member for Salford, East—and the only reason why he could never be successful in any of his talks was that he could never budge Arthur Scargill an inch. The sooner there is a negotiated settlement on the best terms since nationalisation, the better for the industry and the better for miners.

4.34 pm

Mr. Roy Mason (Barnsley, Central): The Secretary of State for Energy completely misled the House during his speech. I have before me a copy of the letter from the National Union of Mineworkers, signed by Peter Heathfield, the general secretary, and sent to Mr. Spanton on Friday morning last week. Proposals were put forward for negotiations as required by the board. The second proposal was about the future of collieries and units. The letter states:

> "The Union's proposal takes account of the Board's own suggestions when we met with ACAS. This would provide for all matters relating to the future of Collieries/Units to be dealt with".

In the concluding paragraphs of the letter, Mr. Heathfield stated:

> "I find your refusal to resume negotiations without preconditions extremely disappointing. Should the Board change its mind, however, and decide that it does want to see a settlement of this dispute, I reiterate that the Union's National Executive Committee is available for talks at any time."

That is the present situation. The Secretary of State misled the House about the negotiations.

I believe that the strike is a Government-inspired, political strike, and since the start has been the subject of intensive Government political activity. The House will remember that in October 1983 the NUM decided on an overtime ban, when one third of its men were to be adversely affected by reduced earnings. The overtime ban had major objectives — to save the pits, pay decent wages and employ more people by cutting out overtime. After 17 weeks, the NCB had lost 6·5 million tonnes of production—a loss of sales equivalent, at only £30 a tonne, to nearly £200 million. Therefore, the overtime ban was biting. The industry was still working, and not many miners were suffering, and that was galling to the NCB.

That was when MacGregor decided to announce a cutback of 4 million tonnes of coal output in March 1984, threatening the life of 20 pits and 20,000 jobs. At the time there were 50 million tonnes of coal in stock. With those massive bastions of reserves behind them, the Government decided to take on the miners. If that was not the reasoning, why did not MacGregor cut back on coal imports and opencast coal mining? He could easily have brought supply into line with demand by those means. We import 5 million tonnes of coal, and opencast production is 15 million tonnes. There was no need for a confrontation, but the NCB and the Government wished and willed it.

The board and the Government, especially the Department of Energy, would have been in cahoots from the start. Moves of this kind and magnitude are not made without officials being involved and Ministers being informed. Therefore, I believe that there was political involvement from the start. MacGregor could have avoided the strike, but did he really want to? The Government were fully aware of what was happening. If they wanted to take on the miners, to wreak revenge for 1974 and to blunt the spearhead of the most progressive united industrial union in Britain, now was the time. By so doing, they could tame the whole trade union movement in Britain.

That is the Government's political goal. With a massive majority in Parliament and noting that they had secured an increased white collar union vote in 1983, the Government thought that they had better strike while the going was good. It had not gone unnoticed that it took MacGregor 13 weeks to bring the steel workers to heel. He always regarded the steel unions with contempt. He saw them as a disparate multiplicity of steel unions lacking the pronounced progressive leadership of the NUM. Therefore, the Government recognised that the battle against the miners, the strongest, most coherent union in the country, might take more time. Well, it has. It has taken longer than anticipated and has been much more costly than the Government thought it would be.

The Government and the NCB chose the time, with ample parliamentary Sessions left in which to do the job. But they never realised what a political and diplomatic disaster MacGregor would be, and that their whole strategy would face ruin because of the ultimate in public relations stupidity by their appointee. After the faltering and stammering television appearances by the NCB's new spokesman, and seeing the NCB's industrial relations department collapsing in ruins with so many men steeped in industrial relations experience sacked or opting for premature retirement, the Government then decided to take over the reins completely. There is now no doubt about the dominating role of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Energy in this dispute.

They have made it clear that this is a fight to the death, irrespective of cost. The Prime Minister's reputation was at stake, and as my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) said, this is her national Falklands crisis. All the Cabinet has come to heel—anti-miners to a man. While there are wets, renegers and rebellions on Third world aid, students' grants, abolition of the GLC or monetarism versus unemployment, there are no splits on this issue. This is a Government-decreed highly politically motivated strike.

At no time in the last 11 months has a miner received unemployment benefit, but because of the politics of this dispute and the Government's determination to win at all costs, neither have many hundreds of workers who have been laid off as a consequence of the strike. I am referring to all outside contractors, canteen workers, apprentices and redundant coal miners. Contractors from AMCO, Thyssen, Cementation Mining, Mathew Hall and various other firms have been denied unemployment benefit, but their case for disqualification is non-existent, although they have suffered all this time. I believe that their benefit has been denied in an attempt to influence the dispute.

If the 700 contractors in Yorkshire—and there are 238 AMCO workers in the Barnsley area alone—returned to work through being denied benefit and starved back to work, that would inflate the return-to-work figures. I suspect that there has been some collusion between the Department of Employment, the DHSS and the NCB.

This is also an unnecessary extension of poverty, social distress and unhappiness among their families. These people are not coal miners and are not involved in the dispute. They work in supportive industries. They have been caught up in the strike and affected by it, yet have been no part of the cause. As long ago as 1926, it was decided that outside contractors to the mining industry were at a separate place of employment, even though they worked at the same pits as the miners. They were paid unemployment benefit during strikes by miners. This umpire's decision was reaffirmed in 1964 in commissioner's case R(U)23/64 which also gave authority for payment. Two other cases relating to the present dispute were reaffirmed in a commissioner's decision from Wales. Therefore, there is overwhelming authority for the view that outside contractors should be paid unemployment benefit. There seems to be no reason other than bias against everyone even only remotely involved in the dispute.

None of the outside contractors, canteen workers and apprentices has yet been paid in Yorkshire. It could take up to two years and much waste of administrative time, unnecessary cost and widespread social distress before every case is dealt with. That is indefensible and is absolutely unnecessary. Only a political decision can rectify it.

The same applies to redundant, now unemployed, coal miners. These men were actually declared redundant before 6 March 1984. They have played no part in the strike. They are on the dole, and were before the strike began. They are not involved in the dispute in any way, yet for 11 months they have been cruelly deprived of unemployment benefit. Again, this is an unnecessary extension of social distress and misery in the mining communities. It gives an impression to everyone in every pit village in Britain that the Government are purposely depriving these men of their benefit and are forcing the NUM in every coalfield to contest every case before tribunals. It adds credence to the overall view that the Government have told the officers of those tribunals to bend the interpretation of the law against those who are pleading for justice.

The denial of unemployment benefit to redundant miners has been grossly unfair from the start. That benefit should now be paid. These men have been callously denied their rights, as a result of which much poverty has been needlessly caused. This is another cruel example of the Government's policy of determining the level of social misery in the strike-torn areas.

Over the last 11 months, a number of men have been arrested for being involved in picket-line incidents. Scores of them, having been charged by the police, have eventually been acquitted. In the meantime, they have been photographed and fingerprinted, and those stains on their character have been kept on police files. The Home Secretary knows that on 10 December last year, I presented the case to him. On 28 December he sent me an interim reply stating that he would ask the chief constable of Nottinghamshire for a report. Last Thursday I again asked the right hon. and learned Gentleman for an assurance that everyone acquitted of offences—the Attorney-General has said that today there are 1,169—would have their records cleansed, including the erasure of all fingerprints and photographs from their records.

I asked for that assurance last Thursday on the Floor of the House, but it was not given. Is that not political? Is it not political that wives and families should be tormented and that the men themselves should be besmirched with guilt for all that time, even though they have been declared innocent? It is up to the Home Secretary to request chief constables to send for the men concerned so that they can witness the erasure of photographs and fingerprints from their records.

[Mr. Roy Mason]

In addition, these men must not have their jobs put at risk or their future impaired when the strike is over. If there is to be an amnesty, and there will have to be, they must be considered.

At the beginning of my speech I referred to the talks. Last Friday, on 1 February, the secretary of the NUM, Mr. Peter Heathfield, said of the future of collieries and units:

"The Union's proposal takes account of the Board's own suggestions when we met with ACAS. This would provide for all matters relating to the future of Collieries/Units to be dealt with".

One cannot get a wider interpretation of that to deal with the future of pits, irrespective of what they are or how they are defined. The letter continued:

"I find your refusal to resume negotiations without preconditions extremely disappointing".

The Times of the following day stated:

"For the first time since talks began last spring the Board yesterday admitted that it had broken off the discussions and it laid down terms for any resumption of negotiations".

The phrase, "the board yesterday admitted for the first time" is another clear sign that since last November, when MacGregor got lost in his plastic bag, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Energy have now taken over. They are determining the words which come from the NCB and the conditions on which negotiations will take place.

To meet with no preconditions seems fair and reasonable to all fair-thinking people, but not to the Government and the NCB. They now want a surrender document before talks can begin. This is political interference at the highest level. The Government are now refusing to talk, and, irrespective of the cost to the nation or the misery to thousands of miners and their families, they want to see the men, frustrated and bitter, starved back to work. That is the Government's political goal. What of industrial relations thereafter? The Government could not care a damn. That is another reason why the dispute is political, and has been for the Government since it began. Even Peter McNestry, the general secretary of NACODS, while representing middle management of the mining industry, declared on 26 January 1985:

"It has become a political strike. It is clear now that she is involved in running the Coal Board's business. She countermanded an arrangement between senior Director Ned Smith and the NUM. She has total involvement and she's out to destroy the NUM."

They too believe, without a shadow of doubt, that it is a Government-motivated political strike.

What about the cost of the strike? Last week the Prime Minister refused to answer my question about the cost to Government Departments and nationalised industries, and fobbed it on to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who referred to a reply that was four months out of date. It is now revealed that the stoppage is estimated to have cost £5·2 billion. The cost to the coal industry so far is estimated at £952 million. The bill for the electricity industry is £719 million. It is calculated that about £271 million has been lost in income tax payments and that a further £47 million has been lost in social security costs. The cost of extra policing is estimated at £189 million, and the loss to the British Steel Corporation at approximately £190 million. The cost of the balance of payments, which has risen to £347 million a month, hurts the Government most. The cumulative cost is running at about £2·5 billion. That is because of the additional imports of oil and coal.

The Government and the country are paying an extremely heavy price for this war of attrition. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer made his famous remark that the costs of the strike were a worthwhile investment for the nation — another fine example of the Government's intentions—the stoppage was only five months old. It has now dragged on for more than 11 months. Privately, officials and civil servants are conceding that the Government's borrowing in 1984-85 is likely to burst through their set target. That has already dented the Chancellor's strategy, which means that it has eroded a considerable chunk of the cash that he was banking on for tax cuts in the Budget. That was the reason for his hesitancy in his speech last week during the debate on the economy. The falling pound, in which the strike is a major factor, has also put the Government's inflation objective increasingly at risk, not to mention the unquantifiable effects on business confidence, investment plans and expansion in businesses, most of which will never be recouped.

Never before has so much been lost and so much placed at risk in industry and commerce to stifle and eventually to cripple the strength of the miners and trade unionism in Britain. The union has offered to talk with no pre-conditions. Throughout the nation that will be seen to be fair and just. It is only because the Government and their puppet MacGregor have decreed that this is a political fight to slay trade unionism and trade union rights that the strike has not been settled. The Government have sown bitterness in the land, and in reaping it there will be more militancy.

Most of my people do not want to see that, but the politics of the Government is forcing them to rethink their industrial and political postures, which will be to the severe detriment of all our industrial relations and democratic procedures. Democracy will count for naught, and dictatorship versus anarchy will start to prevail. That may be the price we have to pay for the Government's political strike.

4.53 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): Since I was elected to the House, I have learned that one cannot repeat anything too often. During previous debates in November 1983 and June 1984, I said that it was an honour to be the Member of Parliament for Britain's largest mining constituency —Sherwood. Today I feel humble but full of pride to be the hon. Member whose constituents have been to hell and back a hundred times, indeed a thousand times, because they believe in democracy, in the form of holding a ballot.

What Lord Stockton said about miners during his maiden speech in another place described Nottinghamshire men to a tee. They are honourable, working men who put their jobs, families and country before anyone's political dogma. They are lackeys of no one, and are working today because they considered that the National Coal Board's offer was a fair and reasonable package.

The House is aware of the catalogue of cowardly, brutish attacks on working miners, but the scum also attack their wives and children when those miners are underground. Many from outside Nottinghamshire have had to seek refuge, and they have settled happily in our mining villages of Sherwood. Their protection and ours

has been made possible only by the positive actions taken by the chief constable of Nottinghamshire and his men, who stopped the thuggery in its tracks.

Nottinghamshire holds no truck with the allegations against its police. We do not need a committee set up by the National Council for Civil Liberties—the Huckfields of the European Parliament—or a call for an inquiry from our mangled-minded, Left-wing colleagues in this House. We live there and see the dawn unfold every day for ourselves.

Scargill, after lying through his teeth for 11 months about winning the strike, is now bragging that he has cost the country £5,000 million. He should read his history books and pay heed to the fate of his predecessors who also tried to hold the country to ransom. The only difference between Scargill's stormtroopers and his Nazi counterparts is that his wear steel over their toes by courtesy of the board, instead of on their heads—all the better for putting the boot in.

During the past months, inquiring people have asked how such a great union, known for its democracy, solidarity and fraternity, could be hijacked by those whose only interest was certainly not that of their members. Mining is physically exhausting work, and men who have completed their shift underground are only too ready to go home. But those who were part of a programmed conspiracy to run the union were like rugby players who fall foul of the referee—they have an early bath so that they are ready to go into a conclave to plan their next move of destruction. That position no longer exists in Nottinghamshire, because once the sheep's clothing was removed from their former leaders, the working miners could see whose interests were being served, and when democratic elections were held, the wolves were, without exception, shown the door.

Mr. Nellist: The hon. Gentleman has referred several times to the hijacking of the NUM. Will he comment on the direct role played by Mr. David Hart, a close adviser to the Prime Minister, who on four occasions in August met miners in Nottinghamshire to set up the NUM's so-called national working miners' committee? If the hon. Gentleman is interested in a hijacking of the union, it has been a Conservative hijacking of the miners in Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Stewart: That intervention is not worthy of comment, because I would not be allowed to use the words necessary to describe it in the House.

The new leaders are now responding to their members' wishes, and covet favours from no one, except to be allowed to participate in running the industry for the well-being of their members and the country. Whatever the settlement, the success of the coal industry will not be found in Hobart house, or from those who shout loudest in the House. It rests with the board's 10 area directors and 180 pit managers, who must be allowed to manage with the full confidence and co-operation of their work force.

Yesterday's thinking on how to resolve industrial strife has gone for good in Nottinghamshire, and what I have outlined is already taking place. There is no going back. If our model were adopted by the other coalfields, there would be no need for the intervention of third parties, whose only role would be to fudge management decisions. Talk of forming a breakaway union is utter rubbish, and has been noised abroad only by the undemocratic national union to try once more to discredit those who would not toe the party line. The loyalty of the Nottinghamshire NUM members to their national affiliated union is total. I speak of loyalty. Does the House know what loyalty means in cash terms to every Nottinghamshire miner? It means the loss of £20 a week so that production bonuses from their efforts can be given to their colleagues in loss-making coalfields. That has continued for many years, and it represents real loyalty.

Perhaps, after working continually for 11 months, the north Nottinghamshire miners might be recognised by a visit from the chairman of the coal board. With Scargill's threat of expulsion they have prepared for the worst, and find contemptible his cry that the area executive should hold a ballot before leaving the union. A ballot, indeed — after he has denied one to his members for 11 months. Expulsion has now been postponed because, at long last, Scargill accepts that he is dealing with real men in Nottinghamshire who will not break.

Mr. Terry Patchett (Barnsley, East): The hon. Gentleman refers to bonuses and the loss of earnings. Is he aware that those bonuses were established after the Nottinghamshire miners went against the results of a national ballot?

Mr. Stewart: What of this man Scargill — [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] — who has brought misery to thousands of people, condoned violence, wrecked his union and driven 23,000 Nottinghamshire miners to withdraw their political levies from the Labour party? Will he do the honourable thing and take a fourth trip to Moscow and stay there, or will he ask his members for a vote of confidence through a ballot? The answer to both questions is no, because, in the Prime Minister's word, he is frit.

Let us forget Scargill. Let us remember only the working miners of Nottinghamshire and elsewhere. With such men, the coal industry's future is secure. We shall see coal production as we have never seen it before; a return from investment such as we have never seen before; and, therefore, wages paid such as we have never seen before. With that will come hope for the unemployed as industry takes advantage of competitive energy costs. That is no dream. It is a practical reality, and the working miners of Nottinghamshire have shown the way.

5.3 pm

Mr. Michael McGuire (Makerfield): What the debate has shown so far is that the Government's hands are not clean. That is the principal reason why, after a dispute that has lasted for 11 months and impoverished many areas of the country, they have not thought fit to debate the matter.

As many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, I shall not repeat the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East——

Mr. Mason: Barnsley, Central.

Mr. McGuire: I apologise to my right hon. Friend. Since the general election there have not been many points on which to fix. We used to remember the names of constituencies. My right hon. Friend mentioned the catalogue of interference by the Government, including their overturning of long-established rights to social security benefits to put pressure on miners and to persuade them that it was their fault that their families did not receive those benefits.

[Mr. McGuire]

Before I come to the central issue, I should say why I believe the Government's hands are not clean and why I believe that they have plotted the dispute for a long time. We warned the Government what might happen when they were contemplating appointing Mr. MacGregor as chairman of the NCB. It is odd that they appointed a man in his mid-70s when the age profile in the industry is that there are hardly any miners aged more than 58 and most top managers leave when they are 60. As my right hon. Friend said, Mr. MacGregor was appointed to help to take on the National Union of Mineworkers. He has been a disaster. Do hon. Members recall disputes in any of our great industries, nationalised or not, when the chairman of that industry did not defend his own arguments? To use a common expression, he has made such a cock-up of it that the coal board has had to use men of much inferior rank—men who are not even on the main board—to defend the NCB's case.

Time and again the Government have condemned Mr. Scargill for his obstinacy in saying that he would discuss anything except pit closures. Ministers and media spokesmen have said that Mr. Scargill's obstinacy stopped them getting round the table and settling the dispute. But that has changed. Nothing could be more fair than a trade union, which has been involved in a bitter dispute for 11 months, saying, "We will get round the table but only if there are no preconditions." The Government have seized the chance to say that they want something which no union would permit: the drawing up of an agenda before getting round the table. The Secretary of State was twisting and wriggling on this point. The NUM has said that it will talk without preconditions. It is the Government who say that there must be preconditions—something against which they railed during the past few months.

The Government have dirty hands. They want the strike to continue for the simple reason that if there are no talks, the drift back to work will continue. However, I should warn the Government that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central and others have said, NACODS is deeply worried about the Government's position and will soon seek an assurance from the coal board on this matter. It will not be made a tool of the Government. If NACODS had gone on strike in October, the dispute would have taken a different turn—better for the miners and worse for the Government. The Government must not push their luck too far. Fair-minded people believe that they are trying to screw the NUM to the floor. They are trying to destroy the union.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): And the communities and families.

Mr. McGuire: That is being done at the expense of people who have endured much for many months. Advantage will be taken of them by starvation and other methods in the hope that they will give up the struggle and go back to work.

The Government have repeatedly said that it is up to the coal board and the NUM to get together, so let them get together. Let us have an end to this strike. If they get round the table, the strike will be settled on fair and honourable terms.

Before any hon. Member starts chirping about the history of pit closures, I shall agree that they have happened. I want to tell some of the young Turks on the Conservative Benches something. In 1957, when I was a pit secretary, we closed pits, but there were then men in the industry who were over 80. We brought in a scheme so that they could retire at 70, and then so that they could retire at 65. We then got a reasonable redundancy payment scheme. However, in those days we were trying to find the statistics to prove that unemployment had gone above the magical 500,000 total figure. In other words, unemployment was at a piffling level. There may have been areas with 3 or 6 per cent. unemployment, but the average unemployment level in the country was 2·5 per cent. Today, there is a vastly different proposition, and in some areas the unemployment level is 40 or 50 per cent.

Pits may be closed because accountants say that they should be but, with the movement of the dollar and oil prices, they may become profitable again. I remember my right hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central saying that at one stage three pits in his area had been on the margin, and the coal board wanted to close them, but they became profitable because of the movement in oil prices. As a result, they were kept open, and communities were kept going. With that background in mind, one can understand the reluctance of miners to say that pits can be closed if accountants think that they are worth closing.

There is now an understanding on this matter, and I urge the Government to take advantage of it. If they do not, and if, as it seems, they want to humiliate the NUM, they will be making a big mistake. They will find out that the public will not stand for it. More importantly, the union most concerned—NACODS—will not stand for it. Such behaviour will rally other trade unions as well as the public to the support of the NUM, and this dispute will become even more bitter. I urge the Government to take this chance. They should get their hands off the matter and let the NUM and NCB get round the table. If they do, I believe that we can have an honourable settlement.

5.12 pm

Mr. David Lightbown (Stafferdshire, South-East): It may be helpful if I begin by setting out my credentials in the mining industry. I was first associated with this industry in the mid-1950s. In those days, there were 650,000 people employed in the industry and hand-cutting and loading were still taking place in most areas. Ponies were still hauling tubs. In those days, I was part of a mine mechanisation organisation, which introduced modern cutting, winding, decking and handling equipment, and this job took me to all the major coalfields in the United Kingdom.

The changes that have taken place over the past 30 years in the industry have resulted in improved productivity, safety and working conditions and earning levels for those still employed. Many hundreds of millions of pounds have been invested in the industry, but many pits have been closed, and the work force is now down to about 200,000. Although this radical change in the industry has occasionally caused local problems, they have generally been resolved by common sense and consultation until now.

The effects of this lunatic strike on the industry, the community and the individual have been disastrous—and for what? It has been to support the politically motivated leadership of the NUM, which has little regard for the industry and none for its membership. This dispute

should never have started. Indeed, it would not have started had union procedures been followed and a ballot allowed.

The dispute could have been settled on a perfectly honourable basis five months ago, with the acceptance of the NACODS agreement, but it still goes on. This is mainly due to the impossible demands of the NUM leader and a few of his Marxist friends, and some Labour Members. The temptation to prolong Mr. Scargill's torment is almost irresistible, as a price that he should pay for the violence and damage that he has encouraged rent-a-mob to wreak on the individuals, communities and industry that he purports to represent.

The dispute still needs to be resolved in the interests of the industry and the vast majority of decent, honest miners — miners such as those living in my county and constituency, who have continued to work throughout the dispute despite the intimidation, and those miners who continue to stay out because of intimidation. It is more desirable that we have a negotiated settlement, but if that is not to be, then we must ask the NCB to hold out to the bitter end. There can be no concessions on the issue of who manages the industry, and we must maintain the historic consultation and closure procedures that have always existed in the industry, so that pits can be closed on grounds of economy as well as safety and exhaustion.

There can be no concessions to those who have been found guilty of sabotage, and of violence towards the individual, who have already been dismissed from the industry. However, the odd mistake may have occurred and an independent body such as ACAS may be helpful to both sides in solving this aspect of the dispute.

The coal board should increase its funding for the new enterprise company, which will provide finance, advice and accommodation for new businesses in any mining community adversely affected by closure. This was done by the British Steel Corporation when its closure programme went through. Although some said that that programme would desecrate whole communities, it has not. One has only to look at the progress made in towns such as Corby to realise that.

The NACODS offer is still on the table. If an offer based on that plus the additional suggestions that I have made proves still to be unacceptable to the leadership of the NUM, the dispute can be resolved only by the men in the industry. They will need to settle it by returning to work and purging their Marxist leadership. It is also important that the more sensible Labour Members, who have made genuine efforts to help rather than hinder the resolution of this appalling strike, should come off the fence and tell the divided work force that loyalty and solidarity are acceptable only if its leadership is right and its cause just.

I remind the House that this dispute has damaged and affected industries and individuals in the mining supply and equipment companies. Over the past 10 months, they have endured short-time working, lay-offs and redundancies. There have been no guaranteed jobs, no large lump sum payments for employees and no Govenment subsidies for their companies, some of which are now near to collapse.

This unnecessary and unconstitutional strike has damaged the economy, damaged allied industries, damaged communities and divided families. Above all, it has done permanent damage to the industry itself. The lasting geological and mechanical failures now occurring on a day-to-day basis will ensure that some coal faces and even whole pits are never worked again. The events at the Frances and Seafield collieries, announced today, are but two examples. If there is not an early return to work there will be no jobs available in the industry.

I pay tribute to and thank those people associated with ensuring the safety and the rights of my constituents and those of a like mind. Their actions have enabled them to get to their places of work when the picket violence has been at its worst. I commend especially the men of the Staffordshire police force and those policemen brought into the county on secondment to assist in this unpleasant and arduous duty.

5.21 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I wish to return immediately, and I hope briefly, to the central issue of today's debate, which has already been pressed so effectively by my right hon. Friends the Members for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason): how are we to get a settlement of the dispute?

It may be that we are quite near the possibility of a settlement. A week ago, there were unofficial discussions between representatives of the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers. The discussions pointed the way ahead, and both sides came away from them thinking that there was some hope. By the end of the week that hope has been dashed and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central reminded us, the NCB representatives were saying that they themselves had broken off negotiations for the first time in the dispute. Many of us might question that latter claim, because we believe that they broke off negotiations on previous occasions.

What happened during the week? A document was issued, which said that the president, the general secretary and the executive of the NUM had to sign an undertaking before they came to the negotiations. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East said, that was an intolerable demand, and it was that demand which broke the discussions. However the Secretary of State may wriggle, that is the fact.

The Government claim that that document was originally issued by the NCB and that they only supported it on television and in the other ways that they did in the last few days of last week. Whichever way it happened, it does not alter the fact that it was the issue of that ultimatum to the NUM which broke the negotiations. It is impossible for the Government to deny that.

I have a question for the NCB and the Secretary of State for Energy. Before they decided to issue that document which wrecked the possibility of negotiations, did they consult anyone? Did they consult ACAS, for example? ACAS knows more about negotiations of this kind than the whole Cabinet rolled into one—and that is not a very big compliment. But did they consult ACAS? If they did, let them tell the country what ACAS said about the possibility of such a document being issued in such a negotiation at such a time. My guarantee is that if they had gone to ACAS and asked for advice, unofficially or in any other way, ACAS would have told them that such a demand was intolerable, especially at such a sensitive moment in the industrial dispute, and it would have told them that it would wreck the negotiations.

Let us have a clear answer. Did the Secretary of State and the NCB consult ACAS about whether that was an

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advisable course? If they did not, they were acting in a way that was not in accord with their duties as a Minister and a board pretending to try to settle the dispute. Did they ask ACAS whether such a document should be issued? More particularly, did the NCB ask ACAS before issuing it? Let us have a clear answer to that, if we cannot have clear answers to other questions.

It may be that the board consulted the spokesmen of NACODS on the matter. That would have been a sensible course. The board has an agreement with one union in the industry, which it claims throughout the country is a very good agreement. If the board was really trying to make an agreement with another union and it wondered how the two might affect each other, surely it would have been sensible to ask NACODS, even unofficially, what would be the effect of issuing such a document? If the board had done that, we know what the answer would have been. If it had gone to NACODS, with which the board had signed an agreement, NACODS would have told the board immediately not to do anything so foolish because it would wreck the negotiations.

The truth is that the Government and the NCB together wrecked the negotiations last week, and the Opposition say that today's debate can re-open negotiations by the simple method of getting the Government to withdraw the document. We demand to know why the Government will not do it. Ministers may say that one of the difficulties comes from the NCB, and there are difficulties from the board, especially when it is conducted by its present chairman.

On Sunday there was a report in *The Observer* of what was being said not only by people in the NUM and not only by Members of Parliament representing mining constituencies but by members of the board. One of the features of this industrial dispute has been the near chaos prevailing in the NCB itself. Its members have never had a clear idea, partly because of the way Mr. MacGregor conducts the board. He does not consult people properly —even members of his own board.

On Sunday, *The Observer* discussed what was wrecking the negotiations, and it mentioned the possibility of their being re-opened. Having stated the position, *The Observer* report ended:

"Many senior managers in the Coal Board continue to advise a conciliatory attitude in talks, fearing that a disorganised end to the strike would have serious long-term consequences for the industry."

All of us who know the industry, as we in South Wales do, for example, could give the names of the people in the NCB who are associated with the management and who take that view. *The Observer* concluded:

"Their advice is receiving little response from Mr. Ian Macgregor, the board Chairman."

So there are those in the NCB who say, "Let us have a conciliatory attitude"—which, of course, would mean withdrawing the ultimatum. Apparently, they are saying it in vain. Some of us are not surprised about that.

It appears that Mr. MacGregor has been taking advice from some very strange people. Who employs Mr. David Hart, for example? Is he paid by the NCB? Is he paid by Conservative Central Office? Possibly he is paid by *The Times*. The Opposition would like to know who pays him, because apparently he has been advising all three to call off any negotiations and to wreck any negotiations which may start, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East underlined.

We want to know from the Government whether they will now override Mr. MacGregor if he again insists on the document which is the obstacle to negotiations.

We could go back over the past discussion of the strike. It is a very different story from the one given by the Secretary of State. There is a very different account of what happened at the beginning at Cortonwood and at the time of the earlier closures, especially in the light of the way that the Prime Minister goes up and down the country parroting the suggestion that the sole cause of the dispute is an insistence by the NUM that there shall be no closures on economic grounds. That is not the case. The Minister shakes his head. He has discovered his head, if not his voice, when dealing with my questions. The NUM made a statement in the middle of last week which was examined by the labour editor of *The Times*, who is not always favourable to the NUM. The article said:

"Mr. Scargill was adamant that his 'peace plan' was the basis for negotiations to end the strike. His letter two days ago proposed: A review of the *Plan for Coal 1974*. The board has offered that."

The second proposal was the issue on which talks partly broke down before the Government and the NCB issued the document. It was, according to *The Times*:

"Reversion to the pre-March 6, 1984, colliery review procedure."

That is what the NUM insisted on. By doing that, it was merely upholding what had prevailed before. The article continued:

"The board says that cannot be accepted because it does not contain any reference to the economics of the collieries."

The NCB is refusing to accept proposals by the NUM for the maintenance of the pre-6 March position. Going deeper into the dispute, one discovers that it is what happened on 6 March that changed everything. How many times have we had to listen to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Energy going through all their rigmarole about how many pits were closed under the previous procedures? These are the previous procedures —which the Government tore up.

The tale was rather different in the early days of the dispute. The Government were not intervening then, were they? How many months did we have to listen to the tale of combined fraud and deceit from Ministers that they were not intervening? If they had intervened, the dispute could have been stopped before it started. Many of us have claimed that if the Department of Employment had not been shut down by the Prime Minister, it would have known before 6 March that such proposals would cause a strike. For months the Government said that they were not intervening. They said that they were leaving it all to the Coal Board. Are they intervening now or are they not? Which is it this week? Perhaps they are doing a bit of both — not intervening on Monday and Tuesday but intervening on Friday and Saturday. That is what it looks like from how, last week, the Prime Minister's claque was sent in to destroy any chance of a decent, honourable agreement.

The House is telling the Government that it demands that decent and honourable negotiations be started. That means the withdrawal of the document which was issued last week. Negotiations can then start. The House and the country need people not to stand up to Arthur Scargill, as

Conservative Members so often shriek, but to stand up to the Prime Minister and tell her that we shall not have matters settled by her dictation.

5.33 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I agree with part of the final statement made by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). There should be honourable and decent negotiations on an agenda that deals with the causes of the dispute and the reasons behind our having 11 months of misery.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has said, there are no winners in the dispute. Those who talk about victory and defeat do not understand the serious consequences of events during the past 11 months. I have tried hard to enable sensible people to meet to settle the dispute and I utterly reject the caricature of a Machiavellian plot by the Government to destroy the NUM and the mining industry, as suggested by the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason). If there were such a planned attack, the leader of the NUM would have had no hesitation in calling a ballot on 8 March. If such a plot had been so obvious, the leader of the NUM would have secured a majority. If the plot was so obvious, why did the Nottingham area, which was balloted, reject that interpretation by a majority of 75 per cent.? Moreover, there were two national ballots on pit closures.

Today's debate was not intended to raise the political temperature or to continue negotiations by the media, which have bedevilled the dispute. The last thing that we required was a word-by-word and nuance-by-nuance examination by the media. We have an industrial problem in traditional industries, especially extracting industries.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): With regard to the Government's long-standing policy, has the hon. Gentleman not heard of the Ridley report of 1978, which was leaked to *The Economist?* It revealed the strategy that the Government later adopted against the miners. The whole thing was laid out in that report. It is clear that even before the Conservatives got into office they were preparing plans to attack the NUM.

Mr. Lester: It all depends on how the Ridley report is interpreted. I interpret it as a means of preventing might from being right in an industrial dispute. Mr. Scargill perfected that strategy at the Saltley cokeworks, to which he often refers, where he used mass picketing to force the Government to give way through pressure and blackmail. He chose not to argue a reasoned case.

The level of production has varied from a peak of 270 million tonnes in 1914 to levels set under "Plan for Coal", because production must relate to the market and what we can use. Moreover, most Opposition Members who have worked down the pits know that when a pit is sunk, its life can be calculated to within five or six years.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I am a geologist and have been involved in the mining industry. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is not possible to predict the life of any colliery as he has suggested. Its life can depend on circumstances that change from day to day, such as strange geological conditions. The NUM has never resisted colliery closures when the winning of coal is difficult or likely to cause danger to its members.

Mr. Lester: I entirely accept that geological conditions can change. However, the hon. Gentleman must accept that before anyone makes a massive investment, as we did in Nottinghamshire at Cotgrave, there is a great deal of drilling and the extent of the coal reserves are assessed. Cotgrave pit is expected to last about 65 years.

We must consider the end of the life of older pits. There are plenty in Nottinghamshire and we have been through that procedure enough times. In the last years of a pit there are high production costs, unacceptably difficult conditions for miners and a real risk of additional subsidence and associated costs.

We have already been through this procedure. When we last looked at the future of one of the uneconomic pits in my area, the cost of working the two faces proved to be unacceptable in terms of working conditions for the men and subsidence problems for the community. The bill has increased. The losses made at that pit mean that other pits in the area have had to carry it. It has been producing coal that is not required. There is a logic to the closure of uneconomic pits over and above geology and exhaustion.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Can the hon. Member comment upon allocated expenditure, in particular the allocated expenditure referred to in the article that appeared in the January edition of *Accountancy?* It showed in relation to Cortonwood that the equivalent of £11 per tonne would have to be transferred elsewhere if Cortonwood were closed and that if it were kept open the cost to the coal board would be £5 per tonne less than closure. Are not questions relating to allocated costs and economic pits relevant to this argument?

Mr. Lester: Yes, indeed, and we have already agreed a formula for looking at that kind of argument. In my hearing the Government have offered to reopen Cortonwood and to put it through those procedures. There is also the problem of producing specialist coal that cannot be used because there is no market for it. Certain types of coal are produced that cannot be used in power stations. We have to import specialist coal for certain purposes because we do not produce that type of coal. The Government's record in terms of obtaining high production at low cost is good. There has been investment in new collieries and in new coal faces. No other Government have ever invested so heavily in the future of high production and coal faces.

Mr. Alec Woodall (Hemsworth): The Government have not opened a new pit in the last five years.

Mr. Lester: The hon. Gentleman is not correct. The Government have approved the opening of pits in the Vale of Belvoir, and in Nottinghamshire the Government have provided most of the new investment. Only when we produce coal at less than the current national average price shall we be able to attack those markets to which the Opposition refer. The fact is that before the strike began we were exporting double the coal production that we needed to import. Many Conservative Members who have spoken in coal debates during the last 10 years have pointed to the value of the European market and how essential it is for Britain to get into it. We can get into that market only if we produce coal at an economic price.

How do we deal with the problem of high-cost production that is in excess of our needs? This strike was totally unnecessary to deal with that problem. During the miners' strike the agreement with NACODS has been reached. It has provided an opportunity for a third party

[Mr. Lester]

to assess the kind of problems to which the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) referred, the social consequences. I can think of no other industry in which management is prepared to accept a third party assessment of the facts before it reaches a final decision. Not even the Church of England is prepared to accept that kind of third party assessment before it decides to close a church in one of its parishes.

I am second to none in wanting to ensure that no community suffers because its sole employer has had to close down business. The new enterprise company is in existence to meet the needs of the few but very important communities that need help.

It is clear from the NUM proposals and from the actions of the Government that the system of redundancies and retirement could be refined to deal with the excess manpower in a perfectly reasonable way when men genuinely want to leave the industry on a voluntary basis. Having done a 31 to 35 year stint in the industry, who would deny that to those men? This could be worked out between sensible and reasonable men. However, what is so sad to Conservative Members who support the industry is the overwhelming evidence that this industrial problem has been turned into a major political dispute by the deliberate misuse of the NUM rule book.

The Nottinghamshire miners are not Tories. They will not support the Conservative party. The Nottinghamshire miners have not supported the Tory party against their national executive. They have supported their own deep instincts for democracy, for the rule book and for their union. They are very conscious of the effect that this damaging dispute has had upon their own lives, upon their own industry and upon their own union and also upon the long-term energy needs of this country.

If one looks back to what happened during the discussions on 6, 7 and 8 March, my understanding is that on 6 March the meeting with the coal board did not end in controversy. It ended with both sides agreeing to go to the Government to find out what additional investment was available to deal with this problem. However, between 6 and 8 March a variety of events occurred. By 8 March—we read it in the *Sunday Telegraph* and there is no reason to believe that the man who wrote the article——

Mr. Heffer: Who paid him for that?

Mr. Lester: Whether he was paid or not does not alter the fact that he recorded what happened at that meeting. What happened at that meeting was a total abuse of rule 41 and what it was drafted for. The ballot that would have legitimised the strike was not held. If a ballot had been held no Conservative Member could have argued against the strike. No Nottinghamshire miner would have balloted individually if a national ballot had been held and the call for a strike had been won. They would have come out on strike, as they have honoured totally the overtime ban that was legitimately and democratically arrived at.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I am interested to hear that if there had been a ballot Conservative Members would not have argued against the strike. Does the hon. Member recall that in 1974 the Secretary of State was going up and down the country condemning the miners, even though there had been a ballot?

Mr. Lester: We should not have argued against the result of a legitimate ballot, held nationally, and neither would the miners. What also happened on 8 March was that the executors of the funds of the NUM were changed from the original executors to Mr. McGahey and Mr. Peter Heathfield. On that day the NUM funds were moved. It is very difficult to convince any reasonable person that the NUM—or, indeed the board of GEC—could plot at that meeting the movement of those funds so successfully. Those funds moved to the Isle of Man and then to Dublin and to New York. They came back as bearer bonds to Jersey where they were put into a private aeroplane and flown to Luxembourg. Which hon. Member is going to tell me that that was done spontaneously?

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is something of an irony that the NUM has been able to move its funds freely around the world out of the reach of the courts of this land as a result of the abolition of exchange control by this Government, which the Opposition are asking to be reintroduced?

Mr. Lester: I do not expect the NUM would claim that that casts credit upon it. My point is that there was a plan to promote a political strike without using the NUM rule book. The plan was to move NUM funds because it was recognised that they might be at risk. Nobody is going to tell me that that was not well thought out long before 6 March. Nottinghamshire has continued to behave totally democratically and within the rule book. Nottinghamshire has held elections for branch official. Far from the sinister use of Mr. David Hart, whoever he might be——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Who is he?

Mr. Lester: I have heard of him and I can tell the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) that the Nottinghamshire miners I have spoken to have no connection with him, or any time for him. However, when one looks for sinister things under stones one neglects the truth. The truth is that the Nottinghamshire working miners group came into existence when Colin Clark, an elected official, went one Friday afternoon to the solicitor who had handled his house purchase and conveyance, put on his desk the NUM rule book and said, "I need some help because I am sure that what is happening is wrong." It was from that moment that the Nottinghamshire miners formed their own group and elected branch officials. The president of the NUM now acknowledges that everything the Nottinghamshire miners have done is legal and legitimate.

That was not the case when he tried to bring in rule 51 and said that no Nottinghamshire miner would ever work again. But he has since found that what was done was legal and legitimate and that is great credit to them. Far from support from secret Tory party funds or whatever, over 6,000 individual contributions were made to the working miners' committee. That does not rank with any secret fund. They are all published and all available.

Mr. Barron: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's point that the working miners' committee in Nottinghamshire has no political connections and that it was just composed of people who felt that the NUM rule book was not being operated correctly. Is the hon.

Gentleman aware that the Nottinghamshire-based working miners' committee held meetings in the Yorkshire coalfield with a Conservative Member?

Mr. Lester: I have news for the hon. Gentleman. Only last week a contingent of Yorkshire working miners, the vice-president, the secretary and representatives of several pits, had a meeting with me. I was pleased to meet them. I am pleased to meet anybody who applies to see me to talk about the future of an industry for which I have a great concern. But any suggestion that any Conservative Member has promoted anything or worked with or been consulted by anybody other than when they have been requested so to do is utterly wrong and completely without foundation.

When history comes to be written my version will be closer to the truth than some of what we have heard from Opposition Members. We need a negotiated settlement on the key issue of how to deal with surplus production in a reasonable, civilised and proper way, with a real respect for the people in the industry who have lived and worked in it, and those communities which have supported it.

The legacy with which we are currently involved is one of deep distrust at every level of the industry. The only way in which we shall start to deal with that deep distrust is if we have a clean and honourable end to the strike so that people can get back to refashioning a vital industry in the modern way that it deserves.

5.51 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) has pointed out some home truths to the House about this debate and for that reason we should welcome the opportunity that it gives us to do just that. We regret the fact that although the dispute has been going on for almost a year now the House has had only two opportunities to debate it, despite its importance and the impact that it is having on the country. Time in the House is allocated by the Government and the Labour party and they have not chosen to debate this vital topic and to provide what should be the national forum for such debates with an opportunity to discuss the matter properly.

There is no doubt that the dispute is a tragedy for Britain. It is a personal tragedy for those who are directly involved and whose families are suffering the hardship of not having an income and who are without the means to keep body and soul together for so long. It is a tragedy for the nation because Britain's economy has been adversely affected by the dispute and therefore industry and our personal lives have suffered. Thirdly, it is a tragedy for the coal industry because a potentially great industry, which could have been of enormous service to Britain over the past year, has been substantially damaged by the dispute, and it will take many years for the industry and all its ancillary parts to recover.

I was pleased to hear what the Secretary of State said this afternoon about the recent boost to NCB Enterprises Ltd, both by the appointment of staff and additional resources. We on these Benches welcome what he said. We noted with satisfaction the right hon. Gentleman's undertaking that more funds would be forthcoming for NCB Enterprises Ltd. if they were needed.

However, it has taken the Government a great deal of time to recognise the need for the establishment of NCB Enterprises Ltd. My right hon. Friend the leader of the Social Democratic party proposed the establishment of that body back in March. It took the Government until August to establish it and it took them until now to start taking it seriously and to provide the resources for it to do the job properly. The Government must bear responsibility not just for that but for providing a background against which Mr. Scargill and his friends in the NUM could thrive and bring the dispute to the point that they have.

The Government have not handled the situation well. Against a background of 4 million people unemployed, the rundown of industry and some mishandling of negotiations during the dispute, they have played into Mr. Scargill's hands by providing him with fertile ground on which to plough his furrow and obtain the support of Britain's mineworkers. The Government must bear some of the responsibility for the state of affairs during the past nine months and for the present difficulties.

But that does not excuse what the NUM and its leadership have been doing during the dispute, and, indeed, the way in which it was brought about. There was no ballot at the start of the dispute as there should have been if the traditions and rules of the NUM had been properly followed. What the hon. Member for Broxtowe said about balloting is right. The country and the mineworkers would have felt that the dispute had been legitimised if there had been a ballot in favour of the dispute. The lack of a ballot undermined the dispute's credibility from the start. It is a great sadness that no Labour Member has been prepared to come out and be forthright in saying that since the dispute began.

There is no doubt that that happened because the leadership of the NUM had political objectives in starting the dispute and in pursuing it as vigorously as it has during the past nine months. Sadly, that still applies today because the NUM's leadership has used its membership as the infantry in its political battle, which is unjustified and unforgiveable.

What does "without preconditions" mean when the NUM's president said on the radio this morning that the NUM would not be party to an agreement that accepted pit closures on economic grounds? It is nonsense for that camouflage to be draped across our screens and to be given to the press when the NUM's president today and in correspondence makes it clear that he is still not prepared seriously to discuss economic pit closures.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh) *rose*——

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I shall not give way because I must finish quickly to allow other hon. Members to speak.

It is right that negotiations should not start again while the NUM is not prepared to accept that the central issue in the dispute is not on the table for serious discussion.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I want to be brief.

I hope that the miners will see what is happening to their industry and what is happening in the leadership of their union, and I hope that they will understand that it is not in their interests to continue the dispute on the present terms and under the present circumstances — *[Interruption.]* The industry has a great future but the miners — *[Interruption.]* — will understand that their interests are not being served by continuing the strike. Therefore, it is hoped that they will return to work in increasing numbers so that the great future that the industry has can be realised.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Stop waffling. What advice does the hon. Gentleman give to the miners in Fife?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, he will have an opportunity to do so later.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) to make so much noise that I cannot hear what the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) is saying?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Many hon. Members are anxious to catch my eye. Interruptions only prevent people from speaking.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I am anxious that other hon. Members, such as those who have been bawling at me from the Labour Benches, should have an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Douglas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: If the hon. Gentleman would resume his seat and behave in the way that one expects an hon. Member to behave, we could proceed with the debate.

It is in the interests of the miners that they should return to work to ensure that the great future that the industry could have is realised. We very much hope that——

Mr. Douglas: That they will crawl back.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: We hope that pressure will build up on the leadership of the NUM so that they are prepared——

Mr. Douglas: Prepared to crawl back.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: So that they are prepared to accept that the closure of uneconomic pits can be put on the agenda. When 80 per cent. of the losses of the NCB come from 10 per cent. of the pits, we do not need to study the facts for long to realise that something must be done.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): So the hon. Gentleman favours closing the pits in Durham? Why does he not say that in Durham?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: A lot of people from Durham will be listening to this and they will see what good sense there is in it.

Many people in the mining industry have fears about their jobs. We recognise that, but it is not in the interests of miners who have worries about the future to continue the dispute. They have been given guarantees that jobs will be on offer to them despite any closures that take place. In those circumstances, it is in their interests to go back to work and to allow discussions to take place on the closure of uneconomic pits so that the dispute can be brought to an end and the potential great future of the industry can be realised.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that the 10-minute limit now comes into operation. No injury time is added for interventions.

6.1 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): My hon. Friends have demonstrated beyond question their respect for the mining industry and miners and, in particular, their respect for Nottinghamshire miners.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) said, we did not assume that the Nottinghamshire miners supported Government policies. They have been seeking to protect the integrity of their union. That has been their prime motivation and I am sure that, when the strike is over, they will be the first to want to put their union back together again, in the hope that they will find leadership that will represent their interests and not use them as political cannon fodder.

It is surely not in dispute that the strike has been a political strike. The prime aim of the miners' leader has been spelt out time and again. He said in February 1983:

"Capitalism is an obscence system which deserves to be overthrown."

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am grateful for that response by Labour Members. It illustrates more clearly than anything else what the strike is about.

Mr. Scargill continued:

"It must be overthrown before it disintegrates into a Fascist dictatorship."

What a nerve. Can there ever have been, since the dark days of pre-1939, a more odious example of the Fascist approach—and spelt out in advance, just as in "Mein Kampf"? But that is what Scargillism has become in these last months.

Demands have been formulated in terms that could not be fulfilled, but that was no accident. It was not a corner into which circumstances forced an unwilling NUM leadership. That is the Trotskyist style of negotiation: to ensure the maximum damage and frustration among the gullible, en route to insurrection.

Mr. Jimmy Reid is not exactly a friend of the Conservative party. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is no friend of ours either."] Apparently, he is no longer a friend of the Labour party. He said on television:

"I recoil in horror at the scenes of a miner's home daubed 'Scab' and into my mind flood visions of Jewish homes defaced in Hitler's Germany."

All the more reason why I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) is not here and all the more reason why I felt a sense of sadness that he who, of all people, should have known better, has acquiesced in these acts of violence and accusations against the police.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That is not true.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I have to say——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you use your position to ask the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) to withdraw a statement which is patently untrue and a misrepresentation of the truth?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) is responsible for his own speech. He must decide, in the light of what is said, whether to withdraw any statement.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman made a personal attack on my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I cannot withdraw those remarks, because I have felt a sense of personal shame, as a co-religionist of the right hon. Member for Gorton, at his attitude over the past months. That is why I feel that I can stand up and say what I have said.

I have made those comments because back in April, when we discussed the strike for the first time—though we were primarily concerned with the actions of the police—the right hon. Member for Gorton put a large red folder on the Opposition Dispatch Box.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Red? Disgraceful!

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: You are a silly woman.

That heavy folder contained nothing but hearsay comments about problems on the picket lines. I know that to be a fact. The only reason why it was placed on the Dispatch Box was to give some spurious evidence of cases that had been laid before the right hon. Gentleman. I know that not one of those cases was laid before the chief constable of Nottingham, because every one was pure hearsay.

In all the row that has taken place, the right to work and the case for coal have been obscured by the outrageous conduct that has occurred. The right to work is a just principle, but it is not an argument for a particular job in a particular place for a miner and his children, regardless of whether the rest of the community wants or needs the product of that labour.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe implied, society must accept the social consequences, but that is a different solution from continuing to make unwanted goods or mining unwanted coal at too high a cost.

"Alice Through the Looking Glass" logic is offered as democracy by the miners' leaders. When the Nottinghamshire miners balloted on whether to strike, 27 per cent. voted for a strike and 73 per cent. voted to work. Our area went to work and fewer than 1,000 of the 31,000 miners there are still on strike.

However, striking miners now say that the majority have no right to vote their colleagues out of work. That now seems to be their argument. Of course, that is why the miners' leaders do not need a ballot any more. If they hold a ballot and obtain the majority they seek, they will be happy, but if they do not obtain that majority, they will argue that the majority has no right to put the minority's views in jeopardy.

This is a political showdown — [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—but not between this Government and miners, or working people in general. The showdown is between evil men, who now lead working people, and parliamentary democracy. It is a showdown in which both sides of the House should ensure that Parliament succeeds.

6.9 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Having heard the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo), I can understand why the Government did not want a debate. It is now quite clear that, far from believing in the prerogative of management and in not intervening, the Secretary of State has masterminded the strike from the beginning. The preparations were made long ago, as the Ridley report proves. The police were equipped and trained to work on picket lines. The whole strike was organised to break the NUM.

If any Conservative Member wonders why Arthur Scargill is so highly respected, he should realise that for five years—and long before he was president of the NUM — Arthur Scargill went to countless miners' meetings saying, "Mind my words, the Government have a hit list of pits." Ministers and coal board officials denied that, but miners have followed Arthur Scargill because he has stayed loyal to them. No Conservative Member or Minister has taken that factor into account. Since no other hon. Member has done so, I should like to place on record my tribute to the 130,000 miners and their families who have endured appalling hardship in the past, almost, 12 months in order to defend the industry, their jobs, and their communities. I feel great pride for them.

It is a great tragedy that, because of many secondary issues, the real question has never been allowed to be properly discussed. That question involves the link between this country's economy and coal. I am very proud to have signed the 1977 "Plan For Coal". I negotiated it with the NUM. The basis of it was that there would be a joint agreement on the industry's future. Much has been made of pit closures under the Labour Government. I am not saying that all of them were right — [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Of course I am not saying that, but when, as Secretary of State, I offered a veto to the NUM on pit closures, it represented a recognition that one cannot run the mining industry without the goodwill of the British miners. Any Government who try to convert the "enemy within" to the "enemy underground" by driving men back to work through hardship will destroy the industry and its prospects.

The NUM has never objected to pit closures when there is genuine exhaustion. I am not talking about being down to the last tonne of coal. Anyone who has had anything to do with the industry knows that generally the argument is whether a bit more investment would reveal more coal faces. The argument is not about the last tonne of coal, and to say that the NUM has said that is a blatant lie designed to deceive those who do not know the truth. If there are geological faults or dangerous conditions, the NUM insists on pit closures. It will not put its members at risk. The argument is whether the Government now have a case for closure on what are called harsh economic grounds. The plain truth is that they do not.

If a pit is denied investment, it can be turned into what is called an "uneconomic" pit, just as, if the roof of a home or a burst pipe is not mended, or if broken windows are not replaced, that home will be turned into a slum. The charge that the NUM rightly makes is that the Government have deliberately starved pits that have great reserves of coal in order to feed money into the so-called high productivity pits with the intention of selling them off when the Government get the chance. Conservative Members should not shake their heads as if to suggest privatisation was a wicked smear against the Government. This Government would sell off the royal family if they could make a quick profit.

The second argument concerns the relative costs of nuclear power and coal. As the House knows, not a single penny of equity capital has ever been put into nuclear power anywhere in the world. Not a single penny has been put into it in the United States. The United States has

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cancelled 90 nuclear power stations, and has not ordered one since 1977. Nuclear power is financed for defence reasons. Therefore the argument that nuclear power is cheaper than coal is quite false.

We sell our oil from the North sea to the CEGB at three times the cost of production, because OPEC fixes the price. There is no case for saying that coal is uneconomic compared with nuclear power or oil. The social cost to the Exchequer of closure where there is no other work is twice that of keeping the pit open. SDP Members with their fake statistics come along and try to pretend that they are presenting mathematical realities that others have to face, but in doing so they are just proving that they are on the Right wing of the Tory party. I think that that is clear

Then, of course, it is said that there is no market for coal. But as coal is cheaper than nuclear power or oil, we should be converting from nuclear power and oil to coal, and providing free fuel to pensioners, who now die in their hundreds from hypothermia during the winter. Those old people cannot afford to keep warm in winter. But the miners who dig that coal could keep their jobs, save the country money and save the lives of the old.

Also, with the pound at half the value of two or three years ago, British coal is exported at half the price and British imports of energy——

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I shall not give way. If the hon. Gentleman had wanted a debate, he could have demanded a debate in Government time. He should listen to the arguments being put forward.

Energy imports now cost twice the price. Not for the first time in our history the NUM is defending the national interest—*[Interruption.]* Yes it is. When the oil runs out—and it is being depleted at a disgraceful rate—and when gas runs out, Britain will again depend on coal.

The Government have tried to bribe and starve the miners into giving up. They have put thousands of policemen on the picket lines who are trained in techniques perfected in Northern Ireland. The magistrates have abused bail conditions by taking away civil liberties without trial. The judges have sequestrated funds that the miners donated with the very aim of defending their jobs if the union was under attack. The mass media gathered up there in the Press Gallery have been pouring out propaganda against the miners. For example, when BBC television covered the Orgreave picket, it showed stones being thrown, and then cavalry charges being made by the police. I know from BBC editors who took part in that bulletin that there were three cavalry charges by the police before a single stone was thrown. But the BBC, pretending to be impartial, put out a bulletin designed to mislead the British people about the sources of violence.

Time is short, so I must be brief. There are 130,000 miners on strike. There have been some casualties—those who have gone back to work because they could not survive. But I tell the House that 90 per cent. of the miners who have ever been on strike are still on strike. As one third of miners never went on strike, it means that, even if the 51 per cent. mark was achieved, all that money and propaganda and all the police would have shifted only 16 per cent. of miners from their original view.

The cost of the strike has been enormous, but the miners have received massive support. They have received support from their communities, from women's action groups and from people and communities all over the country and the world. The public now know that what my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) said is true—we are witnessing an attack on the jobs, living conditions, trade union rights and civil liberties of working people in Britain. The Government rely on cold and hunger to try to drive the miners back, but I do not believe that they will succeed. The other way to end the strike quickly is to follow the lead of the National Union of Railwaymen, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen and the National Union of Seamen and provide industrial support and further political action.

Ministers should study their history. After the 1926 general strike, the Tory Government were swept from office in the following general election. In 1974, when the present Secretary of State was making the same speeches, even though there had been a ballot, he was swept from office. The British people will never, never, never allow the Tory party to destroy the miners, their families and their communities, because, given the choice of the ballot box, they prefer the quality, decency, dedication and loyalty of the miners to the get-rich-quick people who support the Tory party and have contributed to the creation of this strike.

6.20 pm

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) conveniently forgot to tell the House that in Derbyshire the majority of miners are working, having had a ballot locally against the strike. The people of Derbyshire and the miners there cannot understand what the dispute is about and why it was started by the NUM leadership. Derbyshire miners have always accepted that the closure of pits near the end of their economic life is a necessary and normal part of the business.

Many of my constituents are disgusted at the Labour party's nauseating display of licking Arthur Scargill's jackboots. They are particularly disgusted at Labour Members representing Derbyshire constituencies, including the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, who never speak up on behalf of the majority of miners who are working. The Labour party stands condemned tonight out of its own mouth.

Time and again the Labour party has failed to condemn the picketing, the violence and the intimidation. It has failed to speak up for the working miners. It has failed to support the democratic vote and failed to support union rule books. It has failed to condemn a senseless dispute. The Labour party's only cry has been to ask the National Coal Board to surrender to Mr. Arthur Scargill's impossible demands.

The Labour party has used its influence, not to protect the miners, not to protect the union and not to protect the coal industry, but to aid and abet a disastrous conflict which is damaging the economy, preventing the modernisation of the coal industry and preventing lower energy prices.

Members of the Labour party are the guilty men. We have heard them again tonight. They have encouraged an

irresponsible NUM leadership which has cheated its own members out of earnings, cheated them out of jobs and cheated them out of a future for their industry.

Of course pits must continue to close. The Labour Government closed hundreds of them. The Labour Government even provided, under the Coal Industry Act 1977, for the closure of uneconomic pits. We must consider the cost to the nation of maintaining subsidies in the marginal, hopelessly uneconomic pits. We must reallocate resources and invest in the new pits for tomorrow to secure the energy and the jobs that we need. We must provide for more economic energy prices.

Goodness knows how many jobs have been lost over the last few years because of high energy prices. We lost whole industries because our coal was too expensive. There is a huge market for coal—it is bigger than today's—if we concentrated on producing it in the new fields where it can be mined more economically.

Coal could recapture markets that it has lost over the years if only we had a sensible expansion of the industry in the economic areas. That is what the NUM leadership is preventing, and that is what the Labour party is supporting.

If the NUM is really prepared to negotiate on economic pits, why does it not just say so? All that it has to admit is that uneconomic pits have to close. Let us get round the table and discuss how best to do it. The industry must have a right to manage. Every other industry has that right. If the industry had exercised that right in the past we should not be having a dispute now because more of the uneconomic production would have been phased out long ago and new investment would have gone ahead faster instead of being used to subsidise the loss-making pits. If that had happened, we should now have lower cost coal and secure jobs. Instead of wasting subsidies on maintaining loss-making pits, we should reallocate more of the resources into the new mines. Management must be given the right to manage.

In every other industry—private and state—workers and management have to face the facts of life to survive. It may be painful but it is accepted. Uneconomic steel plants, older power stations and remote railway lines which are uneconomic in today's circumstances have been closed. In private industry the realities of economic life have been even more harsh.

If Mr. Scargill were the leader of the engineering union, we should still be producing thousands of steam engines. If Mr. Scargill were leader of the transport union, we should probably still be running stage coaches on mud tracks. If we accepted Scargillism here, Britain would have no modern new technological industries such as aerospace and nuclear electronics and our living standards would be about as high as they are in Bulgaria.

I want to say a word about the future of the industry. When all this is over and the majority of miners have finally voted with their feet, we shall have to start to put the pieces together. There must be some fundamental changes and I hope that the Government Front Bench will take account of them. There must be genuine competition in the coal industry. There must be privatisation and better management.

We have a private sector coal industry. Why have we stifled it? We have private coal mines and mining expertise in the private sector. Why do we not encourage it? Why should the coal industry be retained as a state monopoly? There is plenty of scope for providing efficient competition in the private sector. It is nonsense that companies such as BP should have to mine coal in Australia and elsewhere and are prohibited from using their expertise to mine coal in Britain. It is nonsense that our profitable, opencast mining industry should be deliberately stifled by the National Coal Board. Instead of encouraging more licensing, the NCB is abusing its monopoly to hold back that profitable private sector.

Why should not new reserves of coal, like oil and gas be licensed to encourage private investment for the benefit of the economy as a whole? Why should not miners have a better deal in the private sector, as every other privatised industry provides? There is plenty of scope for introducing genuine competition to the NCB. We could sell off some of the profitable pits, so that the coal board could concentrate on putting right the unprofitable pits.

Let us get on with what we have done in the other industries for the benefit of the economy, the consumer and, above all, the employees in that industry.

The nation should note the way in which the Labour party encouraged the miners to believe that they were supporting an honourable dispute, when it knew that the miners had been tricked, bullied and intimidated into supporting a lost cause. It is time that the country realised that Labour's attitude has been to wreck a once great union, and now it has the nerve to demand that the coal board surrender to impossible terms.

Even today, when the disastrous NUM leadership has been discredited and exposed for its shameful deception of its members, and when the suicidal policies of Arthur Scargill are rejected by more and more disillusioned miners, who remains to support Scargillism and all that it represents? Not the miners, not the TUC and not even any other union—just the Labour party and Her Majesty's official Opposition. Long may they remain the Opposition.

6.31 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): It gives me no pleasure to speak in this debate about a dispute that should not have taken place.

The Secretary of State must take full responsibility. He should have got off his backside and involved himself more openly in trying to resolve the dispute. His failure to do so shows either that he agrees with the Prime Minister's policy or that he does not have the guts to stand up for what is right.

I said recently that the Secretary of State knew nothing about industrial relations. It is now apparent that he knows even less about the coal industry. In view of the duration of the strike and the right hon. Gentleman's failure to do anything, he should do the honourable thing and resign.

The various plans for coal are not worth the paper on which they are written if there is no overall energy policy, and there can be no such policy while the Government allow short-term market forces to dictate the size of the industry. An overall energy policy based on coal must be implemented for the long-term good of the nation.

The Government and the NCB have shown that their pea-sized brains are incapable of understanding and discharging their duties. The Government, who have allowed the dispute to cost £5·5 billion, should be charged with treason, for it is obvious that they do not comprehend the figures. If not charged with treason, they should be

[Mr. Martin Redmond]

committed to Rampton hospital. Having worked in the industry and served on various committees, I would not trust the coal board to run a children's tea party.

As for the Cortonwood issue, when Yorkshire took the decision to strike — because the NCB refused to implement the then policies on pit closures — the Government sat on their backsides, did nothing and allowed the strike to start the following Monday.

Hickleton pit was made uneconomic some years ago, as the result of bad investment and bad management. Bentley pit, under the old ABC hit list, was to close, but as a result of the Doncaster NUM panel threatening total strike action, the then area director caused investment to be made in that pit. Meanwhile, the rest of the pits in the Doncaster area were being asked to produce the same excellent profits for the industry. That shows that, when good investment takes place, a pit—even one on the hit list—can produce a profit for the good of the industry and the local community.

I could go on at length giving examples of stupid decisions made by the coal board, but time does not permit me to deal with that aspect in depth. One can only hope that if these points are made often enough, they will penetrate even the minds of Tory Members, who may then feel able to question whether the Government are pursuing policies that are good for the nation.

It is strange that in other countries the private sector is investing in their coal industries—anticipating the future demand for coal—while the British Government would sooner import coal and see our miners on the dole, with all the consequences of deprivation and so on. It is economics gone crazy.

Comparisons have been made between Labour and Conservative Administrations closing pits. The main difference is that, under previous Labour Governments, there were alternative jobs for the miners. There is clear evidence to support the aims and objectives of the NUM.

A number of reports have been made on the method of accountancy employed by the coal board, reference has been made to the Government's stance throughout the dispute and much has been said about the social cost of it all to the mining communities. Lord Kaldor has argued a simple and overwhelming case against the Government's and the coal board's policy. Andrew Glyn has argued that the NCB's policy is wrong. Barnsley council in south Yorkshire has produced a booklet entitled, "Coal Mining and Barnsley". It is a study of employment prospects in the area, especially if the Government have their way. If the Secretary of State cannot afford to buy a copy of that booklet, I will purchase one for him.

The University of Manchester Institute of Science of Technology has argued against the misleading method of accountancy employed by the NCB, yet the Secretary of State buries his head in the sand like an ostrich. He should spend more time reading suggestions and reports which conflict with the methods employed by the NCB, especially in the light of the financial jargon that emanates from the board.

Not once have the Government argued their case on logic and truth. In reality, there is no logic or reason in their policy. If there had been, Government time would have been provided for us to debate the problems facing the mining industry. If the Government were correct in their policy—and they are not—they would argue their case for pit closures before an independent body, which would have the final say on whether a pit should close. The Government will not do that, because they are like frightened children. They do not have the guts to argue their case before an independent panel. Their policy is a total disaster for the nation.

I have seen all the correspondence that has passed between the union and the coal board, and I can say with confidence that the NCB and the Government are pathetic in their lack of understanding of industrial relations. The letter listing five negotiating points sent by the NUM to Mr. Spanton last Friday was most reasonable. For the coal board to have refused to act in accordance with that—either on its own or at the direction of the Government—makes one question the sanity of those involved.

A bold, imaginative policy of investment in the mining industry by men with the vision to think of the future needs of the industry would receive the grateful thanks of future generations, but the present Government will stand condemned. The propaganda that has appeared in the media would no doubt warm the cockles of Goebbels' heart, because the media have distorted the truth. I hope that this debate will give the public some of the knowledge that has not yet appeared in the media.

6.40 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): The media cannot have distorted Mr. Scargill's position sufficiently, as he made it absolutely plain on radio this morning that he has not budged an inch. On a day when a record 2,237 men have gone back to work for the first time, I warmly welcome this debate. I have the privilege of representing many miners—

Mr. Patchett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: No, I have only just started.

I reject the description of the dispute as "the miners' strike" because my constituents care about their jobs. To their great credit, the vast majority of miners in Staffordshire are at work today. Many of my constituents work at Littleton colliery in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack). That colliery is not just working virtually as normal but is back in profit. That is a great achievement.

Mr. Patchett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: I doubt whether the Leader of the Opposition welcomes this debate, as it has taken him eight months to find time for it. Despite the appearance of unanimity, this issue divides the Labour party from top to bottom. The miners have never had a better deal—significantly better than they had under the stewardship of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who was booted out at the last election. Picket line violence is losing support for the Labour party like a haemorrhage. That support is now coming to the Conservative party, certainly in my constituency.

The Leader of the Opposition knows that the real purpose of the strike is an assault on the democratic system of this country. Above all, he knows that economics must play a part in pit closures, as he said himself today and on radio last Friday morning. He had to stage this debate because he knows that the Labour party is now controlled by men who wish to introduce the tactics of the picket line into this very Chamber. If leadership is woefully lacking

among the Opposition, no such deficiency exists on the Conservative side. The leadership of the NUM has sought to challenge democracy.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: The Opposition's belief in freedom of expression is skin deep. The NUM leadership has sought to challenge democracy, to turn out the lights of Britain, to deny heat to the elderly and infirm and to paralyse the economy. The people of Britain expect the Government to be robust and to give all necesary support to the NCB in its attempt to manage the industry. I believe that the people of Britain have not been disappointed by the resolution of my right hon. and hon. Friends in supporting management's right to manage. Management was always undermined when the nation had the misfortune to be ruled by a Labour Government. Under the Conservative Government, management has been given the authority to manage, and I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on their achievement in this difficult and damaging strike.

Mr. Allen McKay: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: I know that the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) is a fair man. I am sorry that I cannot give way now. Perhaps I shall have time later. I wish to make three brief points.

First, pit closures are nothing new in my constituency. In a very small geographical area, 12 pits have been closed since 1947 with the loss of 9,650 jobs, but not one day was lost in strike action as a result.

Mr. Barron: By agreement.

Mr. Howarth: Yes, those closures were by agreement, but they took place on economic grounds as well as on grounds of exhaustion.

Secondly, intimidation has been the worst since the war and has been a major feature in the campaign to stop men going back to work. Constituents are still coming to me, saying that they have been hounded out of the business by the extent of picketing, sometimes on the insistence of their wives, who could not stand it any longer. Those men have lost their jobs and have no new jobs to go to. There has been a conspiracy to organise mass picketing up and down the country. How else could there have been 6,000 men at Orgreave on one day?

Mr. Corbyn: What about mass policing?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman seems uncertain where we stand on liberty. The police are there in support of liberty, although I do not expect him to appreciate that. Only yesterday, the president of the NUM called for further mass picketing. I submit that, under section 7 of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875, such acts constitute a conspiracy to organise illegal picketing throughout the country. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said that he wishes to encourage chief constables to do all in their power to find evidence of conspiracy. In that, he is supported by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. The people of Britain believe that there must be evidence of conspiracy. Without organisation, how can 6,000 men gather at the same place?

Mr. Corbyn: Or 7,000 policemen.

Mr. Howarth: I believe that the strike will soon be over. When it is over, there should be an inquiry into the way in which picketing is organised so that, if necessary, provision can be made to ensure that in the future mass intimidation of this kind is not inflicted on the working men and women of Britain.

Thirdly, my area contains one of the largest opencast pits in the country, producing about 1 million tonnes per annum. Coal has been mined at that pit for the past year, but between the end of March and the end of September there was no movement from the pit because the railwaymen and signalmen refused to move it. The strikers' friends and the destroyers of the British economy are on the Opposition Benches. That coal is now in a volatile condition and has to be moved, so it is being moved by road—with consequent effects on the road system of Staffordshire and surrounding counties.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say something today about the role of the railwaymen in the dispute. I know that there are drivers willing to move coal. It is outrageous that an industry bleating for more public investment for electrification and so on is shooting itself in the head by refusing to move coal and thus losing at least £50 million per year. What kind of economics or job protection is that? If railwaymen refuse to move coal by rail, there is one remedy left to British Rail—to dismiss them for failing to fulfil their contracts of employment.

I believe that the Government have done extremely well in a difficult and damaging dispute. I believe that the people of Britain are grateful to have a Government who have resolution and who are prepared to stand up to the thugs because—let us make no mistake about it—Mr. Scargill and his formation brick-throwers have been spoiling for this fight for years. The Saltley coke depot business in 1972 was but the forerunner of it.

I believe that there should be no further concessions and that my right hon. and hon. Friends are absolutely right in supporting the coal board, and in standing firm until the NUM agrees to talk about the closure of uneconomic pits that are costing the taxpayer dearly.

6.50 pm

Mr. Jack Dormand (Easington): I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not present—but I understand why not. The most memorable episode in the debate will be his wriggling at the Dispatch Box while attempting to answer the many probing questions asked by the Opposition not only about the content of last week's agenda for peace talks in the dispute but about the interpretation of it. Normally—I stress the word "normally"—I find the Secretary of State a forthright debater, someone who gives straight answers. I did not find that today. Therefore, I can deduce only that he was rather less than honest in answering a question which, frankly, could have been answered with a straight yes or no. We did not get that today.

Some people genuinely believed that the Government's policy towards the coal industry was to rid the industry of uneconomic capacity, so pit closures were inevitable. There can be little doubt that the Government wanted and still want a coal industry in which economics plays the most important part, regardless of the consequences. Those who took that view were both naive and misguided. I do not say that there were not other objectives, but the major aim was to destroy the power of the NUM and, having done that, to pave the way for similar policies

[Mr. Jack Dormand]

against the whole trade union movement. The planning of the operation was as precise and deliberate as that of a military campaign. It is worth while taking a few sentences to say what constituted that operation and why I believe it to be so.

When the miners made the Prime Minister climb down over wages in 1981, several things happened. Coal production was stepped up until a total of 53 million tonnes was stocked, but—this is important—the Government ensured that 26 million tonnes of that stock were placed at the power stations. That was the crucial part of the operation. Incidentally, that amount was more than twice as much as had ever been stocked at the power stations in the history of the industry.

While that was happening, the Government were, in the House, changing the social security laws and regulations to the detriment of strikers. We now see the most infamous operating, in that miners on strike are deemed to be receiving strike pay—a sum of £16, which they never receive. That directly affects their social security entitlement and is part of the reason for the hardship among miners' families.

The Government were more explicit with other legislation. Their three trade union and employment Acts constitute a direct attack on the unions and form an important part of the whole structure of the offensive not only on the miners but on the whole of the organised labour movement. The most flagrant attack on the miners was yet to come. Anyone who had any doubts at the time about the Government's intentions had them dispelled with the appointment of Ian MacGregor as chairman of the NCB. His record in the United States and this country was an ideal qualification, in the eyes of the most callous of Prime Ministers, for the rundown of the industry, regardless of the social costs, and, as some of us would argue, regardless of the economic costs to the country. Some of my hon. Friends demonstrated that today.

Had that been the end of the story, it would have been bad enough, but there was more to come. MacGregor chose when and how to launch his attack with considerable ease. He provoked the strike at the beginning of spring so that some six months of fine weather could be expected. In the event, that fine weather materialised. He also announced the closure of five pits without carrying out the normal consultations or procedures that were in operation at the time. That is one of the most disgraceful acts that has taken place in the dispute.

I have not said anything new in describing those events, but they constitute the most devious operations against organised labour in this century and are reminiscent of the action taken by employers in the 18th and 19th centuries, when trade unions were beginning to make themselves heard. I have to say that the Government and the NCB have had some success, but I say to the Secretary of State that it is a short-term success, and the Government had better not forget it.

The original purpose of the Government's and the NCB's policy was to remove 4 million tonnes of capacity from production and to reduce the number of jobs by 20,000. There are various estimates of how much has been taken out of the industry, but it is reasonable to assume, on the basis of past production figures, that 80 million tonnes will have been taken out because of the strike. There will be no trouble for the Government with regard to manpower because they will get rid of the 20,000 workers with no problem when the strike comes to a conclusion.

As that is the situation, why on earth are the board and the Government being so stubborn, obstinate and, above all, so vindictive about it? The answer is plain for everyone to see. They are revelling unashamedly in a political strike of their own making.

However, I warn the Government. I said a few moments ago that they were having some short-term success. In the longer term, people who do not hold any particular brief for the miners will say—indeed, they are saying it now—"Enough is enough." They are appalled by the hardship among miners' families, they are frightened by the alienation of the police and the new uses to which police forces have been put, and they are bewildered by the divisions in the mining communities and the conflict between some mining and non-mining areas. They fear, with justification, that the fabric of our society, torn as it has been by almost a year of strife, will not be the same for a generation; that the changes will affect every man, woman and child for a generation.

The Government may believe that their war is won. We have seen evidence of that in the speeches today. Thinking that would be foolish in the extreme. Thousands of miners—many in my constituency—are determined to stay out in the absence of an honourable settlement, and that will exacerbate the present difficulties in the dispute, regardless of whether more than 50 per cent. go back to work. The Government have not persuaded miners to return to work by the force of their arguments; that has been done by the hardship brought upon the miners by the sheer political spite of the Prime Minister and her senior colleagues.

The Government have left and continue to leave unanswered several important questions. Let me put them quickly. I have already mentioned one, about why the Government do not recognise the loss of production and manpower. Several of my hon. Friends have raised my second point. Why do the Government not have the grace and humility to consider that their concept of the "profitability" of a pit is now under serious question? There are at least four studies—indeed, about half a dozen have been mentioned in the debate—which are objective and have no connection with the NUM or the NCB, and which dispute the accountancy methods of the board and the Government. After all, this is at the centre of the dispute, and it is arrogance in the extreme for the Government to believe that they hold a monopoly of wisdom on such a crucial issue in the face of such contrary evidence.

I remind the Government that the miners see this as a dispute about jobs and the destruction of the mining communities. The belated offer of £5 million towards a company to provide new jobs is a disgrace to a mining community which has such a great tradition. Indeed, the Government themselves were shamefaced, because that figure has now been increased to £10 million. When I asked the Secretary of State about this last week, he said, "Well, of course, we can consider a higher figure if necessary." That reveals the weakness of the Government's case.

If the Government are really serious about helping to create alternative employment, they will have to think much more seriously than they have done so far. If I had time, I could draw a parallel with Consett in my own area.

The case for coal is overwhelming. If we had a Government who believed in an expanding economy, we would never have coal stocks of more than 50 million tonnes. An increase in exports, the extension of the boiler conversion scheme and taking coal liquefaction seriously are only some of the things that could produce a successful and expanding coal industry.

7.1 pm

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): It is appropriate that on this day, when a hesitant and reluctant Labour party leadership has been forced to use its Supply day for a coal debate, a record number of striking miners have returned to work. By lunchtime alone, 2,237 miners had turned their backs on Mr. Scargill and the dinosaurian NUM, including 870 in the north-east in Northumbria and Durham and 552 in the Scargill home area of Yorkshire.

That clearly shows that the stream is now turning into a flood and that the NUM case is collapsing around its ears. Therefore, this debate is not about the war—the dispute—but about the peace. The war is effectively over. The soldiers are putting down their weapons and are on their way back. Therefore, I do not wish to go over the old ground but to concentrate on the present position.

Many hon. Members will speak as representatives of coal mining constituencies, and their evidence and advice is always valuable to the House. But as we know, our loyalties to our constituents to a great extent often influence our attitudes. That is only to be expected. My position is that of one who since the early 1970s has been involved in the energy sector. I do not represent a coal mining constituency but I can claim to have shown consistent support for the development of a successful coal industry.

Through Coal Bill after Coal Bill throughout the 1970s and under different Governments, I have seen financial provision for miners, their families and the industry increase substantially. I have seen Labour Governments close pits on uneconomic grounds, just as I have Conservative Governments—matched at the same time by stupendous amounts of investment in new fields. I must, however, say that the Conservative record on pit closures comes nowhere near the numbers closed under the Labour Governments of 1964 and 1974, when 295 pits were closed and 250,000 miners put out of work at derisory levels of compensation compared with those now offered by this Government.

Many uneconomic pits have closed under Labour. Provision for that was included in the Coal Industry Act 1977, when the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), then Secretary of State for Energy, took the powers necessary to assist financially with the Coal Board's "elimination of uneconomic colliery capacity".

The clearest evidence of the political nature of this dispute is the fact that the NUM sat down and took passively the Labour Government's massive closure programme without strike action, while a small and relatively well-cushioned closure of about 20 pits has produced this crippling and self-destructive unballoted strike.

Mr. Allen McKay *rose*——

Mr. Hannam: I am sorry, but time does not allow me to give way to interventions.

The Labour leadership has known the NUM case to be flimsy from the very beginning. It has also known that the actions of the strikers have been undemocratic. That is why the Opposition have been so equivocal about debating this issue or about standing up to be counted on the real reason for the dispute, which is obviously a naked attempt to overthrow an elected Government by violent methods.

Once again, the country can see the hypocrisy of the Labour party, which says one thing in government and another in opposition. It is like Dr. Doolittle's "push-me-pull-you", which faced both ways at the same time. Throughout this dispute, the Opposition have argued that the Government should intervene. There has now been a reversal, and the Opposition are saying that the Government must take no action, even when the most sensible statements are made by the Prime Minister or by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. The coal board requirement that any further talks must include the closure of uneconomic pits is surely common sense. That is the very nub of the dispute. After seven previous negotiations and a rejected ACAS arbitration, any final set of talks must evolve around an agreed system for such closures.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Why?

Mr. Hannam: Because that is the very nub of the dispute.

To try to make political capital through accusations of revenge and malice on the part of the coal board and the Government is just stuff and nonsense, and totally irresponsible at that. The Labour party should be persuading the beleaguered NUM executive that it must agree to uneconomic pits being top of the agenda because, as I have said, that is the crux of the whole dispute.

Mr. Scargill's desire to fight on does not necessarily mean the loss of his job, his car or his pension, but it means that, day by day, the union is facing disruption and loss of integrity and the miners are facing the loss of coal faces and coal markets. I do not think that Mr. Scargill is too bothered about the effect on the Labour party. If that collapsed, I am sure that along with some of his friends he would be happy to pick up the pieces and remould it into a shape that he would like.

In my work in the energy sector, I meet many industy representatives who at various times present their views on energy matters which affect their firms. In recent weeks and months, the one message that has come through strong and clear is that, if we could put the coal industry on to a competitive, productive footing, industry which uses large amounts of energy would invest large amounts of capital in new coal firing plant and processes.

Only last week I met the leaders of the British Paper and Board Industries Federation, who use large amounts of energy for their continuous process mills. They informed us that, just before the beginning of the coal dispute last March, that industry had decided in principle to convert to coal. This was based on its evaluation of Mr. MacGregor's plans for an expanding, competitive coal industry, including the phasing out of heavily uneconomic pits and the development of new low-cost fields. The investment programmes of those industries ran into millions of pounds per plant, with resultant large orders and jobs as well as new customers for the coal industry. All those plans were shelved when the dispute began.

Labour Members must realise that these major investments in coal-burning plant will not take place if coal does not become more competitive. In other words,

[Mr. Hannam]

if for one political reason or another a final deal is fudged and uneconomic pit closures do not take place, we shall lose the opportunity for these major advances in the installation of coal-burning plant.

That was confirmed at a CBI meeting last week, when I was informed that the wholesale price of coal had to come down from about £55 a tonne to about £35 a tonne. That is why this is a crucial and fundamental issue, and why I fully support the coal board's determination to achieve that aim. It represents the future of the British coal industry. With a competitive price, coal production could rise to between 130 million and 140 million tonnes a year, as Mr. MacGregor stated before the strike began. Without a successful outcome, the continuation of high-cost fuel and coal production will cause the industry to wither away and production to decline to between 70 million and 80 million tonnes.

I want to see the targets for exports of British coal achieved, an increase in the numbers of firms converting to the use of coal, and a modern industry emerging. I want that industry to be highly paid, highly skilled and highly successful. That is why the NCB is absolutely right to insist on this fundamental issue being top of the agenda.

7.10 pm

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I shall deal with the central issue of the dispute and the debate —the definition of the word "economic". In a letter to *The Guardian* in the autumn Lord Kaldor said:

> "Uneconomic pits, though they cause financial losses, bring a net benefit in the form of an additional supply of exhaustible resources which otherwise would not be retrievable."

That simple text shows that we cannot talk about coal and fossil fuels as if they were manufactured goods which could be produced at a development agency advance factory.

Since I have been a Member of the House, the Conservative party has not produced any arguments about uneconomic farming. We have not heard arguments about the economics of food production, yet the same arguments apply to the extractive industry of coal production as to the extractive industry of agriculture. I should like Ministers and Tory supporters who talk about economic pits to address their remarks to agriculture.

We hear that individual pits are uneconomic, yet the Trident missile programme at £11 billion, the fortress Falklands policy at £5 billion—an uneconomic pit if ever there was one — and the advanced gas-cooled reactor nuclear programme are within the Government's definition of "economic". Only the coal industry is not economic. The only way to explain that is by understanding the economics of the coal industry in terms of the Government's overall approach to public expenditure, and especially to those who work in the coal industry and the National Union of Mineworkers.

Recently we heard a further analysis of the Government's assessment of uneconomic pits. I refer to the work done by two economists at the university of Wales — Tony Cutler and Karel Williams. They examined the basis of the NCB's calculations that were presented to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1981. Their analysis shows clearly that the 70 pits identified by the NCB as big loss-makers and highly uneconomic, many of which are in the south Wales coalfield, are not high-cost pits, but pits that are marginal to the board's investment strategy. There is an important difference between those two points.

An uneconomic pit is not one that is losing large sums, but a pit that is marginal to the NCB's investment strategy. It is noticeable that the real link between the 70 pits is not a lack of profitability but a lack of investment. They are located in the geographically peripheral coalfields in Wales, Scotland and Durham. The comparative figures in cash and percentage totals for mining investment by NCB area between 1979-80 and 1983-84 show that Scotland received 4·5 per cent. of the total investment, and south Wales 3·5 per cent. In cash terms the investment level in south Wales has declined from £52 million in 1979-80 to £24 million in 1983-84. The NCB's investment strategy creates uneconomic pits.

The Government argue, and the NCB confirms, that the free market determines the price of coal and the energy market, and therefore that the economics of the free market and the profitability of a product in the free market determine what is economic. That is wholly spurious economics. The shape of the energy market is determined by the Central Electricity Generating Board, which takes about 70 per cent. of the NCB's output. Therefore, there is no free market in coal. That notion is pure Thatcherite-Government propaganda. The price, profitability and investment prospects of coal are not dictated by a spurious free market but determined by negotiations between two Government-controlled monopolies—the CEGB and the NCB. The CEGB is encouraged to increase its selling prices, and the NCB is expected to cut its prices so that coal price rises are kept below the rate of inflation. A continued hidden subsidy is coming increasingly into the open—the hidden subsidy from the CEGB to the NCB, which makes the CEGB economic and the NCB uneconomic. Therefore, the shape of the energy market is determined by the Government.

The investment strategy of the NCB is also decided by the Government, and therefore it is an essentially political decision to invest heavily in the super-pits in Nottinghamshire and to starve the south Wales pits with their irreplaceable reserves of low sulphur-content coal. That strategy is a self-fulfilling prophecy. As the so-called uneconomic pits of south Wales are starved of resources, they become, in the Government's terms, more uneconomic.

In 1983 in south Wales, investment per head was £11,400, and incurred operating costs of £58·8 per tonne. The north Nottinghamshire coalfield received £21,900 per head and had an operating cost of £32 per tonne. There is a clear link between the level of investment and the productivity in so-called uneconomic pits. The profitability of pits has as much, if not more, to do with the amount of investment in them as with their geological condition, to which Conservative Members always refer when they talk about uneconomic pits.

The Government have not found funds for new investment, and the NCB has not placed its new investment in the peripheral areas. As a result it is a political decision to centralise production in the large capital-intensive and ultimately union-free areas. The central coalfields will no doubt be privatised. At the same time those areas which are economic in real terms—in terms of the energy needs of Britain—are starved of investment.

I have a nuclear power station in my constituency and I represent nuclear power workers. If we applied the same accounting practice to nuclear power stations, there would be a large number of uneconomic nuclear power stations, but the Government do not apply the same practices. While the Government face their sterling crisis, their argument about the relative costs of imported coal and home-produced coal is turned on its head. NCB profitability was calculated on an exchange rate of $1·70, but the rate has now declined. At the present rate, home-produced coal is as profitable in the Government's own free market terms as imported coal.

The Government will not heed what I have said because they are not interested in the economics of energy policy, to which many hon. Members have sought to refer during the debate. Their main interest is in the political outcome of the dispute. They are conducting a campaign on the basis, not of economic rationality, but of the Thatcherite philosophy of a free market, and especially on the restructuring of politics of Britain. Because the mining areas have continually produced Socialist leaders who have challenged the economics of the free market, the Government seek to destroy the mining communities. In south Wales we understand that the enemy within is not found in the pits of west Yorkshire or west Wales, but here in the Palace of Westminster.

7.19 pm

Mr. T. H. H. Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I listened with great interest to the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who congratulated the people on strike on their forbearance during the tough winter. I remind him that the winter is almost over, and that stocks are high. I wish to pay tribute to the 70,000 miners—42 per cent. of the work force—who are working. The striking miners can end their plight by going back to work tomorrow if they so choose.

An interesting point about the debate is that so far Opposition Members have focused on the Government and have not mentioned Mr. Scargill. Let us examine what Mr. Scargill has done. There have been seven rounds of talks, and on each occasion he could have put many matters on the agenda. After each set of talks, he said, "What a good man I have been. I have not moved an inch." Mr. Scargill has disregarded the law. In the *Financial Times* of 3 October, Mr. Scargill is quoted as saying:

> "Let me say this. The High Court decision, as far as we are concerned, will not be accepted. Our rules and constitution have been upheld, and the Derbyshire strike is official. The Yorkshire strike is official, and 86 per cent. of the members in an individual ballot voted for the decision . . . There is no High Court judge going to take away the democratic right of our union to deal with internal affairs. We are an independent democratic trade union."

Here is a man who is prepared to defy the law to vindicate his actions. He says, "To hell with the law of the land." No one in the House, from the Conservative party and I dare say from the Opposition, would give credence to those remarks.

I have never heard Mr. Scargill say that he condones intimidation or that he is prepared to accept a picket of six or seven, as laid down by the CBI—[HON. MEMBERS: "The CBI?"] The CBI has accepted some discipline, as has the TUC. Mr. Scargill is prepared to cast aside TUC advice because he wishes to goad by intimidation. It is remarkable that the Opposition have exonerated him from all responsibility, but have fixed all the responsibility on a Government who provide investment in the industry. The Government have said that none of the 20,000 workers involved will become unemployed. They will all be engaged elsewhere and there will be no mandatory redundancies. Those who wish to accept the redundancy terms—probably the best in British industry—can do so. Will they not accept those terms?

I wish that I could persuade the NUM to accept that coal cannot live in a market which is out of balance. In the 20 most profitable and successful pits, it costs £28 to produce a tonne of coal, whereas in the 20 worst pits, it costs about £90 a tonne. But it is precisely the latter pits which Mr. Scargill will not allow to be closed. That is ridiculous. Does not the NUM realise that the future of mining will be a small, efficient industry producing about 100 million tonnes a year, with production increasing gradually in response to market conditions?

This is the most ludicrous dispute in British history, and it is about the closure of 20 pits that were outlined by the chairman of the coal board. Since the dispute began almost a year ago, about 37 coal faces have collapsed because of fire or convergence. That destruction could have been avoided. Although the NUM is trying to safeguard 20 pits, other coal faces have been collapsing right, left and centre. The miners are destroying their own facilities. From where will the money come to recreate those facilities in new pits?

The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) said that many pits could be made economic if we spent more money on them. We already spend £700 million a year on capital investment in the industry. Further, there are deficit and and other grants payable to the board. The coal industry is pre-empting too much of the nation's wealth. What about the rest of industry, including high technology industry, which requires money? It is being neglected.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) mentioned pit closures. I should like to go through all the points he made with him. I have also received documents from Gavyn Davies of Simon and Coates and from David Metcalf. It is not for us to argue during this short debate about what should happen now and what should be taken into account. When the coal board regains the confidence of the mining communities after the dispute, it is for the NCB to reach the right conclusions about the industry. I hope that when the strike is over, the board's finances will be reconstructed. The board is completely and technically insolvent, and much of its debt will have to be written off.

Mr. Nellist: How can the hon. Gentleman say that pits are uneconomic?

Mr. Skeet: The coal board exists only because the taxpayer is prepared to subsidise it enormously. It is subsidised much more than any other industry, and the public are becoming fed up with it. The coal board survives only because the public are prepared to pay higher prices for electricity than they need do. Everyone knows that that is true. The Government have been able to get through this winter successfully because more than 18 per cent. of our power is produced by nuclear and oil power stations, and we have obtained cheap, imported coal. I acknowledge that British coal is becoming more competitive as the pound falls against the dollar. However, we must remember that to keep British prices competitive for the consumer, we must have some imports.

[Mr. Skeet]

During our debates on the Coal Industry Act 1980, the Government talked about their hopes for the profitability of the industry by 1983-84. When that time arrived, the coal board was no nearer profitability. We were then told that there could be a vast expansion in the mines and that we had many years of reserves. But, of course, that was not true. We have also been told that we should invest heavily in the industry because we have security of supply. We have had no such thing. We had trouble with the mining community in 1971-72, interruptions in coal supplies in 1973 and 1974, and serious disruption in supplies in 1984 and 1985.

Finally, may I say this to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and the Government: we must remember the Government's responsibility to the nation to ensure that we have enough stocks to see us through the winter, and to ensure that the prices charged for that fuel are reasonable.

7.29 pm

Mr. Ray Ellis (Derbyshire, North-East): This debate has been like nearly all other debates. At least the Government's track record is consistent. When they first took office in 1979, they started to blame everything on previous Governments, and five and half years later they are still doing it. I do not absolve from my strictures any Government, past, present or to come, who will sterilise vast tracts of the nation's precious coal wealth underground for the sake of temporary economic expedience.

I would prefer to consider the acquired wisdom of the ages. Let us start with Lord Stockton. He had recently been in the headlines for attacking the Government's monetary policies. I refer to the days when he was Britain's Prime Minister — "Supermac". He went to Washington to speak to the Government on Capitol Hill on behalf of Britain. He told the Yanks that they could not compare their economy to ours. They are fortunate and have the benefits of farmlands, forests and mineral wealth. In Britain, he pointed out, the only thing that we have is fish around our shores, the coal under our feet and the skills of our workpeople. His words to the Senate were:

"Our greatest asset is the quality of our workforce".

Our skills in industry enable Britain to survive and compete. Of the three important things—fish, coal and skill—the Government have discarded all three.

Macmillan went to the United States to defend Britain —MacGregor has been brought from the United States to destroy Britain. The roots of the miners' strike must lie in the series of deliberate acts of provocation committed by MacGregor on behalf of the Government. They have sought a battle, provoked a battle and, by the spirits, they have got a battle. No doubt they will argue that they did not want to destroy the coal mining industry, but intended only to destroy the spirit of the workers. Events have shown that they cannot have one without the other. The day will never come when we have a quiescent work force in Britain that will accept the stupid diktats that come from the monetarist policy of the Prime Minister.

No one in the NCB, and certainly no one in the Government, would have believed that the great bulk of the miners would still be out when the strike approached its first anniversary. However, the miners are still out, and it is not because they have been hypnotised by Arthur Scargill or anyone else. It is because they see that the continued existence of their pit is the only alternative to generations of abject poverty.

They are not on strike because they are masochists or because they are enamoured of being locked away from daylight underground, scrabbling for a living on their hands and knees and eating coal dust. Like the Prime Minister, they see no alternative. There is no other hope. Since 1979, they have seen the steelworks decimated, jobs lost in their communities, in the service industries for which they had hopes for their kids, in the Health Service and in education. They have seen whole factories packed up in crates to be sent off to be used by our competitors. They have seen the Government busily exporting whatever other alternative employment there has been.

It is indisputable that the logic of the Prime Minister's monetary policy taken to its conclusion decrees that there can be no reversal of the trend of constant grinding down until the living standards of ordinary British working people are driven below those of the peasants in Korea, Hong Kong and Hanoi. There are many on the Government Benches who know this to be true and some who applaud it.

I can give an enlightening example of the thinking behind the talk, of the philosophy of the chairman of the coal board and the Government who imported him. It can be found in Mr. MacGregor's choice of words—if they are his. Earlier in the strike, Mr. MacGregor manipulated words, and offered the word "beneficial" as the criterion for pit closures. The Prime Minister applauded it and repeated it here. However, she got that word from her study of Victorian values. In 1848, when giving evidence to a public inquiry, the agent for the Countess of Durham, who owned 23 coal mines, objected to the abolition of child labour underground on the grounds that it would not be "beneficial". If anybody has been in any doubt as to what this dispute has been about, they should know now.

The Government's policies are debasing Britain, and selling us short. There are some on the Government Benches who know that this is so and disagree with it. They should assert themselves to ensure that the trend is reversed. They should start now, tonight, by voting with us to ensure that the Prime Minister is compelled to tell MacGregor to get the coal board back to the negotiating table, in the interests not only of the miners but of the future of the nation.

7.37 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): As the House knows, a large number of coal mining constituencies are represented by Conservative Members, and that can only be because a large number of miners voted for this Government.

In this debate, we have heard what can only be described as a confidence trick deployed by the Labour party—a sleight of mouth if not of hand. No doubt, when the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) winds up, we shall hear not only about the sweat of the brow but about starving miners, one of the great confidence tricks perpetrated on the British people. We have heard of food being sent from Poland—food that would be better sent to Ethiopia. I have not seen any starving miners. They all seem to be as well-padded as I am.

Mr. Flannery: The hon. Gentleman has never seen a miner.

Mr. Ashby: Of course I have—I have a mining constituency.

This confidence trick has been so well carried out that the Leader of the Opposition had to tell the Russians that the miners were not starving. That is a measure of the untruths that have been coming from Labour Members.

Another untruth is the use of the word "vindictive". The Government are said to be "vindictive". This is said to be a "vindictive" policy. It would be vindictive if the Government were to say that there was no more money for the industry and that they were going to stop supporting it. Instead, we are supporting it in a way that the Opposition never did, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House today.

The other word that we have heard is "provocation". Apparently it was a provocation to appoint as chairman of the NCB one of the most knowledgeable men in the mining industry who, at the age of 73, has been in mining throughout almost all his life and who has more knowledge of the industry in his little finger than most Opposition Members have in their bodies. Apparently it is a provocation to refuse to give in to economic madness. If that is provocation, let us have a bit more of it.

My constituency includes two minefields—the south Leicester minefield and about 80 per cent. of the south Derbyshire minefield—*[Interruption.]* I apologise to the House. I meant, of course, coalfield.

Mr. Flannery: The hon. Gentleman is in a minefield, all right.

Mr. Ashby: It may be one, I agree.

In south Leicestershire, only 30 out of 6,000 miners are on strike. The men there insisted that they would continue to work until there was a ballot. They demanded a ballot in Leicestershire. There was no ballot, so they continued to work. Because they have chosen to work, they are subjected to violence and intimidation. Villages in north-west Leicestershire have suffered at the hands of hordes of pickets from as far afield as Kent. They damage gardens. They urinate in gardens. They make life quite impossible for the people who live in those villages. Shops have been broken into. There has been a general aura of intimidation and violence in the area.

The resolve of my constituents who work in the industry has not been broken, and I should tell the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that Mr. Scargill — *[Interruption.]* I call him "Mr. Scargill", although we keep hearing from Opposition Members about "MacGregor". There seems to be no politeness among the Opposition. What is more, it is surprising how, when a Government supporter who represents a mining constituency is on his feet, the noise begins to come from the Opposition. We are seeing exactly the intimidation in the House that we see outside.

When Mr. Scargill visited Rawdon colliery in my constituency, he stayed for only about five minutes. The miners bundled him into a car and made him leave.

Mr. Flannery: Intimidation.

Mr. Ashby: I ask why Mr. Scargill is loathed by Leicestershire and south Derbyshire miners to the extent that he is. It is because he has linked the NUM closely with unprecedented intimidation and blackmail. He has destroyed one of the finer unions. He has destroyed villages, pitting father against son and brother against brother—all for a spurious claim about the supposed destruction of pits and jobs which is not sustained by the facts. In Leicestershire, it is known that the Government and the NCB have stood by their pledges. The board is going ahead at Asfordby, for example, and the Government are providing the capital.

Mr. Flannery: The taxpayer.

Mr. Ashby: Leicestershire miners know that the precondition of the NUM not to discuss the closure of pits on economic grounds flies in the face of reason. They know that that is why the Labour party closed so many pits when they formed the Government.

Mr. Flannery: By agreement.

Mr. Ashby: They also know that the NCB has negotiated seven times and failed seven times because the NUM would not discuss the very heart and core of the matters needing to be discussed. Seven meetings later, the NUM has the cheek to say that it has no preconditions. It says that, but it also says that it will not talk about the closure of pits on economic grounds. That seems to be the prime precondition that the NUM and Mr. Scargill are putting forward.

It is Mr. Scargill who has not given an inch in the last 11 months. He has perpetrated a confidence trick on the nation by saying that he has no preconditions. I say that that is a cruel and heartless confidence trick played on the many who pray for the end of this madness.

Mr. Scargill talks about the decimation of whole villages because they are dependent on mining. If they are, why not put NUM money, as National Coal Board Enterprises Ltd. has put its money, into profitable ventures which diversify industry in those areas, instead of putting it, as it has done, into Luxembourg banks? Why not unite with and inspire local authorities positively to improve their towns?

We have seen Corby recover from the loss of its steel industry, and it has recovered very well. Coal areas recover from pit closures, but that recovery needs a positive attitude and not a negative one.

Given a partnership between all, everyone can benefit. In my constituency, Coalville has lost one pit and is close to losing another. Vigorous efforts have been made with National Coal Board Enterprises Ltd and with the European Coal and Steel Community—and we could do with NUM money as well—to revitalise the area and to look for new industries and jobs to replace those being lost. Instead, we find that the NUM is so busy playing power politics that it forgets about the very people whom it purports to represent.

I also wonder about the resolve of some of these areas. Many of them have Labour councils. I wonder whether those areas have the resolve to provide the extra industry that is required.

Everyone should get together. We must see NUM money injected into these areas as well. Let us build for the future.

7.47 pm

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): At the outset, I want to put the record straight, because the Secretary of State made yet another announcement today to the effect that Arthur Scargill wanted every pit to stay open until the last tonne of coal had been brought out. That is quite wrong. No one who knows anything about mining would

[Mr. Michael Welsh]

make such a statement. When a mine ends production, a certain amount of coal must be left to support the roofs so that the chocks can be removed. Arthur Scargill, to my knowledge, has never said that, and I am interested to know from where the right hon. Gentleman picked up that assertion. If it is not the case and the right hon. Gentleman made it up, I hope that he will not repeat it, because it is a foolish statement and not worthy of any man, even of his character.

I want also to put the record straight about Arthur Scargill. It must be emphasised that he takes his orders from the national executive. As a member of that executive, I happen to know what goes on there. Arthur only carries out its wishes.

I should like to make another correction for the record. The Secretary of State said that Arthur Scargill was holding on to meet ACAS to delay negotiations. ACAS telephoned the national executive of the TUC at about 1.45 pm on Friday and asked to see Arthur, Mick McGahey and Peter Heathfield. The information came by telephone. ACAS asked to see Arthur, not the other way around. I attended the meeting when Arthur gave ACAS the reply "information?" I do not wish to make a point about that, just to set the record straight.

The dispute is about the right to work. The NUM believes that it should have that right and the Government do not. The NUM has written to the NCB asking for negotiations without preconditions many times and the board has refused. On 1 February the board asked the NUM to provide a basis for negotiations. The NUM therefore set down five issues. They were discussions on "Plan for Coal" — the board agrees on that — future collieries and units, the five collieries threatened with immediate closure, the 6 March 1984 proposals and an amnesty. The NUM sent that agenda only because it was asked to do so by the NCB but, as far as I know, the NCB has not replied.

The Government and the NCB want to close uneconomic areas. If so, the first area that should be closed is Nottingham. It has been working all year and is making losses of millions of pounds. I am sure that Conservative Members do not want Nottinghamshire to be closed because it is uneconomic.

Mr. Andy Stewart: It is not true that Nottinghamshire is uneconomic.

Mr. Welsh: I am using NCB figures. To be fair to the NCB, all annual accounts in any industry are suspect because of how they are compiled. If units are closed on the basis of suspect accounts, nobody knows whether the units being closed are genuinely uneconomic. That is why there should be detailed negotiations between the NUM and the NCB to define an uneconomic unit.

It should not be forgotten that when a pit is closed, the one next to it is made uneconomic as a pit carries a lot of on-costs, which are thrown on the pit that remains open. Therefore, pits that are profitable according to their own accounts can be made unprofitable by closing the pits next to them. The result could be just one open pit because all of the others have been closed as a result of having to bear the on-costs of pits that were closed before them. Such a result would be daft and, as the NUM said, the issue should be discussed in more detail.

When pits are closed, shaft capacity is closed. Demand for coal will increase towards the end of the century but it cannot be met as is the case with a factory. It is possible to get out of a pit only what the shaft capacity allows. Moreover, the critical path of a pit takes 12 to 15 years to meet increased demand.

One of the great issues is the NCB's right to manage. The Government are not asking that it be allowed to manage, they are asking that MacGregor be allowed to dictate. That is a different kettle of fish. They are asking that he should be allowed to dictate just as the Prime Minister dictates to her Cabinet and Back Benchers. I should like to give an example of management.

In 1940, I was pony driving at Bullcroft colliery when the west side went up. Management knew that there had been an explosion, and we had to send six lads in. When they went in there was a second explosion. That often happens underground. We sent in another team, which could get in only so far, and it found the first two lads who were dead. When it came to sending in another team to get the other four who we thought were dead, and most probably were, management came to the union and said, "Please order us to seal it off." We said, "Why do not you take the decision—you are management?" They replied, "Oh, but it's your pit an all, why don't you?" The union had to decide to seal off the corridor. That was probably the right decision but those four kiddies are still down there. We cannot expect managers just to manage pits. They must manage and work with the union through consultation, and more consultation, but that is not what the Prime Minister wants.

There is no such thing as the right to manage in an extraction industry. It is not possible to have a young manager coming in and saying, "Do this, do that." At a coal face he would ask the men, "Which is the best way to do it?" As to the right to manage, it should be done correctly. There should not be dictatorship, which is what MacGregor wants.

7.57 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): I am proud and privileged to represent a mining constituency in the Yorkshire coalfield. I hope that I share with the majority of right hon. and hon. Members the conviction and belief that coal should be at the centre of the provision of energy requirements for Britain long into the future.

However, that future can come only if the price charged by the industry is competitive and if the industry is profitable. An industry or company that is not profitable in the long term will never be able to protect or preserve the jobs of the people who work in it. That inevitably means that the coal industry must look to its future from investment rather than subsidy and that uneconomic pits must be closed, albeit within the framework of a proper consultation process.

Pit closures have always occurred and Opposition Members are right to say that circumstances are now different. The principal difference is that Arthur Scargill is president of the NUM. From the day of his election, he has been determined to have a strike. He has tried to do that through the democratic process and failed repeatedly.

As we have read in the newspapers during the weekend and this morning, the machinations of that man on the executive committee of the National Union of Mineworkers have led to the calling of this deeply undemocratic strike. He has not only denied to the rank

and file members of his union the benefit of the ballot to which they are entitled; he has even manoeuvred his own executive so that the strike was called without the majority support of the members of the executive. Because the miners are a deeply democratic group of people this strike has inevitably opened up the deepest rifts within the mining community. It can only be enforced by intimidation and violence by the leadership of the union.

There have been various references to me during the course of the debate. I should like to put on record certain circumstances that were erroneously reported in *The Times* a couple of weeks ago. I am proud to be the president of the Yorkshire area of the Conservative trade unionist organisation and in that capacity will accept — *[Laughter.]* The laughter on the Labour benches masks the fear that lurks within them. They know that millions of ordinary trade unionists now vote for the Conservative party because their aims and objectives have been betrayed by the Labour party. I have always accepted invitations to speak to groups of miners, but I have never encouraged anybody to break away from the National Union of Mineworkers. Quite the contrary. When people come to me and say that they are dissatisfied with their officials or with their leadership in the NUM I say to them, "You stay in the NUM and fight for what you believe in." If people drop out of the union it will be for ever condemned to the extremists. Those who come to meetings say, "We are not Tories, but it is only the Tories who will stand up for those who wish to preserve their democratic rights."

Despite all the noise that we hear tonight from the Labour Benches and despite all their intimidation I shall continue, as will all my hon. Friends, to fight for the rights of people to work in the mining industry free from the intimidation of Arthur Scargill and his colleagues. It is those people who are really fighting for the future of the British mining industry. It is their courage and commitment to democracy within the NUM that is an inspiration to this country. It is also a signpost to the way forward. As yet further negotiations founder on Arthur Scargill's intransigence, these men are showing how to fight for the future of their industry.

Arthur Scargill boasts that he has not moved an inch since the strike began. There is a belief among Conservative Members of Parliament and in the country that whenever the return to work builds up steam Arthur Scargill calls for another set of abortive negotiations to try to set it back. All Conservative Members of Parliament believe that the best way for this strike to end is by means of a negotiated settlement. However, there must be only one more set of negotiations. That must be the one to end the strike. And there is no way for the strike to be ended unless at the top of the agenda is the closure of uneconomic pits. That is what the strike has been about from the very beginning.

There are also other important matters that the Government must consider. This strike is nearing its end. As everybody recognises, it has been lost. Therefore we must look to the future of this industry. We must consider what the Government need to do to reassure the people who have been working so hard to preserve that future. The Government must continue to reaffirm and confirm their commitment to investment in the industry in order to ensure that large scale, profitable production will be continued for many years ahead. The Government must continue to guarantee unequivocally to the working miners their fullest protection against intimidation — not just now during the strike, but against any victimisation in the years ahead after the strike is over. The Government must ensure that when the strike is over there is a general amnesty within the industry for those who have worked and for those who have not worked. Those coming back to work must be sure that they will be free from such pressures and that they will not lose either because they have worked or because they have not worked.

The Government must look again at the funding of National Coal Board Enterprises. This type of vehicle could be very successful in stimulating new jobs. The Government must also look at the work of the enterprise agencies which have been successful and try to pull them together by means of adequate funding. In areas such as mine all miners who wish to continue to work when their pits are closed will be offered jobs in other mines in the area. I believe that the NCB must look at the provision of a proper transport network so that people can remain in their communities while accepting jobs that are some distance away.

Mr. Lofthouse: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Batiste: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse). I have a limited time in which to speak and I shall finish what I have to say. No amount of yobbo yelling from the Left will make me change my mind. Not only must the NCB provide a system of transport so that the fabric of those communities can be preserved, but it is also obliged——

Mr. Lofthouse *rose*——

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) has said definitely that he is not giving way.

Mr. Batiste: If you will give me extra time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall have no fear about giving way to the Opposition, but I have promised to be brief. Because so many people may in the future live some distance away from their work—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I believe the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) has a point of order.

Mr. Allen McKay: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you please give a ruling upon whether the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) is either deliberately or unintentionally misleading the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As far as I could hear, the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) made no definite allegation against any other hon. Member.

Mr. Batiste: Because the future pattern may be that miners will live at a greater distance from their pits than has been traditionally the case, I believe that the NCB must look at the provision that it makes for the holding of branch meetings, both as to the timing and the facilities offered for those meetings.

Having listened to the debate and to the noise on the Labour Benches, appreciating that the face of the rabble they are demonstrating here is the same sort of face that they are showing in the coalfields to the members of the NUM, I am ever more proud that I am a Conservative representative of a mining constituency and I am ever

[Mr. Batiste]

more determined to fight against the abuses of democracy that, unfortunately, in this day are typified by the Labour party.

8.6 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Already during the debate I have noticed that Conservative Members have accused my hon. Friends and me of noise and rowdiness. The charge is unjust. At the beginning of the debate my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) was virtually shouted down. No Conservative Member has been shouted down by my hon. Friends and me, although from time to time we have been roused either to mockery or to irritation by some of the silly things that have been said.

I want to say a word or two about my constituency, which is where the strike began. During the past 12 months I have been horrified on numerous occasions by the deliberate attempts that have been made to provide disinformation, first by senior people in the coal board and then to a very real extent by the Secretary of State for Energy who said this afternoon that no decision had been taken to close Cortonwood colliery—that it had merely been suggested that its future should be reviewed. However, the Minister knows that all of the mining unions in the south Yorkshire area were brought together and told that Cortonwood would cease to produce coal in five weeks' time, that the men would be transferred and that the matter would then be put before the colliery review procedure — an absolute mockery of the supposed arrangement.

Conservative Members have said that nobody wants collieries to be closed. My hon. Friends and I accept that all collieries have a life and that collieries do close. The Minister is well aware that only a couple of miles away from Cortonwood is Elsecar colliery. That colliery ceased to produce coal towards the end of 1983. The miners in my constituency and in the constituencies of my hon. Friends recognised that Elsecar had to close. They were surprised when the National Coal Board guaranteed Cortonwood for five years and persuaded 100 men from the Elsecar colliery to transfer to Cortonwood. Some of those men had not even done a shift down Cortonwood before the decision was taken that it should cease to produce coal.

The hardship, sacrifice and bitterness that has developed during the past 12 months make this a very serious day for the House. We are entitled to demand that the Conservatives as well as my hon. Friends should treat this as a very serious matter.

I hope that when the Minister replies he will answer the point that I have just made and recognise that the Secretary of State may inadvertently have been indulging in the same disinformation as we have heard from the chairman and deputy chairman of the board and, in a letter in *The Times*, from the secretary to the board.

I was not surprised when the decision was taken. In a debate in December 1983 Labour Members were warning the Government that the situation in the mining industry was dreadful. We called on the Secretary of State to intervene to bring the parties together and to stop the crisis that we could see developing. He flatly refused to carry out what I thought then, and still think now, were his responsibilities. He was perhaps contributing to the situation that we have described today in which we allege that the strike was largely engineered and manipulated by the Government; that it was "a good investment" for the Government, if I may quote the Chancellor. It is no good the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) waving his hand. The Chancellor of the Exchequer described the strike as "a good investment".

I do not know how much the strike has cost. The fiscal burden may be £5 billion. It will be an enormous sum. I am concerned not so much about the money that it has cost but the damage which has been done to the social chemistry of our coal fields. The immeasurable consequences of the dispute which have already been described are such as should make any intelligent sensitive politician aware of the enormity of the events.

A situation has developed in areas such as my own which a year ago none of us, not even the most experienced in public life, could have anticipated. Problems have been created that some of us will have to try to resolve. It is about time that Her Majesty's Government contributed to the settlement that they pretend they seek.

I was hopeful after the talks that resumed recently that there would be movement. But the fact remains—here I think that I am quoting the general view of NACODS, the association with which I am involved, and it is a view widely shared in the mining communities generally—that a settlement was in sight until No. 10 intervened. Nothing has been said from the Conservative Benches which in any way removes such suspicions which some of my hon. Friends may regard as a certainty.

The strike has gone on long enough. The miners who are on strike know that it has gone on long enough. I spoke to miner after miner in Swinton, Silverwood, Cortonwood miners welfare and in a hostelry yesterday at Rawmarsh frequented by members of the Kilnhurst NUM. Every one of them agrees with me that it is time that the strike was over. But they want to walk back to their pits. They are not prepared to be subjected to abject humiliation. They are not prepared to be treated like Argentine conscripts in the Falklands war. Those men have put up with more than any Conservative Member can begin to imagine. They are in debt to their eyeballs. They have suffered hardship.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South) *rose*——

Mr. Hardy: No, I shall not give way.

Mrs. Currie *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is obviously not giving way.

Mr. Hardy: Some of my hon. Friends have been sitting here all day hoping to speak in this debate. The hon. Lady comes in late and then expects to get the headlines. I am not giving way for one reason and that is that while I hope that I shall never behave churlishly in the House, if I were to give way to the hon. Lady, I would feel tempted, when she sat down, to use the same response that one of the Scottish Members offered her the other day.

I intervened in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and in the speech of the Secretary of State to try to clear up one important matter. It is important, and questions remain. The insistence of the Government or the board—I am not prepared to argue which is responsible — is that the NUM must write out in surrender terms that it accepts that

collieries will be closed. That is a contradiction to or a conflict with the agreement about which Ministers—I include the Prime Minister—have boasted since before Christmas.

If the NUM is to accept that collieries are to close without regard to the review procedures and the independent element which is firmly part of the NACODS agreement, the members of NACODS will definitely feel that their agreement is rendered worthless. They are increasingly angry because they are coming to believe that they have been led astray and used by a rather ruthless Administration.

If the Minister wants to see the situation degenerate further he will allow that uncertainty to continue. If he can relieve that uncertainty he will create a climate in which urgent negotiations can begin and a settlement achieved. That settlement is so urgently needed that the Minister should secure approval to clarify the matter before the debate ends.

We expect collieries to close. I have a number of collieries in my constituency and some of them have a short life. I do not know the score today, but the numbers returning to work in the collieries in my area are lower than the average in Yorkshire. When someone makes a critical analysis—a detailed history—of the dispute they will realise that the pits where few men have returned happen to be situated in areas of high unemployment.

I can understand the men in my area not being eager to return to work because they know that when their pit closes, as Cortonwood was supposed to close, a huge additional unemployment burden will be created in an area where one person in three is unemployed and where four out of five of our young people are idle.

Our people know that their pits will close but they should be closing in due time in a proper season after we have had some opportunity to create the alternative industry and employment that we need. For the Government to close collieries in areas where one in three is unemployed is foolish. It justifies one of the powerful arguments used in the industry that in some cases it may seem expensive to keep a colliery open but it can be far more costly to close it, particularly given the enormous social and other costs that are incurred.

The Minister must carry out a fine task. He must balance whether it is wise to close or keep open a pit. The NUM and my association recognise that the Government have not given adequate attention to that factor. We do not want to be merely remittance areas—areas where once there was a pride in work, a low level of unemployment and a real social stability. We do not want to get rid of that and become merely remittance areas to which the affluent parts of the country will offer a grudging dole.

There is a future for our area if we have a wise Administration. But a Government who have allowed the dispute to go on as long as it has, who have allowed such costs to be incurred as have been incurred, who have seen the bitterness and trouble we have had to bear in our areas, have so far not been very wise and it is about time that they were.

8.17 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): This is a debate which the Opposition leaders clearly wish had not taken place. Traditional Labour voters have been appalled at the fence-sitting of Labour leaders over the miners' strike. They have failed to condemn the worst violence that we have seen over the past 50 years in industrial history. They have failed to tell the nation that my constituents and others should have a right to a ballot before we had this appalling carnage in the mining industry. They have failed to protect the welfare of those who are still in striking areas who fear to go to work because of the vengeance of the mob on themselves and their families if they do so. They have failed to support the police in upholding the rule of law and people's right to work.

In their efforts to be all things to all men, the leaders of the Labour party have let down their traditional supporters, and they know it. Instead, they have used the strike for their own political ends, just as blatantly as the president of the NUM. They have tried to build up in miners' minds the feeling that it is not a strike against the NCB, but a strike against the Prime Minister and the Tory Government. They know that that is wrong, but they are making political capital at the expense of their supporters' jobs.

Every fair-minded thinking person knows that the generous pay and redundancy terms and the outstanding investment proposed in the industry prove that the Labour Members are wrong, yet Mr. Scargill and the Labour party continue to bluster. Mr. Scargill said recently:

"There is increased determination on the part of miners to stay on strike and win this dispute."

That is not true. Mr. Scargill knows that it is not true and today's figures of thousands of miners going back to work prove that it is not true.

The days of bluster and rant by the leadership of the NUM are almost over and it should be the duty of the Labour party, whose conference last year was so much an Arthur Scargill benefit match, to tell the president of the NUM just that. The alternative is to let the industry bleed and to build fear and resentment in the miners who are still on strike, and to leave them with despair and anger.

On behalf of working miners in my constituency, who have a divided union as a result of what has happened, I express anger against the president of the NUM and the spineless Labour Opposition who have supported him. Miners in my area were and are proud of their union, but they see it dragged down, split from top to bottom, sacrificed——

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand that the rules of debate give you authority to rule that something is repetitious or that an argument has been presented for the second, third or fourth time in a debate. The hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) is reading the same Tory brief that other Conservative Members have already read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Alexander: It is perfectly proper to say that miners are being sacrificed on the altar of one man's crusade against the Prime Minister and the Government and that that man is being propped up by violent mobs of pickets.

The Labour party, by giving Mr. Scargill support, is part of the tragedy. As a loyal Opposition, Labour Members should have stood up for democracy and decency in one of their most traditional heartlands. They have let their own people down and they have let the country down. Their motion deserves to fail.

8.23 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): The House cannot negotiate an end to the dispute, but we can focus

[Mr. Dick Douglas]

attention on what has happened and the public can determine for themselves which party is anxious to get an honourable settlement of the dispute and which party is anxious to exacerbate the dispute to humiliate men and women who have been on strike for 11 months.

I speak only from a constituency point of view, but among the outstanding features of the dispute are the tenacity and loyalty expressed by the communities involved. The men on strike have been fortified by their womenfolk. In my humble opinion, the women have stood behind their men and sustained them. I speak for strike centres at Steelend, Oakley, Blairhall, High Valleyfield, Kincardine and Woodmill.

The leader of the Liberal party came to my constituency, but did not go to one strike centre or near one pit. Yet the Liberal party will be pronouncing on the strike tonight. The SDP Bench is empty. Where is the hon. Member for Stockport, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) who told us what we should do and what we should tell our people? What is the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) doing talking about courage? My God, if we turned to him for courage we would be hard put to find it. We have seen courage in the mining areas against a management that has violated trust. I believe that Mr. MacGregor was put there to violate trust.

It is the anniversary of a pit closure in my constituency that was caused not by the strike, but because Mr. MacGregor in his American way, said, "I run a decentralised industry." He told the area directors that they must get their share of a 4-million tonnes cut in production and their share of a reduction in the labour force. We saw that in Dunfermline before the strike began. We saw it in the closure of Bogside. My hon. Friends know that I have probed the reasons for that.

Labour Members have asked for an inquiry into the operation of the coal industry in Scotland. The Government will cast some of the blame on the NUM, but will they give us an investigation into the management of the coal industry in Scotland? Will they let any investigation examine what cut in production Mr. Albert Wheeler had to obtain in Mr. MacGregor's decentralised management?

People who want a settlement of the dispute should look at what the miners had before 6 March. One young man in a strike centre said to me a few weeks ago, "We are on strike for something that we thought we had on 6 March in relation to the review procedure." Are the Government seeking to go back on that procedure? It was an agreement on how collieries would close. The NUM has fought to preserve that.

We could argue from now until doomsday about how to define an uneconomic pit. The situation will be settled only if the parties are willing to get round the table.

The Under-Secretary of State for Energy who is responsible for the coal industry nods his head, but the Secretary of State for Energy had the temerity earlier to ask my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), in effect, to deliver the NUM, and its leader in particular, to the negotiating table. If the Secretary of State had done so much to try to get a settlement as my right hon. Friend has done, we would have had a settlement long ago. The Secretary of State has spent billions of pounds in fortifying the dispute, but could not spend 10p on a telephone call to bring the parties together.

It may be said that it is within my right hon. Friend's gift to suggest the terms and conditions upon which the NUM executive as a whole would go to the negotiating table, but what terms and conditions can the Minister obtain from Mr. MacGregor? Will the Minister say that he can get Mr. MacGregor to the negotiating table only if the NUM virtually capitulates? Is that what is in his mind? It is a long time since I have been involved in trade union negotiations, but I know that no union worth its salt would put itself in the position that the Minister suggests.

If the Minister wants a solution to the dispute, he and the Secretary of State for Employment should use their good offices to bring the parties together. We are entitled to ask what the Secretary of State's intentions are with regard to the dispute. I think that the Opposition recognise that the dispute has gone on for too long. In my constituency I have played a part in keeping my folk out. It is no good the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland tut-tutting. If he wants to intervene he should get up and speak. I will tell him why I have done that. That is the way to preserve dignity and peace in my community. It is also the way to preserve unity and self-respect. I shall certainly not advise those miners to crawl back. If Conservative Members were in the same position as me, they would, on analysis, give the same advice.

If the Secretary of State wants a solution instead of acrimony and if he does not want to humiliate people, particularly in Scotland, he will get the parties round the table. But if he wants bitterness and strife, they are also in his gift. I for one will not advise my folk to go back to work. They came out together, and they will go back together. That is the prescription for unity, understanding and self-respect in my area. The Under-Secretary of State keeps interrupting from a sedentary position, but he is not the Scottish Minister responsible for industry—because that Minister has not been present—and there are not many pits in Argyll.

We are arguing about the cohesion and dignity of our people. Against a background of colossal and rising unemployment in Dunfermline and Fife generally, my miners fear that if they lose their jobs there will be no other jobs to go to. Of course, we have had pit closures which have been negotiated. I was unhappy about some of them, but they were negotiated against a background of sustained employment in the area. However, if pits close now there is no alternative employment. Unemployment is high in those areas, and is growing under this Government.

I say to Conservative Members that the nation must judge who really wants an honourable and dignified solution to the dispute. I passionately want that, but I also want everyone to go back. I do not want people to be dismissed, potentially for life, because of the action that they took on picket lines. I want dignity and understanding, and I want my folk to realise that to preserve that, they must stay united and stay out until the Government bring the parties round the table and obtain a solution.

8.33 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) comes from a mining constituency and spoke with some of the passion that has been a hallmark of many of the speeches made so far. He referred to the bitterness and strife that have also regrettably been a hallmark of the dispute.

Perhaps not surprisingly, but nevertheless regrettably, that bitterness and strife have often been reflected in the debate.

Recrimination, or going over the history, is no way forward to the solution that all of us want. I do not believe for a moment that recriminations can do the future of the coal industry any good. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West, referred to the difficulties of unemployment in Fife. That cannot have been helped by yesterday's announcement of the closure of Frances colliery, at a cost of about 500 jobs. But the recriminations have already started.

Albert Wheeler, the Scottish director of the coal board, has blamed the striking miners who, he has claimed, gave the board little or no assistance to control an underground fire. In response, a union official has said that the board did not approach the union until Thursday about undertaking work that could have saved the coal face, and that after the union had offered to start preparatory work, the NCB refused to meet it. I am in no position to judge whose version is closest to the truth, but I know that a failure to establish and build upon a community of interest —an interest that must be shared by both employees and management—has led to the loss of that pit and that recriminations will not repair the damage——

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian) *rose*——

Mr. Wallace: I would normally give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I want to be brief so that other hon. Members can speak.

The continued dispute can only increase the likelihood of such damage being repeated elsewhere. Would that this House could help to foster that community of interest as much as it emphasises division. I believe that there must be a community of interest. Because of our resources of coal, it must play a major role in supplying our long-term energy needs. As a result of the dispute the industry faces dangers from the loss of coal faces and because the coal-firing scheme that was so successful in 1983 has—I am sure that the Minister will confirm this—been nowhere near as successful in 1984 for industrialists wishing to convert from oil to coal.

The dispute has also been an absolute gift to those who propose further expansion of the nuclear industry. Many of us who fear that further expansion and who are very cautious about it because of the understandable questions hanging over safety and the environment, feel that the continuation of the dispute serves only to strengthen the hand of those who would like greater dependence on nuclear energy. Recriminations cannot bring the dispute to an end. We must seek ways of finding that common ground.

There are two further unacceptable ways of ending the dispute. First, it would be unacceptable to pin everything on a gradual return to work. That could be only a very ragged way of proceeding. As has been said, it ultimately would not succeed, because significant pockets of miners throughout the country would not go back. Secondly, it would be wholly unacceptable to bring about an end to the dispute by crowing about victory wrought at the expense of rubbing the miners' noses in the dust. I regret that one or two Conservative Members have said that that might be acceptable to them. I hope that that is not generally true of them. Indeed, the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) said that talk of victory would not help the way forward. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) has said that we must seek a decent and honourable settlement, and we should be considering how to achieve such a settlement.

The Labour party's motion welcomes the NUM's decision to seek immediate resumption of negotiations with the NCB without any preconditions. On the radio this morning, the president of the NUM said that he would not be party to an agreement that took economic considerations into account. That must be termed a precondition and makes any further meaningful negotiations a non-starter. It is not a radical departure to suggest that economic considerations should be brought into play. Reference has already been made to the Coal Industry Act 1977. The leader of the Labour party has said that commercial considerations must now be taken into account.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), when he was Secretary of State for Energy, said:

> "I have never found the NUM in any way unreasonable where closures are necessary because of exhaustion or because pits are out of line in economic terms." — [*Official Report*, 4 December 1978; Vol. 959, c. 1015-6.]

Economic conditions must be high on the agenda and there must be meaningful discussions on how to determine the future of pits which are said to be uneconomic.

The NACODS agreement did allow for some review. It is essential for any negotiations about pits which the coal board regards as uneconomic to include full consultation at local level. Each pit depends upon its local conditions, geology and social conditions. Management or diktat from the centre in London cannot guarantee the stability of the coal industry.

Mr. Cambell-Savours: Which way will the hon. Gentleman vote?

Mr. Wallace: If the hon. Gentleman waits, he will learn.

At one stage during exchanges between the two Front Benches, I thought that there was a meeting of minds but there was a problem of semantics. "Plan for Coal" says:

> "Some pits will have to close as their useful economic reserves of coal are depleted."

That item must be on the agenda. I should welcome it if the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) could assure the House that he and his right hon. Friends have brought influence to bear on the NUM to accept that.

Obviously, some pits with uneconomic capacity will be withdrawn from production, but there is a future for the coal industry. We must have new capacity through new investment. We welcome the assurance that more funds will be made available to National Coal Board Enterprises Ltd., but that is not all that is required.

It is said that the Labour movement closed about 300 pits, but that was when there was more employment. The fear in mining communities today is that the pit closures are taking place at a time of very high unemployment. The recession which brought about the fall in demand for coal also makes the miners afraid for their jobs and for their families. The failure of the Conservative Government to acknowledge that that is what is causing the fears in the mining areas means that we shall not be able to support them in the Lobby tonight.

8.43 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): We are left wondering exactly what the Liberal party's position is. It is certain that they are standing in the middle of the road again and will probably be run down.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), who spoke with such passion, said that the strike had gone on far too long. I agree with him. Anyone who has studied the mining communities and the miners will be in no doubt that they are among the finest people in the country. They are loyal and dedicated, and believe in what they are doing. The sad thing is that this time, as once before, to their regret, they are not speaking and acting with one voice. One must ask why.

I can accept that in some instances one can describe a few people as scabs. As an ex-trade unionist I understand the language. But to describe a substantial number as scabs in unrealistic. I was a member of the Transport and General Workers Union and proud to be so.

I feel sad about the whole business. We should be maximising our skills instead of fighting amongst ourselves. We should be asking why so many miners are unwilling to follow their leadership. That is the question which should be asked in the mining communities. If the miners' case is so good, and believed to be so good, why was the leadership unable to convince so many of its own active members? We are not talking about individuals who are inactive in the union, but about members who are active. What is wrong?

Opposition Members should be considering how the NUM executive has handled the affair. No one can get any pleasure out of watching one of our finest unions destroying itself. I get no pleasure from that — *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members can make as much noise as they like, but I get no pleasure from such an event. The country needs trade unions that are responsible and organised, in the same way as it needs responsible and organised management. We cannot run a modern democratic country without a balance.

What has brought about the present situation? On occasions during the dispute any reasonable person would have thought that there was a solution. In the past an answer would have been found.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West suggested an inquiry into the way in which the coal board has been run in Scotland. I am certain that within the NUM an inquiry will take place into the way in which the executive has handled the dispute. That will come about because the ordinary members who are dissatisfied with the outcome, the protracted nature of the strike and the awful suffering that it has caused will ask, "What went wrong? Why didn't we have some answers? Why, when we looked about to find a solution, didn't we find one?"

The answer is that the NUM does not have the calibre of leadership that it enjoyed in the past. It does not have the quality of conciliation that it has enjoyed in the past. I go further, it does not have the people with the political nous to know that one does not make political speeches in the middle of a delicate strike if one is striking about matters with an industrial base.

The great mistake made by the NUM executive was to allow its spokesperson to decide who wears the cap and to misrepresent its case. Its case has been badly misrepresented. It has been presented to the country, the people and the Government as a battle against entrenched Tory doctrines. — *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members will have their opportunity, inside and outside the House, to put their views. I am putting the view of people in a non-mining constituency. I have no knowledge of mining, but I understand that when involved in delicate and difficult negotiations one does not stand up and divert attention from the real issue.

I have a high regard for the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie). He represents all that is good in industrial relations. I mean that sincerely. Without people of integrity on both sides, there is lack of trust.

The problems really started when the overtime ban was introduced. The problems within the NUM began when the union could not throughout accept the productivity deal. The time when some NUM regions accepted the productivity deal and began to make more money was the opportunity for the high productivity areas to become high income-earning areas.—*[Interruption.]*

While I know nothing about mining, I have studied the problems of the union. I know something of what goes on inside unions, and it is sad that the leaders of the NUM, who are the real culprits, have led their troops into a disastrous situation. Yet those same people are still making speeches that leave no room for an honourable compromise. There cannot be an honourable compromise when one side is clearly stating that it will not budge an inch.

If Opposition Members genuinely believe, as I am sure they do, that pits with an economic future are being scheduled for closure, they have an alternative. Those pits need not close. They could be taken over as miners' co-operatives, perhaps with some public assistance. I would not argue with that. If it is right to do it in other spheres, why not do it in mining?

The nationalised industry could not make a go of Scott Lithgow and it was taken over. I am not stressing privatisation on this issue. I am simply suggesting that there should be a middle ground on which all concerned —the Government, the NCB and the NUM—can stand comfortably. That will be possible only if we look for realistic and viable avenues or escape routes.

In this ghastly dispute, many people have been sacked because they have broken the law. I judge that that will be a more difficult problem to resolve, in terms of reinstatement, than some of the other issues about which I have spoken. After all, some of the crimes have been hideous. I accept that the more trivial ones should be dealt with in a more trivial way, but the really nasty ones cannot be overlooked.

We cannot ignore the fact that many policemen have been severely injured. The public would never forgive us or the Government if we did not acknowledge that the police, in carrying out the duties that they were instructed to perform—in other words, to maintain law and order —had been injured. Whatever one's view, it must be accepted that the police were doing their job. Nor must we forget that those policemen have families. We in this House have a duty and responsibility to them, particularly those among them who were injured.

That, if we are not careful, will sour the final stages of negotiation. We must watch that problem carefully because I caution hon. Members to reflect that it is unlikely that the public would accept a situation in which men convicted of serious crimes were allowed to demand reinstatement.

I agree with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West that the dispute has gone on for far too long. It is time that the leadership of the NUM adopted realistic trade union negotiating postures.

8.54 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Almost a year ago the National Coal Board announced its intention to reduce deep mined coal capacity in Britain by 4 million tonnes. I must at the outset put that in context.

I asked the Library to tell me the year when Britain last deep mined 97 million tonnes of coal. The Library officials had to go into the basement of the building to discover the answer, for the date was 1864. In other words, 121 years of history and sacrifice by miners and their families were threatened to be wiped away by the coal board's announcement on that occasion.

No wonder we have had the bitterest and longest national dispute there has been in this country this century. About 9,000 people have been arrested, 600 sacked and almost 200 put in prison, including the four strike leaders from Keresley colliery, Coventry, last Wednesday. That has all occurred in defence of 70,000 jobs in their own industry and 85,000 jobs which were due to be affected outside the industry by the proposed closure programme. The miners took their action not just for themselves but for the children, the school leavers, of this generation for whom those jobs will disappear, even if the existing miners are able to get transfers to other collieries.

This strike was provoked, and it has been prolonged, by the Tory Cabinet. We have heard of the so-called Ridley plan, a scheme drawn up by the present Secretary of State for Transport in the mid-1970s. It was designed to provoke this strike because at that time he saw the NUM as the main political enemy of a future Tory Government.

We have heard of the preparations that were made for cutting the benefits of starving families, for increasing coal stocks before the strike was provoked, for increasing the oil burn, for increasing the importation of coal, for increasing the use of non-union scab drivers by haulage firms and the use of highly mobile police squads, invented to deal with the dispute. We know of all those developments.

In recent days, however, events have shown that during the dispute the Prime Minister sought politically to intervene in an effort to carry out the real reasons why the strike was provoked—namely, to split the NUM as an effective trade union. Mr. David Hart, a leading adviser of the Prime Minister, said in *The Times* a few days ago that the main aim of the strike was to gain victory over Arthur Scargill. What is perhaps less well known is Mr. Hart's involvement in setting up the scab organisation, the national working miners' committee, meetings of which he attended on 11, 19, 25 and 28 August.

He, while in the payment of the Prime Minister's office, placed advertisements in the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Sunday Times*, advertisements which were designed in the offices of Saatchi and Saatchi by Mr. Tim Bell, another adviser to the Prime Minister, the money having been provided by Sir Hector Laing, whose company gave £43,000 to the Tory party last year.

The promotion of the drift back to work by some miners has, throughout the dispute, particularly in the early stages of the strike, represented a Tory propaganda coup designed within No. 10 Downing street. It is clear that the Government bear responsibility for trying to split the NUM. However, that attempt to demoralise — to fracture, to use a word used by the Secretary of State— and to neuter the trade union movement is the real reason why the Chancellor of the Exchequer regards the cost of the strike as a worthwhile investment, paving the way for attacks on other trade unions.

From the Government's point of view, this dispute has nothing to do with economic or uneconomic pits, except perhaps in preparation for the privatisation of parts of the central Midlands coal field. Last year in this Chamber the Secretary of State said that the reason why the Government were trying to tackle the so-called uneconomic capacity of 12 per cent. of the coal fields was to save £275 million. In the last 11 months the Government have spent 20 times that, £5·5 billion, trying to defeat the strike.

Even if the dispute ended tomorrow on the terms set by the Government, everything else being equal, the Government would not be back in an economic position, until the year 2005. Where is the economics in that? Where are savings to be found from what has occurred? That £5·5 billion would have paid for a £25 a week increase in the dole packets of every registered person or for a £4 decrease in every taxpayer's contribution to the Revenue. To put it another way, £100 million—one week's Government spending—is enough to build a hospital, six large comprehensive schools and 1,000 council houses in a town the size of Coventry. The cost of this strike organised by the Government could have provided those much-needed public services for 55 towns the size of Coventry.

The Government and the NCB talk about economics and the need to get rid of uneconomic pits, but the coal board's accounts include the cost of subsidence, mainly in the Mansfield area of Nottinghamshire, the cost of early retirement for miners who have left the industry, interest charges and a rate of return back to the Government twice that of any other industry. If the Minister closed every pit in the country, he would still have to pay compensation for subsidence and early retirement, so those are not genuine costs on the present generation of miners. If those costs are removed from the accounts, instead of a loss of £6·20 per tonne, Cortonwood would show a profit of £5·50 per tonne. The Tories harp on uneconomic pits, but those are the true circumstances.

In the past 11 months I have been proud to be associated with miners and their families and with the other workers — the seamen, the power station workers, the railwaymen—who have supported them. I pay special tribute to the women of the coalfields. In the first week of the dispute Mr. MacGregor said that he would like to hear from the miners' wives. He never said that again. There are now 172 miners' wives support groups throughout the country. The Prime Minister has created—or re-created —a new generation of Socialist men and women in the coalfields. Those people have drawn lessons from the strike. They realise that there is a certain logic in the Government's argument. Since 1979, the Government have closed one factory in five in this country. They have increased unemployment to 3·3 million officially and 5 million in reality. They have reduced investment in manufacturing industry by 27 per cent. If there are fewer factories there is less need for steel and electricity, so there is less need for coal.

The real lesson of the past six years is this. If one thing has been utterly uneconomic for the working people of this country it is the capitalist system over which the Tory

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

Government preside. The system itself is uneconomic because it cannot afford jobs, homes, schools or hospitals. Under that system, for every £1 invested in Britain £2·50 goes to South Africa, Korea, Brazil and Argentina. For every £1 worth of machinery that wears out only 82p worth is replaced. The Tory solution is to cut the wages of working people, especially youth, so as to restore profits to their gaffers in manufacturing industry. That is why they want to destroy the trade union movement, beginning with the National Union of Mineworkers.

That strategy will not work. Mr. MacGregor was transferred from the British Steel Corporation to the National Coal Board on the personal recommendation of Lord Chapple to the then Secretary of State for Energy, now Chancellor of the Exchequer, but it will not destroy the NUM. One per cent. of the population has held the Government at bay for 11 months. Labour Members and working people are now asking themselves what would have happened if every member of trade unions affiliated to the TUC had given as much support to the miners as the wives and kids in the coalfields have. The Government would not have lasted four weeks. That is the lesson being absorbed by the Labour and trade union movement and it will rebound on the Tory Government in the months and years ahead.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Alex Eadie.

Mr. Lofthouse: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the difficulty of the Chair on these occasions, but it may have escaped your notice that there has been no voice from the west Yorkshire coalfield in this debate, and the same seems to have been the case in previous debates. Is it not time that consideration was given to discontinuing the privilege and patronage accorded to Privy Councillors in giving them priority in these debates?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As more than 30 Opposition Members wished to speak, and in view of the content of the debate, would it be possible to arrange a further debate at very short notice?

Mr. Speaker: Fortunately, that is not a matter for me. I have done my best to balance the debate. Privy Councillors have a right to speak, but they have all acceded to my request for brevity. I call Mr. Eadie.

9.4 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): At the outset of my speech, I think that my right hon. and hon. Friends would like me to mention the role that my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) has played in trying to get a negotiated settlement to the dispute. We in the Opposition want to put that on the record for this purpose. If the Secretary of State for Energy had put half the energy that my right hon. Friend has put in to try to resolve the dispute, we would not be debating this costly and damaging industrial dispute tonight.

We are in greater crisis since we last debated the matter in the House of Commons. The miners' funds have been sequestrated and put into the hands of the receiver. To put a trade union in the hands of a receiver is to break the law in a new way.

"It is not good for trade unions that they should be brought into contact with the courts, and it is not good for the courts . . . but where class issues are involved . . . it is impossible to pretend that the courts command the same degree of general confidence. On the contrary, they do not, and a very large number of our population have been led to the opinion that they are, unconsciously, no doubt, biassed."—[*Official Report*, 30 May 1911; Vol. 26, c. 1022.]

If any Conservative Members objects to that, I must inform him that those are not my words, but the words of Sir Winston Churchill in May 1911, in a debate in the House of Commons. He was Home Secretary at that time. His words are evidence of how, since 1911, the clock has turned back and our industrial relations have been polluted in the year of 1985 because the Government's policy ordains that industrial relations be conducted on the streets and picket lines.

Mrs. Currie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Eadie: No, I shall not give way.

Mrs. Currie *rose——*

Mr. Eadie: In the last major debate——

Mrs. Currie *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Mr. Eadie: In the last major debate that we had on the miners' strike, the Government defended their appointment of Mr. Ian MacGregor. I should like to ask the Secretary of State or the Under-Secretary whether the Government are still defending Mr. MacGregor after 11 months of one of the most costly industrial disputes in our industrial history. We said then and we are saying now that the appointment of Mr. MacGregor as chairman of the National Coal Board was a disaster. Not only was it provocative but it was a recipe for industrial conflict. It is even more bizarre now because since we last debated the dispute, Mr. MacGregor has chucked in his hand at trying to explain personally to the media what he is about and his current views, particularly on the miners' strike. Mr. Michael Eaton, the area director in Yorkshire, is the voice that we now hear on radio and the face that we now see on television as the NCB communicator because Mr. MacGregor cannot do it.

I can think of no other parallel in which the head of a nationalised industry is not only allowed to keep his job but has Government support and backing in such circumstances. When we last debated the matter, one of the Government's defences was that they were pursuing a policy of non-intervention in the dispute. We did not believe them; we still do not believe them. That guise and that deception cannot be trailered in today's debate. Not only are they interfering in this dispute, but they are preventing an honourable negotiated settlement. Mr. Geoffrey Kirk, a former public relations officer, who was sacked in November and then reinstated only to refuse his reinstatement, blew the gaff when he described how a consultant from Saatchi and Saatchi, Mr. Tim Bell, had been working with or for Mr. Ian MacGregor and how a Mr. David Hart, a freelance journalist, who apparently is not unknown in the portals of No. 10 Downing Street, has tripped in and out of NCB headquarters.

As an aside I should add that the House observed that, when one of my hon. Friends referred to the article in *The Times* and asked whether the Government agreed with Mr. Hart's remarks, the Prime Minister nodded yes and the

Secretary of State for Energy nodded no. That is an example of the confusion among the Government Front Bench.

That brings me to Mr. Gordon Reece, the Prime Minister's adviser, who according to Mr. Kirk turned up at a "News at Ten" interview in which the chairman of the NCB was supposed to appear. Is it any wonder that "the Government echo", this invisible man, Mr. Ian MacGregor, keeps his job and gets Government support? The Government can now more openly be identified with interfering in achieving a settlement. The voice of the Prime Minister—a voice which is a triumph of social engineering—and those of her Ministers are evidence of that.

The NUM has stated that it wants to get back to the negotiating table without preconditions.

Mr. Rost *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: That would leave either side free to raise or discuss anything. It does not mean that one demands something before one starts. When playing chess, one does not forfeit one's queen the moment the game has started, but that is what the coal board is suggesting. There cannot be written preconditions if one asks for no preconditions before getting to the negotiating table.

Mr. Alexander: A few moments ago the hon. Gentleman referred to the press. Did he see the article in the *Sunday Telegraph* yesterday stating that of the 22 members of the NUM executive, 12 demanded a ballot before there should be a strike? The hon. Gentleman is a member of that executive. Did he support that call?

Mr. Eadie: I do not read the *Daily Telegraph*. However, if it has not dawned on the hon. Gentleman, I remind him that this dispute has continued for 11 months. To talk at this stage about a ballot, when we should be talking about a negotiated settlement, is completely irresponsible.

The House must be made aware of the origin of the phrase "no preconditions" as a basis for settling the dispute. It did not come from the NUM or the Labour party but from the NCB last year through the mouth of its chairman. Now that they have it, neither the NCB nor the Government want to know.

Another aspect of the dispute, the negotiating team, must be mentioned. The board called for changes in it. More than a fortnight ago the national executive of the NUM decided that the whole national executive would comprise the negotiating team. After both suggestions were carried out, derision was heaped from many quarters on the prospect of the entire national executive being involved, as if it was the first time that it had happened. However, it happened in 1972.

Mr. Rost *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: The dispute could have been settled three times but for Government intervention, and the Secretary of State knows that. If all parties could get round the negotiating table, we could resolve the dispute within 24 hours. There is a good precedent for that. I was present in 1972, when the national executive spent most of the day at the Department of Employment with the then Secretary of State.

Mr. Rost *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: The day culminated with all of us going to 10 Downing street where the dispute was settled. There was no tea and sandwiches because it was too late, but we got what we do not have now. All parties were willing to resolve the dispute, but then that was before the Conservative party was hijacked by the Thatcherite militant tendency. That was before the day when a Conservative Prime Minister boasted that she wanted to be known as the Prime Minister who broke the consensus in British politics. Confrontation not conciliation is one of our images of the Government. All the evidence shows that the NCB, at the Government's diktat, scuppered attempts to start negotiations last week and at the beginning of this week.

I have full copies of the correspondence that took place last week when the forerunner meeting to the entire national executive negotiating team was in London. There was a meeting between Mr. Peter Heathfield and Ned Smith, who works in industrial relations at the NCB, which lasted nearly four hours. They agreed on the parameters that could lead to negotiations being resumed and the strike being settled. However, eventually Mr. Ned Smith was dropped from the negotiating team, despite his willingness to see the negotiations through to a conclusion. He had given notice to leave the employ of the NCB in January. The allegation is that the NCB, with Government connivance, rattled on the parameters agreed by Peter Heathfield and Ned Smith.

Mr. Rost *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: I have evidence. The NUM was informed that the replacement was to be Mr. Merrik Spanton. He asked for an informal meeting on Tuesday 29 January. At that meeting all the ground that had already been covered with Ned Smith had to be gone over again. After three hours they had managed to draft an agenda, but then Mr. Spanton was called to the telephone, in the same room, and after his telephone conversation he changed his mind. The general secretary of the NUM had to take back the agenda that had been drafted.

Then we had what were described as talks about talks by post, despite the fact that all parties were in London to talk and reach an honourable negotiated settlement. It is absurd that Mr. Spanton should have written in a letter of 30 January that the National Coal Board had no way of recollecting the content of the agenda drawn up by him and Peter Heathfield, and asking that the agenda be forwarded again. His letter also stated that the talks had to include uneconomic capacity. There were four NCB representatives in that room, yet they claimed that they could not recall what was on the draft agenda. I refuse to believe that. They are not stupid men. I know some of them—*[Laughter.]* I know some of them, and may I say that Britain has the finest mining engineers. It is despicable that the Government should betray men in the way that I have described. I repeat that they are not stupid men, but they were forced to look stupid by superiors who want not a negotiated settlement, but nothing less than complete victory over the striking miners and the NUM.

However, the NUM was not to be deterred. On Friday 1 February, it submitted another agenda as a basis for resuming negotiations. The agenda had five points, the first of which related to "Plan for Coal". The agenda stated:

> "This proposal is based upon previous submissions by the Board which have been accepted by the Union."

There can be no argument about that. I speak with some authority, because I am a co-author of "Plan for Coal".

[Mr. Eadie]

Incidentally, although "Plan for Coal" provides for the closure of pits, it also deals with new capacity and new pits. Not one pit has been sunk during the lifetime of this Government. Without new pits, the industry will inevitably contract.

The second point on the agenda dealt with the future of collieries units. The House should pay close attention to this agenda, because it could be the basis of negotiations. The NUM stated:

"The Union's proposal takes account of the Board's own suggestions when we met with ACAS. This would provide for all matters relating to the future of Collieries Units to be dealt with in accordance with procedures operating prior to 6 March 1984"—

on television, Mr. Eaton gilded the lily on the next point—

"and of course the Union have previously accepted an amendment to the procedures to provide for an Independent Review Body, and we feel that the broad recognition given to this proposal during informal discussions could lead to agreement in negotiations."

The third point on the agenda is about the five collieries, which have been mentioned in the debate. It says:

"The Union's proposal accepts that these five pits remain within the procedure on the understanding that undertakings given by the Board within the Procedure will be honoured. This new proposal also provides for any unforeseen major mining problems to be discussed in the normal way, and we feel this point is manifestly fair and sensible."

The 6 March proposals have also been mentioned in the debate, and they are the fourth point on the agenda, which says:

"The Union's proposal is, of course, a statement on the present situation and has been publicly acknowledged by the Board's spokesman, Mr. Eaton, in an Independent Radio News interview on 31st January."

From that there was the initiative about the 4 million-tonne capacity which is now out of date because it is doubtful that the industry could get back to 1 million tonnes once work begins. There is no argument about that.

There is then the problem of the amnesty. I understand that Mr. MacGregor has been running around the coal fields saying that only over his dead body will an amnesty be given. I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said. He was not being so hard. He said that there were difficulties, as there are, but for the chairman of the NCB to say what he did is irresponsible.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Breach of the peace. Law breakers.

Mr. Eadie: I feel emotional about this matter because my father was a mining leader in 1926 and for eight years he was victimised because he was associated with the struggle to win recognition for the mining union.

Mr. Bruinvels *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: The union agenda says about the amnesty:

"It is inconceivable that in any discussions leading to a resolution of this dispute that the question of dealing with those men who have been dismissed in the course of the dispute cannot be a matter for discussion between the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers."

That is what Peter Heathfield said, and that is why I said that there was dirty work at the crossroads involving Ned Smith. Mr. Heathfield continues:

"In my meeting with Mr. Smith on the 21st January, it was acknowledged that the Union would pursue this matter when negotiations resumed."

We are not breaking new ground with this. The NUM proposals continue:

"It seems a matter of equity that the same principle applied in 1972 and 1974 be applied in the current situation."

There are already established procedures.

Mr. Peter Walker: As the hon. Gentleman has just given the impression that Mr. Ned Smith implied some approval on the point about the amnesty, I shall read out the minutes of the meeting between Ned Smith and Mr. Heathfield. The words are as follows:

"The NUM representatives said that they thought that part of any settlement would have to be related to discussion on that amnesty. The Board's representatives said that this would not be acceptable to the Board."

Mr. Eadie: The right hon. Gentleman is gilding the lily a bit again. I have the minutes from Mr. Ned Smith. They say that there was disagreement but, nevertheless, negotiations without preconditions means that both the NUM and the NCB can put anything that they like on the agenda. If the right hon. Gentleman does not know the meaning of the words "no preconditions", I suggest that he consults a dictionary.

The Secretary of State was embarrassed today, and almost started arguing with himself. I hope that we shall get an answer from the Under-Secretary of State for Energy who is to wind up. He will have to answer categorically the question put to him: is the NACODS agreement now being scuppered? Is it now in tatters as a consequence of what my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East said? Mr. Spanton would not give an assurance to Mr. McNestry this afternoon. If the Under-Secretary can say that the NACODS agreement is sacrosanct, why does the NCB want the NUM to write a script saying that it agrees to economic closures? The hon. Gentleman is impaled on his own statement. It is not necessary to have it.

Mr. Peter Walker: Does the hon. Gentleman, as a member of the NUM executive, approve of the NACODS settlement?

Mr. Eadie: When the Secretary of State tells me that the NACODS settlement is sacrosanct, he will get the answer that he wants—or the answer that he thinks he wants.

Mr. Peter Walker *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: I am telling the right hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Peter Walker *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that this is getting a bit personalised.

Mr. Eadie: I am not personalising it, Mr. Speaker. I am treating the right hon. Gentleman as the Secretary of State for Energy, who is responsible for these matters. All I say to him is that he or his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary should say whether the NACODS agreement is sacrosanct. Mr. McNestry does not believe that it is. Over the weekend Mr. McNestry said that if the NCB insisted that the NUM must write a script on economic closures, the agreement that his union had entered into with the National Coal Board was in absolute tatters. I think that I have demonstrated that.

We talk about there being no preconditions. But what has come to light is that negotiations have been scuppered by the NCB, I suspect with Government connivance.

The NUM went to see ACAS, but I understand that a statement was issued by the NCB. This is how we conduct industrial relations nowadays: ACAS went to the NCB to see whether it could make a contribution towards resolving the strike, but before it got there, the board issued a statement saying:

"The Board stress that until the NUM firmly indicate in writing that they have changed their position on this main issue facing the industry, any talk of resuming negotiations would only be raising false hopes."

I have trailered the negotiations to the House. If there is no response to the proposals that I have outlined fairly and accurately, it will become clear that the NCB strategy, with the support of the Prime Minister, is that it wants total victory against and humiliation for the NUM. It wants to starve the miners into submission, because it must be aware of the hunger and starvation already in the coalfields. Gas and electricity supplies are being cut off. Bairns are having difficulty in getting clothes and footwear. There are financial problems—*[Laughter.]*—when it comes to burying the dead. That is nothing to laugh at.

I can best illustrate the present course of events by reminding the House of the Vietnam war and President Johnson, who was not the worst President that the United States has had, in my view. He was a kindly man, and he was deeply wounded by the cry in parts of his country: "Hey, hey, LBJ. How many kids have you killed today?"

If the Government adopt a strategy of starvation and misery, the cries of the starving in mining areas will be, "Hey, hey, Maggie May. How many kids have you starved today?" Victory for the NCB and the Government is unacceptable. We believe that the British people want, and we demand from the Government, a principled, honourable and negotiated settlement of the dispute which has cost the nation and miners so dear.

9.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt): I hope that the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) is ashamed of what he said. I should have thought that all the years he has spent in negotiations and industrial relations — nobody has doubted his commitment to the great coal industry — would have led him not to make the quite provocative speech that he made today.

I have listened with interest and attention to all of those who have spoken. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) said, this is the debate that was never supposed to take place, but it has. I can tell the Leader of the Opposition that the nightmare will shortly be over, because the debate, as he would know if he had attended it throughout, has shown that opinion in the House, like opinion throughout the country, is united in calling on the NUM leadership to change its stance and to come and talk realistically to the NCB. The House is also united in condemning the tactics that miners' leaders have condoned and encouraged in pursuit of the strike. The only dissenting voices in the country and among the miners and in the House have been the militant ones. They are a small and increasingly isolated minority. Their message holds no future for this great industry and they will not succeed.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) and for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown) said, this is a strike that should never have happened. There would never have been a strike if there had been a national ballot in accordance with the NUM's democratic traditions and that union's rule 43, which provides that a national strike shall be entered upon only as a result of a ballot vote of members. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members might try to shout me down but the truth will out. Like everyone else, they know that there would have been no strike if there had been a ballot. That was amply demonstrated by NUM areas which held their own ballots. They voted overwhelmingly against strike action and in favour of continuing to work for the future of their industry.

Ms. Clare Short: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hunt: No.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) and others are rightly proud of their constituents who have gone to work in the face of the most disgraceful scenes of mobs and intimidation.

This is the first time in our lifetime that the NUM has called a strike without a ballot. The Labour Front Bench know what a disgrace and a stain that is upon that union's great record. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) stressed that point.

But occasionally the Opposition have had the courage to say so. At the start of the dispute the Leader of the Opposition called for a ballot. So did the deputy Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). Indeed, many Opposition Members referred to the lack of a ballot. This theme has been evident throughout the debate. In April the Leader of the Opposition said that if he had been a member of the NUM executive he would have been favour of a national ballot. But it was a timid approach. It did not cut any ice with Arthur Scargill. Rather like an individual who has tried to interefere with the course of history, Arthur Scargill roared and the Leader of the Opposition quickly left the stage. Shakespeare had a stage direction for it: "Exit pursued by a bear". Appearing with Arthur Scargill at the Durham miners gala, the Leader of the Opposition said, "There is no alternative but to fight." The right hon. Gentleman decided that, as the NUM had taken no notice at all of his views he would drop them. What a shamefaced attitude for the Leader of the Opposition to adopt.

However, the right hon. Gentleman has come back on to the stage. Last Friday, he tentatively suggested on the "Today" programme that commercial considerations had a part to play. I shall turn to that point in a moment. If only the right hon. Gentleman had had the courage at the start of the strike to call for a ballot, the strike would not have happened. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe and many other hon. Members referred during the debate to Mr. Ottey's explanation of what happened at that first meeting.

Mr. Eadie *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Member for Midlothian knows what happened at that meeting. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will intervene and correct me if I am wrong and if Mr. Ottey is wrong. Mr. Ottey quoted Mr. Morgan, the general secretary of the colliers, as saying at that meeting, "If I had the confidence that a ballot would go the right way, I would vote for it." What a disgraceful comment. Mr. Wadsworth, one of the leaders of the NUM in Yorkshire, said recently on breakfast television, "The reason we did not have a ballot was because we knew we

[Mr. Hunt]

would not win it." Talk about plotting, as the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McGuire) talked about plotting at the start of the dispute! I hope the House will agree with Mr. Ottey who said that the meeting was "an outstanding betrayal of the miners' constitutional rights". Those are not my words, but the words of a man who spent 45 years in the mining industry and who for 18 years was a member of the national executive.

Miners know that this strike should never have happened and, denied a ballot, miners have voted with their feet. More than 81,000 members of the NUM—over 43 per cent. of its membership—are no longer on strike. Since the start of this year over 13,000 miners have left the strike. Today, communicating a message that, sadly, the Opposition do not seem ready to hear, over 2,300 members of the NUM—a record number—have voted with their feet. Over 30,000 miners have returned to work since the negotiations broke down. In that time the NUM has not changed its position. When will it ever learn?

It is time the strike was over. Of course we agree with the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), but, as many hon. Members have said, we have had seven rounds of negotiations lasting over 175 hours and we have a right to ask: why have the negotiations failed? The answer is that the NUM has refused to acknowledge that the cost of production is an important factor in decisions about the industry.

I refer again to the Leader of the Opposition's words: "including commercial considerations". Arthur Scargill went on the same programme soon afterwards and was given the opportunity to say whether he agreed with the Leader of the Opposition. If he had said, "Yes, commercial considerations have always counted," the strike would now be over. Everybody knows that. But he did not. He said that the Leader of the Opposition must answer for what he said.

This has been a rather artificial debate in some ways. It has been acknowledged by almost every speaker that economic considerations have always played a part. That has been the underlying theme throughout the debate. I do not need to echo the words of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). Everybody knows that economic considerations have always counted. It was the then right hon. Member for Newton who, when he was Labour Minister for Power in 1965, said:

"The industry has made great strides in mechanisation, efficiency and productivity. A substantial part of it has relatively low costs. It is, however, carrying the burden of a good deal of uneconomic production that can become—indeed, has become—a threat to the industry itself . . . this huge on-cost of uneconomic coal is one of the greatest threats to the prosperity of the whole industry."

That was a Labour Minister. He continued:

"the coal industry is weighed down by a part of it that is uneconomic and because of this coal is in danger of losing markets".

He asked the House this question:

"Why should the good pits be dragged down?"—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1965; Vol. 721, c. 780, 883-84.]

The same question applies today. Why should the good pits be dragged down by those which are uneconomic?

Mr. Hardy: The Minister has just asked the House a question, but will he answer the question that I put to him? Will he categorically assure the House that the NUM will not be expected to agree to the closure of collieries in advance of the colliery review procedure or in advance of the consideration which is pledged for independent construction?

Mr. Hunt: I shall give the hon. Gentleman that categoric assurance. I shall amplify that in a moment.

In 1966, the Minister for Power, the then right hon. Member for Greenwich, said something which is relevant to our debate tonight:

"the greatest threat to the future of the industry would be any attempt to average up the cost of economic low cost pits to subsidise pits which can only be a burden on the economy in general and the coal industry in particular."—[*Official Report*, 20 May 1966; Vol. 728, c. 1849.]

Those statements were made by Labour Ministers. The industry faces the same problem today. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) knows about the 22 pits which were closed when he was responsible for the industry. The right hon. Gentleman is an expert on the closure of pits. I could reel off a long list. I could ask the right hon. Gentleman about Graig Merthyr, which had three or four years' resources left; I could ask him about Langwith, which had 1·5 million tonnes left. The right hon. Gentleman ignores the points that I make, but he ignores them at his peril.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Is not one of the difficulties about the superficial attraction of negotiations without preconditions the statement of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) on Tuesday:

"not a single pit in Britain is uneconomic".—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1985; Vol. 72, c. 154.]?

Mr. Hunt: I completely agree. I wish that the debate could have taken place against a background of renewed negotiations, leading quickly to a constructive, realistic, negotiated settlement. I am sure that I speak for many hon. Members when I say that. No one wishes to see a negotiated settlement more than the Government; I stress that fact to the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot).

Hon. Members have asked that there should be more give from the NCB. But the story of the dispute is that it has been all give by the NCB and all take by the NUM. In seven rounds of negotiations, lasting 175 hours, the NCB has given and the NUM has taken.

Mr. Rost: Is my hon. Friend aware that a few minutes ago, Mr. Arthur Scargill, interviewed on the BBC television programme "Panorama" said yet again that he was not prepared to talk to the NCB about the closure of uneconomic pits? How can we have a negotiated settlement?

Mr. Hunt: We ask ourselves where the true debate is taking place. If only Opposition leaders were to engage in discussions with the president of the NUM and explain to him the economic facts of life, the dispute would be over.

The hon. Member for Midlothian quoted many documents, but the problem in the dispute has been that, although the NUM has sent documents in writing and has said things on television and face to face, every time the president has said anything about the dispute he has said that uneconomic pits must stay open. [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] Of course he has. The hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Welsh) said that Mr. Scargill carries out the wishes of the NUM executive. Mr. Scargill said on the "Today" programme this morning:

"What we are saying is that we are not being parties to an agreement that accepts the closure of pits on economic grounds." He shut the door on any possibility of negotiations.

Mr. Barron: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: Just a moment.

Later in the interview, Mr. Scargill said:

"We haven't got any demands on the negotiating table."

Yet he had just made the demand that stopped negotiations from the start.

We have had discussions at ACAS and we have had a just and honourable settlement with NACODS. We have seen these discussions take place. The hon. Member for Wentworth asked me to deal with that point. Let me make it quite clear that the NACODS agreement, which provided, inter alia, for the enhancement and improvement of the industry's established colliery review procedure, stands in full. It was there on the table for the NUM to accept last October and the union rejected it. It is still there today.

If the NUM moves its position and is willing to withdraw the unreasonable demand that there should be no closure of uneconomic pits, there can be a negotiated settlement. All that the leadership of the NUM has to agree is that the closure of uneconomic pits should be included in the first item on the agenda for negotiations. That was conspicuously absent from the agenda that the hon. Member for Midlothian read out. So far, they have refused to agree.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I shall not give way, as this is an important point.

If the Leader of the Opposition or the TUC can persuade the president of the NUM to accept an agenda that deals with the issue that Mr. Scargill has made the main issue of the dispute and can accept the reality of the situation, the dispute will end, just as it could have done last October, last July and, indeed, last March, before it had even started. I hope that I have made that absolutely clear.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: The Leader of the Opposition shouted to me about the NACODS agreement, and I should make it clear that, if the NACODS agreement is accepted, there will of course be no need for any written undertakings. It is a written agreement and can be accepted by the NUM. It has always been on the table.

Mr. Douglas: What the Under-Secretary of State is saying is very important. Are we to take it that the suggestion put forward from the Dispatch Box is deliverable by him through the NCB, and that there will be no request to the NUM to give a written undertaking to the NCB in that regard?

Mr. Hunt: I have made it quite clear and will repeat again that if the NUM wishes to accept the NACODS agreement, there is no need for any written undertakings of any sort. I have made that absolutely clear — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are coming towards the end of a very important debate.

Mr. Hunt: I can only say that it seems clear that the Opposition Front Bench does not want a settlement. The approach of the Government and of the NCB towards the coal industry has been enormously positive. It is curious that no hon. Member has said in the debate that the NCB's offer is not sufficiently generous. No one has questioned the generosity of the offer secured for the NCB by this Prime Minister, this Secretary of State and this Government underwriting the most generous offer to miners since nationalisation.

Let those in communication with the leader of the NUM get straight on the telephone to him to try to talk some sense into the NUM so that we can obtain an end to the dispute. Today we have heard of a record number of miners voting with their feet. They have been denied a ballot. They had no other course open to them and they have now voted with their feet. When will the president of the NUM listen? Seven rounds of negotiations have foundered on the refusal of the NUM's leadership to recognise the crucial reality that was implicit in almost every speech today. I have just one message for those who care—as we all do—for this great coal industry. The Government will not let down the miners. Miners who have worked and who are returning to work every day have shown their loyalty to the industry. They have kept faith with the coal industry and we intend to keep faith with them.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe said, there are, of course, no winners in the dispute. Yet the tragedy is still being played out. Mr. Scargill seems set to fight to the bitter end, but has not the bitter end come? Can he ignore any longer the relentless tread of his members returning to work? Today's record number of returns once again highlights the growing dissatisfaction with his leadership. When will he listen to the rising tide of opinion? *[Interruption.]* When will he settle on the reasonable terms available to him so that this tragic, pointless and damaging dispute, for which there was never any industrial justification, can be brought to an end? The message is that moderation——

Mr. Michael Cocks (Bristol, South) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 200, Noes 378.

Division No. 87] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo	Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Anderson, Donald	Buchan, Norman
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Caborn, Richard
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Ashton, Joe	Campbell, Ian
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	Campbell-Savours, Dale
Bagier, Gordon A. T.	Canavan, Dennis
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Carter-Jones, Lewis
Barnett, Guy	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Barron, Kevin	Clarke, Thomas
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Clay, Robert
Bell, Stuart	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Benn, Tony	Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*	Cohen, Harry
Bermingham, Gerald	Coleman, Donald
Bidwell, Sydney	Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Blair, Anthony	Conlan, Bernard
Boothroyd, Miss Betty	Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Boyes, Roland	Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Corbyn, Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*	Cowans, Harry
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*	Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*	Craigen, J. M.

Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Ames, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Rt Hon Sir Frederic
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry

NOES

Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Freud, Clement
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*

Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Maclennan, Robert
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wainwright, R.
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Carol Mather and
Mr. Robert Boscawen.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments)*:—

The House divided: Ayes 360, Noes 200.

Division No. 88] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Rt Hon Sir Frederic
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry

Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Carol Mather and
Mr. Robert Boscawen.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*

Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House deeply regrets the damage done to the coal industry, miners, miners' families and mining communities by the unnecessary industrial action of some sections of the National Union of Mineworkers; recognises that this action is totally unjustified since this Government have provided more capital investment for the industry than any previous Government, far in excess of that provided by the last Labour Government, and substantially exceeding the scale of investment envisaged in 'Plan for Coal'; recognises it is also unjustified in the light of the National Coal Board's extremely generous offer on pay, early retirement and voluntary redundancy terms, and on the creation of a scheme designed to bring new enterprises and job opportunities to mining communities; notes the acceptance of the Board's offer by the industry's other two unions, and the refusal to strike by those sections of the National Union of Mineworkers which in that union's normal tradition decided to hold a ballot; deplores the Opposition's failure to persuade the National Union of Mineworkers both to arrange a national ballot and to use methods of picketing complying with the National Union of Mineworkers and Trades Union Congress guidelines on picketing; regrets the National Union of Mineworkers leadership's intransigence, displayed in seven rounds of negotiations, including with the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service whose compromise proposal was accepted by the Board but rejected by the National Union of Mineworkers; and expresses the hope that this intransigence will now cease so that a realistic settlement can quickly be achieved which recognises that the cost of production is an important factor in securing a good and prosperous future for the industry.

Immigration

10.28 pm

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Immigration Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1984 (S.I. 1984, No. 2041), dated 21st December 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th January, be annulled.

We have the opportunity for only a short debate on this issue, although immigration is clearly a matter of major interest to many people. The specific point this evening covers only a narrow issue about immigration as, sadly, the prayer does not enable us to criticise or consider the entire Immigration Act 1971 or the immigration rules.

I note that next week the Commission for Racial Equality is expected to publish its report on immigration procedures. It must be a matter of regret that with such an important report shortly to come before us, the Minister has attempted to pre-empt it by laying down these rules before we have had a chance to consider the CRE's report. In passing, I should note that when those procedures were before the House for the first time in 1969, under the Immigration Appeals Act 1969, the Minister voted against the Second Reading, although, as he did not speak in that debate, it is impossible to judge what his views were.

It is clearly unsatisfactory to have such a limited procedure to deal with such complex rules, because even in one hour we can hardly discuss the details adequately and we cannot suggest amendments. It would have been much better had the Minister introduced draft rules which we could have discussed, on the lines of the procedure adopted by the House in recent years of discussing immigration rules in draft form so that amendments suggested by the House can, if the Minister is willing, be incorporated. It is a pity that we do not have the benefit of that approach this evening.

The new rules are the product of a review of immigration appeals that was announced in 1980. In 1981, the Government published a discussion document, and many organisations commented. Sadly, those comments were never published, although the rules are clearly the product of the review. This is the House's first chance thoroughly to examine the procedure for immigration appeals.

It will come as no surprise to the Minister if I contend that the present immigration appeals system is fundamentally unjust, as is the entire immigration system. May I draw to his attention several specific examples of that. First it is almost valueless to tell people that they have a right of appeal provided that they exercise it outside Britain. That is true of people whom the Minister would call illegal entrants, but it is a travesty to say, "Leave this country and appeal from another country." We all know that that does not work.

Secondly, there is no right of appeal for refugees seeking asylum in Britain. Such a right would bring Britain more into line with the international convention and protocol on the status of refugees, of which Britain is a signatory.

A further criticism is that in half the present immigration appeals, the appellant is not present at the hearing.

Another criticism is that adjudicators are appointed by the Home Office, although the Wilson committee recommended that they should be appointed by the Lord Chancellor. Adjudicators sit alone, but I should have thought that it would be preferable to have more than one adjudicator. Furthermore, there is no legal aid, although the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants do good work in helping appellants. Nevertheless, in 1979, the Royal Commission on Legal Services recommended that legal aid should be available for immigration appeals.

There is no right of appeal to the High Court on a point of law, and there is no procedure for the tape recording of immigration interviews and the use of such tapes in immigration appeals. Such tape recording would provide an essential safeguard for many people who feel aggrieved by the present approach. I hope that the Minister will consider introducing tape recording. It was considered by the Select Committee on Home Affairs some years ago, and I was a member of the Race Relations and Immigration Sub-Committee which produced a report. The arguments that we heard from Home Office representatives did not convince most of us that it would not be a good idea to introduce tape recording. One argument was that as an immigration officer or entry certificate officer would be interviewing an applicant, and as an interpreter would be present, tape recording would be confusing as no one would know who was speaking. That is an absurd suggestion, but it was put forward in all seriousness. Our appeals procedure would be significantly improved and made much fairer if there were tape recording, and such tapes were admissible in evidence during appeal proceedings.

Several changes have been made in the immigration rules, but time allows me to discuss only one or two of them. Two rules in particular concern me over and above the others. Under rule 41, all appeals from an appellant to a tribunal can be carried out, if the rules are passed today, only with the leave either of the tribunal or the adjudicator, whereas at present, there is an automatic right of appeal. That is unnecessarily limiting the rights of anybody who wishes to appeal.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Disgraceful.

Mr. Dubs: As my hon. and learned Friend says, it is disgraceful. I can see no justification for the Minister having done this.

The other rule that concerns me particularly is rule 21(c), which gives tribunals additional powers to dispose of appeals without a hearing. Already, there are enough instances of appellants having their futures decided without their presence. Here is an extension of that power. It particularly affects cases where the granting of leave to appeal to a tribunal is mandatory under section 22(5) of the Immigration Act 1971. It particularly affects those people who have applied for entry certificates, been granted one, but, on arrival in the United Kingdom, are refused entry. This is really an attempt to circumvent section 22(5) of the Immigration Act. It certainly goes against the spirit of that Act, and may well go against the letter of it. It is a significant diminution of the rights of the individual when faced with the new rules.

I remind the Minister that the Afia Begum case came roughly into this category. It is true that her tribunal appeal was unfortunately lost, but perhaps the enormous support that she received from all over the country while awaiting the appeal persuaded the Home Office to change the

procedure so that in future it could no longer be used. Most hon. Members will be aware of the circumstances, but I shall briefly remind them of the facts. Afia Begum was a 19-year-old woman, who married a man who was settled here, and under the immigration rules required entry clearance. She applied for it, but by the time that she got it and arrived in the country, her husband had died tragically in a fire in his home.

When Afia Begum sought to enter the country, she was refused entry. She appealed and lost the case. Under the suggested new system, she would not have had even that right of appeal. In future, people will be denied such a right. It is disgraceful that the Minister is seeking to weaken existing rights in this way.

A number of rules have not been changed but are still undesirable in their effects. Under rule 4, there is a time limit for appeals, and an appellant in Britain has only 14 days in which to get his appeal in. That 14-day period starts on the day when the Home Office posts the notice of decision. That means that appellants may miss their chance to appeal because by the time that delays in the post have had their effect, there is little time left. If the appellant is not being advised by somebody who knows a lot about the matter, or if he does not know about it and does not speak fluent English, he may lose his chance to appeal to stay. Sometimes people even miss the date when they are advised by solicitors. It is wrong to impose a rigorous time limit.

The time limit of 14 days applies also under rule 15, in an appeal from an appellant to a tribunal. Again, the same objections apply here. Under rule 5, there is no provision for an appeal out of time from an appellant to a tribunal, although there is some provision for this in an appeal to an adjudicator. Under rule 27, appellants have no right to insist that Home Office officials or immigration officers should give oral evidence or present themselves for cross-examination. Again, that is a significant diminution in the right of an individual.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): To which rule is the hon. Gentleman referring?

Mr. Dubs: Rule 27.

Mr. Waddington: Surely, the hon. Gentleman will agree that there has been no alteration in rule 27.

Mr. Dubs: I said that this was one of the rules that had not been changed, but nevertheless, with the passage of time, I find it undesirable. If we are presented with a set of rules that incorporate some amendments, it is reasonable to say that we disagree both with some of the amendments and with some of the original rules.

The Minister followed a consultation procedure, but many of the rules have been criticised by organisations and individuals that have made representations in response to the consultation document. It is unfortunate that the Minister has not heeded those representations. It is unfortunate also that he has not explained why, but perhaps we shall hear the reason later this evening. It is against that background that I am arguing that some of the rules that the Minister has not changed are still undesirable. That is part of the Opposition's case.

An appellant has a limited right to demand the production of documents and adjudicators have no general power to order relevant documents to be produced. Indeed, an ajudicator cannot even require an entry clearance officer's notes to be produced as part of a hearing. In the absence of tape recordings a great deal has to be attached to the accuracy of the notes of an entry clearance officer at the time of the interview. The fact that these notes cannot be made available at the time of a hearing weakens the right of the appellant, as a critical part of the evidence is denied to the ajudicator or the tribunal.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): It seems that no other system claims to be judicial in which a hostile witness—the entry clearance officer who has refused someone entry—is required to give the major part of the evidence on which an appeal is heard. Surely this is a defect in the system that can be remedied only by the adoption of tape recording.

Mr. Dubs: My hon. Friend is right and I agree fully with the argument that she has advanced.

Rule 23 is concerned with the requirements of bail applications. It is a matter of regret that there is no necessity for the applicant authority to deal speedily with applications for bail when someone is held in custody under the Immigration Act. It can take quite a long time for such a hearing to take place. Someone may be held in custody in the London area for as long as a couple of weeks before, if his bail application is successful, he is released from custody. Surely that is not the right way in which to proceed.

The rules are typified by delays and discrimination. As a result, they assist materially in keeping families apart. The main responsibility rests with the rules and the Act and not the procedures here. However, there is so much discontent with the way in which our immigration procedures operate and the way in which appeals are conducted that there is a great feeling of injustice at the discrimination that takes place in our immigration system, of which the rules are a part.

10.43 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): The Minister's staff are invariably courteous when we telephone to deal with immigration cases. Unfortunately, their courtesy is not always matched by the Minister's decisions. I do not wish in any sense to let him off the hook, but all hon. Members are grateful for the speed and infinite patience with which out telephone calls are handled by his private office and for the letters which follow those calls.

Secondly, there has been some improvement in the procedures at Lunar house as a result of our debates. Lunar house now has a human face, but previously it had no face. It was impossible to employ the ears of Lunar house by telephone. It seemed impossible to speak to one of its officials, and very often one felt that the staff were not reading the submissions which had been made. However, the result of criticisms of Lunar house is that officials respond by means of telephone calls. It is possible to make telephone calls to them, although the telephone lines are engaged on some occasions. I hope that the Minister will regard this situation as an improvement in some ways on what was happening previously and not as perfect.

Mr. Waddington: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said. I am proud of the staff who serve under me. However, I am slightly mystified by his remarks. One must not have too thin a skin in my position, but I do not know what he means when he suggests that I have been

[Mr. Waddington]

discourteous. I have had no personal dealings with him about any immigration case. If he feels that I have been discourteous at third or fourth hand, I wish that he would let me know, and I shall gladly look into the matter.

Mr. Fraser: I have not made myself clear. I intended to say that the courtesy of the Minister's private office was not always matched by the welcomeness of the Minister's decisions. I acquit him of any discourtesy and did not intend to imply that there was any.

One requirement of immigration rules and procedure is that the substance of the rules should be fair. That cannot be said of them at the moment. The rules remain sexist in the extreme, and have not been helped by a recent decision of the Divisional court that the husband of a United Kingdom citizen will not be allowed to stay if one purpose of the marriage was to enable that person to remain in Britain.

The procedure ought to be fair. It ought not to be full of booby traps. Immigration appeal rules that create tripwires are unjust and create a grave sense of injustice and unfairness among those who have to operate them. I should like the Minister to give special attention to the way in which he has changed rule 6 so that there is no longer a prescribed form of appeal against the decision of an entry clearance officer or an immigration officer. The procedure is full of traps, not least because the time limit of 14 days in which to make an appeal does not commence when the decision is received by the applicant but when the decision is made.

If a decision is made and posted on a Friday during the Christmas period, it might not arrive until Tuesday because of delays. Moreover, the applicant might not be able to read English or understand the decision and will therefore want to get advice. It is therefore easy for 14 days to elapse between getting the decision and lodging an appeal, and thus to lose appeal rights. That is redeemed at the moment by the Home Office's practice of sending out an appeal form which states the particulars that the new rule 6 requires — name, address, date of birth, nationality, the decision that is being appealed against, the grounds of appeal, whether an oral hearing is sought and whether the appellant is appealing against the country to which he is being removed.

If people cannot read English, those to whom they go for advice or for a translation can see what must be done and where the form must be sent. The likelihood of mistakes is minimised by the form. As soon as the Home Office departs from that practice of sending out a prescribed appeal form, mistakes will be made. People will leave out details of the decision, their date of birth or their nationality. In other words, the form of appeal will be invalidated, not on the merits of the case but on a technicality. It is in the interests of the Home Office and the Minister for appeals to be made through the prescribed form or a letter, delivered to the Home Office, that gives particulars that are as nearly as possible the same as those given in the prescribed form.

If the Home Office drops the prescribed form, it will result in a sense of injustice and a great deal of delay. It will create the suspicion that the Home Office intends to introduce rules with which it will be difficult to comply. An example is the substantive immigration rules. One cannot change one's status from that of a visitor to a business man unless one is out of the country. It is very difficult to acquire a business when one is out of the country. On this rule alone I implore the Minister to think again for the sake of the immigrant, the Home Office and good race relations in this country.

10.50 pm

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Already there is a very profound sense of injustice among all immigrant communities concerning the operation of the current immigration procedures that come within the Acts. These new rules do absolutely nothing to change that sense of injustice. Indeed, they make matters worse. Not only is injustice manifestly felt to be done, but further steps are now to be taken to remove existing rights. Speaking, as I know I do, on behalf of a vast number of Asian citizens who feel that the discrimination against them at ports of entry by immigration officers under the current rules is wicked and rampant, I beg the Government to reconsider whether or not they could produce rules——

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Janner: No, I will not. Every Opposition Member who is in the House wishes to speak and I do not intend to take up their time.

There is no question but that immigration officers are believed and, in my view, frequently correctly believed to discriminate against people because they are Asians. Under the present rules, there is an automatic method under which a person who wishes to appeal against the refusal of entry clearance is given a blank appeal form with which to instigate his appeal. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) in begging the Government not to require people whose knowledge of the system is non-existent; who arrive in this country frightened and often in a state of deep insecurity; who do not speak the language and who often have come here entirely legitimately, to fill in special forms that will not automatically be given to them, or to require them to instigate appeals by writing to the authorities. This change will undoubtedly affect——

Mr. Budgen: The hon. and learned Member speaks of the great sense of injustice that is felt by many of his constituents. I have a very large Asian community in my constituency and I have received no letters or representations about this issue. It is all too easy for hon. Members to express their personal views and to pretend that they are supported by a large body of opinion. Will the hon. Member please give us further and better particulars of this strong sense of injustice that is being put to him?

Mr. Janner: With the greatest of pleasure. Before the Minister leaves the House, as he is apparently doing at this moment, I shall ask him to be kind enough, when he is outside the House, to produce the vast file of letters that I have written to him over past years denouncing precisely these injustices. Day after day, week after week, my Asian constituents bring complaints to me. That the constituents of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) bring no complaints to him should be no surprise to any hon. Member of this House, knowing the way in which the hon. Member would be likely to deal with them.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Would not the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West

accept that in a way the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South-West (Mr. Budgen) has a point? The point that many hon. Members on this side of the House would argue is that people have a great deal of difficulty in writing these letters and that that is why it is so odious that there is to be a change in the rules by removing a form that is so easy to fill in and insisting instead that people should send letters.

Mr. Janner: I fully accept that point. On the other hand, in constituencies such as mine the Asian community knows that their Asian Labour councillors and their Labour Member of Parliament are working for them and with them. With surgeries every week and availability every day, and very often every hour of the day, there is no shortage of complaints, and the Minister knows it.

The question is whether the procedures are fair now—in my view they are not—and whether the revised procedures will make them any fairer. On the contrary, they will do damage. They will harm good race relations and good will. They will not improve procedures. Even now, the Minister should think again and withdraw the procedures, wait for the CRE report and then introduce procedures that are fair, decent and honourable.

10.55 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) rightly said that it was a shame that the debate was taking place only a few days before a valuable report is to be produced which will highlight many of the deficiencies in the rules. Not only is it discourteous to have the debate in advance of that report being produced, but it is clearly an attempt to pre-empt some of the criticisms that will probably be contained in it.

The hon. Member for Battersea also said that the present system was fundamentally unjust and that there was a need for more than one adjudicator. He said that there was a need for legal aid—in a sense, a more judicial system than the one that we have. I wholeheartedly endorse that. He said that there was a need for tape recordings of interviews and talked about the admissibility of interviews when deciding on the issues. He talked about the disposal of appeals about hearings. They were valuable points, all of which I would happily endorse.

The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) talked about the courtesy which Home Office staff in the private office show, and I found that to be the case as well. The hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) talked of the examples that he has experienced in his constituency of people having difficulty understanding the gobbledegook of many of the Home Office rules and regulations. My city has a large immigrant community with considerable illiteracy and frequently people have enormous problems in understanding complicated rules and regulations.

The rules before the House tonight have been dissected by many of the influential immigrant organisations such as the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants and the United Kingdom immigrants advisory service. I do not intend to detail their criticisms, which will be well known to the Minister and which have widespread support on these Benches, but I shall ask him not to ignore those well-thought-out representations.

Those groups and many others took the trouble to make detailed comments on the discussion document of April 1981. Their comments have never been published by the Minister. The rule changes are the only product of the review announced in 1980 and bear little relation to informed opinion or comment now or then. That cavalier disregard for the view of representative organisations concerns me, but my major concern tonight is how little relationship the rules bear to any form of humanity, opportunity or real justice.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): How can it be an injustice when rule 6(4) says:

> "The grounds of an appeal particularised in a notice of appeal may be varied or amplifed at any time during the course of the appeal"?

Surely that leaves the matter wide open. What is the matter with that? Surely it is much better than having a formal notice?

Mr. Alton: It all rather depends on whether the grounds exist in the first place. As the hon. and learned Gentleman well knows, the grounds may not appear to exist in the eyes of the Minister. It may depend on the information which is sent back. It may be that the adjudicator does not agree with the grounds submitted. All those factors will apply. The changes in the rules tonight will only make matters worse. They must be seen in the context of many other changes which have taken place in the past nearly six years. There have been a frightening number of infringements.

Mr. Waddington: It is important that people should not be misled. The hon. Gentleman is surely not trying to give the impression that no heed was paid to the representations made by the JCWI. He knows perfectly will if he has read the draft rules that the opposite is the case. He knows perfectly well that the most minimal changes have been made in the rules. We stuck more or less to what was the situation when the Labour Government were in power simply because we did heed the representations of bodies such as the JCWI. The hon. Gentleman must not mislead the House and give the impression that we have flown in the face of representations made to us. We have heeded virtually every one.

Mr. Alton: The Minister knows that the JCWI takes a dim view of the regulations, Indeed, it says:

> "The limp product of a review initiated nearly five years ago does nothing to challenge the fundamental injustices of the immigration appeals system."

The council sets out a number of complaints about the way in which the system works.

The rules must be seen against the background of a number of infringements that have occurred against the immigrant community and others over the past six years. There has been the infringement of the right to movement, the infringement of the right to form relationships, the infringement of the right to live together as a family unit and, in particular, the infringement of the right of all women to equal treatment under the law. All those rights are in the United Nations declaration of which the United Kingdom was founder signatory.

It is no surprise to find tonight that other rights are jeopardised. It is a tragedy that the Government should be so dedicated to undermining the personal liberties of our people as well as the aims of institutions such as the United Nations. But that is part of the pattern that we have come to expect over the past five or six years. The Government's

[Mr. Alton]

poor record on overseas aid and provision for overseas students, and our record on the rights of immigrants and the treatment of foreign visitors on arrival in the United Kingdom all damage the proud reputation that this country once enjoyed around the world.

The new rules are littered with examples of how the state's powers are increased at the expense of the individual. For example, rule 6(1) removes the Home Office's responsibility for providing simple, straightforward forms to give notice of appeal. Appellants will be told in future that they must write a letter to the Minister. I wholeheartedly endorse the view of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service that the change can lead only to uncertainty among those considering an appeal. It will undoubtedly create further confusion and frustration among those who are already confused and frustrated by a complicated system.

Yet the change will also create more work for civil servants, burdening them with reading letters often written by people who are not well versed in the English language. The change is the exact opposite of the stated aim of the review, which was that it should be a

"consideration of ways to reduce delays and create more efficient use of resources".

In an area so afflicted by bureaucracy, it is strange to see the Government creating yet more work for their civil servants. But, of course, the Government's motives are patently obvious — to place as many obstacles as possible in the path of the appellant, to create a tangled web of bureaucratic controls and to impose every possible burden on the shoulders of those seeking refuge, and all in the hope of deterring appeals and making life as difficult as possible for people who are often frightened, vulnerable and greatly at risk.

The Government should not replace the mandatory provision of appeal forms by a requirement on appellants to write a letter. Similarly, it is wrong to specify in advance that if certain particulars are omitted, an appeal will be deemed to be disallowed. Nor should grounds of appeal have to be submitted at the time of giving notice of appeal. What if crucial information is inadvertently missed out? What if the immigrant is not aware of what is relevant and what is not?

Similarly, under rule 14, access to the tribunal against an adjudicator's decision will be possible only by leave. That erodes the right of appeal provided for in the 1971 Act and will make it difficult to challenge an adjudicator's decision before the tribunal. Once again, the Home Office is trying to reduce the rights of the appellant and this time the change in the rules will mean that some people who currently have the right to remain in the United Kingdom will in future be deprived of that right.

Time does not permit me to go through all the examples, but my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) has told me about someone who was made to wait for about four years before a decision was made. A Nigerian constituent of mine has been ordered home to Nigeria. The Minister wrote to me on 1 February saying that she would be able to exercise her right to appeal to an independent adjudicator against the decision to refuse her entry. That is a terrible way to treat people. They are sent back whence they came and they cannot get advice or make appeals.

I remember the case of a young Bangladeshi boy, Giss Uddin, who had been educated in this country, but who was sent back to Bangladesh and told to prove that that was where he came from. He had to prove, through some sort of certification, that he was born in that country to people who had the right to live in this country — and all because he could not produce a piece of paper. He was unable to appeal from Bangladesh because he was not able to produce the necessary documents. That is a hallmark of this Government. Another example of the inhumanity of our immigration legislation, which these proposals will compound——

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Alton: I have already given way, and I am sure that the House will understand if I press on.

Another example of the inhumanity of our immigration legislation, which these proposals will compound, is the process that a British woman must go through in order to bring her fiancé into this country. She must prove that she met him before his interview for settlement, with the state acting as some sort of voyeur. She must prove that the marriage

"will not be undertaken mainly in order for him to settle in the UK",

with the state acting as prosecution, judge, jury and appeal court for the crime of love. She must prove that he will not rely on supplementary benefit or any other public funds. He may then have to undergo a medical examination, and the couple may also be ordered to reveal letters or private correspondence between them. One wonders whether civil servants in the Home Office do not have better things to do. It is a degrading, dehumanising and often disgusting process to have to go through.

These rule changes will place even more aces up the Home Secretary's sleeve. They will increase the odds yet more against an appellant. In some cases a pathetic 14 days is given in which to give notice of appeal. At the same time, the amount of documentation that the appellant must gather appears to increase substantially.

These people will often be abroad, illiterate or not English speakers. The rules may make a difficult task near to impossible. That could, of course, be the Government's intention. It is certainly the view of many people that that is the Government's aim.

My party will oppose the new rules tonight, because we believe that they will substantially erode good race relations in this country and that they will make life much more difficult for immigrants who have already suffered quite enough under this Government's pernicious policies.

11.6 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Perhaps I should declare an interest as I am the chairman of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. Which I hasten to add, is an unpaid position.

I believe that the more strictly immigration is controlled, the more important it is that the appeal system is fair and just, and seen to be so by those appealing. It is important to bear in mind that not only immigration is at issue. Many people who want to come to Britain to visit or study are refused permission to do so and then are given the right to lodge an appeal. When the Wilson committee recommended in the late 1960s that the appeal system be set up, it was stressed that those who were refused either

here or abroad should be in a position to put their cases to an adjudicator with the necessary advice and representation.

Some of the changes are disturbing. Earlier, the Minister said that he had more or less agreed with the representations made by the JCWI, but it is important to remember that like the UKAIS, the JCWI has objected to several of the proposed changes. I also re-emphasise the need for forms to be supplied to those refused. I am not suggesting that only the form should be the basis of any appeal. But many of those refused are on the Indian subcontinent and may have great difficulty in composing a letter once refused. It is feared that agents will be used. As the Minister knows, when they are involved in India or Pakistan they often confuse the position, worsen the appellant's situation and make his chances of winning that much less. If an application is turned down, a form should be sent, as has been the position until now.

It is wrong to say, as rule 6.3 does, that an appellant should have to give grounds for an appeal at the time that an appeal is lodged. Often it is impossible to give adequate grounds, because the wording of the refusal is such that it provides little basis on which to lodge an appeal. When the explanatory statement is finally issued giving all the reasons for the application being turned down, there is some substance upon which to submit the grounds. The Minister should, therefore, reconsider that point.

Some people apply to stay here because they fear that if they return they will face possible persecution. If the appeal is turned down by an adjudicator and an application for leave is made to the tribunal it can succeed only if the tribunal is satisfied that the fears of persecution are genuine. This is not a technical matter. It is important. The application for leave for the case to be heard by the tribunal will be determined before the appeal is heard, if permission is granted.

Rule 14(2)*(b)*provides that the tribunal has to be satisfied on the basis of the written submission that there are genuine fears for the person to return to his own country. The person has to make the point in writing on the basis that if the application for leave to appeal succeeds he will seek to prove his case at a full hearing of the tribunal. That will cause anxiety to people who believe that they have genuine difficulties and genuine reasons to fear persecution, and worse, if they are forced to leave the country.

It is unfortunate that this debate is limited to one hour. This is a matter of great concern to many of our constituents and their relatives. I see no reason why it should be confined to such a short time. It shows, I think the lack of respect by the Government for issues of justice.

If we are to have such a rigid system of immigration control we must ensure that those who are refused, whether they want to live here, study or visit, must genuinely believe that if they lodge an appeal it will be heard in the proper spirit and that they have the right to put their case to an independent adjudicator or tribunal. It is up to the Minister to satisfy those people that they will have that right. Most people do not believe that they stand much chance of having their case heard in this way.

11.12 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I pay tribute to my hon. and learned Friend the Minister responsible for immigration and to the caring way in which he looks after the ethnic community. Despite what Opposition Members said, his Private Office has performend well when I have contacted it.

There is a much larger ethnic community in my constituency than there is in the constituency of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). Out of my 19,500 ethnic constituents, not one has made a representation to me about being unhappy with the new immigration appeals procedure.

The procedure as detailed in the new rules, especially 6 and 16, makes it easier for members of the ethnic community to accept the rules as they are. The rules are fairer. The grounds for refusal, for applying and appealing are made very clear and they provide an easier way of handling all types of appeals.

The people involved need care to be shown to them. I believe that they are shown care in the way that I would show care, unlike some Opposition Members. The rights that they seek are being dealt with in a much more humane manner. I cannot understand why the Opposition parties find it necessary to complain about the appeals. I deal regularly with immigration appeal procedures—between five and 10 times a day — so I know more about immigration procedures than most other hon. Members.

Let us remember that those who come here and then appeal, having been told it is time for them to go, cannot yet be called "our people." Indeed, having been allowed to come on a visit, they are being unfair to those who wish to come here permanently and who are patiently waiting under a quota arrangement to be allowed to come. We should aim to ensure the continuation of the humane way in which my hon. and learned Friend has dealt with these matters in the past. The sort of criticism that we have heard tonight from Opposition Members does nothing to make for the harmonious conditions that now exist in Leicester in particular and in Britain in general. I commend the appeals procedure.

11.15 pm

The Minister of State, Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): The hon Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) complained about the limited time available for this debate. The Opposition tabled the prayer —they had every right to do so—and many will have been surprised at their having done so.

I say that because anybody who had read the instrument with care — which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley (Mr. Alton) had not—would have recognised that, far from us ignoring all the points made by the JCWI in its comments on the consultation document, we have heeded what it had said, and therefore the rules include only the minimum number of changes.

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) was less than fair. He was wrong to say that the Wilson committee had recommended that adjudicators should be appointed by the Lord Chancellor. In fact, the Wilson committee recommended precisely the reverse — that they should not be appointed by the Lord Chancellor — and the Labour Government of the day followed the recommendations of that committee.

Nor did the hon. Member for Battersea tell the whole story about the tape recording of interviews. The chief adjudicator had the opportunity recently of assessing how helpful the tape recording of interviews might be by investigating results of experiments conducted in the Indian sub-continent, and he unhesitatingly concluded that

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it would not be helpful to have tape recordings. That does not mean that I have closed my mind entirely to the possibility in the future. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that the Government are not being obdurate in this matter. The chief adjudicator's view was that it would not help.

Ms. Clare Short: He is appointed by the Minister.

Mr. Waddington: That is a ridiculous observation, and the hon. Lady may wish that I had not heard her remark, for she is saying, in effect, that because adjudicators are appointed by the Home Office — in accordance with the recommendations of the Wilson committee — nobody should have respect for the work being done by the adjudicators. That is a wicked thing to say. I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Lady will withdraw her remark, because those who are appointed adjudicators are people of great probity and who carry out an extremely difficult task with great skill.

Ms. Short *rose*——

Mr. Waddington: I hope that the hon. Lady will reflect on what she said, and I give way to her in the hope that she will withdraw her remark.

Ms. Short: The Minister distorted what I said. I said that the chief adjudicator, who is appointed by the Minister, took the same view on the tape recording of evidence as did the Minister and that that might not have been a total coincidence. I did not make any comment about the general performance of adjudicators—which I consider to be patchy; some are good and some are extremely bad. The whole system would be better if adjudicators were appointed by a body independent of the Home Office.

Mr. Waddington: The House now has the opportunity to judge what the hon. Lady was getting at. I do not think that I was entirely unfair in concluding that she was making a gross attack. She now says in mitigation that the attack was not on all adjudicators but only on the chief adjudicator. I should have called that a plea in aggravation rather than a plea in mitigation.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Waddington: No, I have a great deal of material to cover.

The hon. Member for Mossley Hill advanced a most extraordinary proposition. Like most of the propositions that he advanced it had absolutely nothing to do with the rules before us. Nevertheless, as he mentioned this ridiculous proposition I suppose that I had better take it up. He took the view—presumably it is also the view of the Liberal party—that anyone who arrives at a port of entry in this country and is refused entry should be able to stay here until such time as his appeal is heard. I ask the hon. Gentleman to address his mind to the practicalities of the matter. In those circumstances either one has to fill the gaols and detention centres with people whose appeals are being prepared or one gives the person what he wanted in the first place — access to this country, to which the immigration officer has found that he is not entitled.

Mr. Alton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Waddington: No, I really must get on——

Mr. Alton *rose*——

Mr. Waddington: Oh, all right.

Mr. Alton: As the Minister seems to have adopted a new strategy today of attacking the person rather than the argument, I am grateful to him for giving way. I cited the example of a Nigerian widow who arrived in this country with her daughter, having lived here for many years. She was returning to stay with a doctor with whom she had worked. The Minister wrote to me about this on 1 February so I am sure that he has read the details of the case. Surely he is not saying that a person in that situation should simply be shipped back without any chance of staying to lodge an appeal and that four years should elapse before the appeal is heard.

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well what I am saying. If a person is refused entry at the port of entry we operate a most generous system of entry as a result of the intervention of a Member of Parliament. There is not one Member here today who has not benefited from the more liberal regime now operated by the Home Office. We are far more willing to grant temporary admission than the Labour Government were. It it is one thing to allow temporary admission while the Minister looks into the case, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to reconsider his proposition that the person should have not just temporary admission but permission to remain here until his or her appeal is heard before an adjudicator, presumably for however long it may take for the legal machinery to be put into action. I repeat that that is the most arrant rubbish.

The Opposition have tabled this prayer, but there is virtually nothing to complain about in the rules. That is why they have so often talked about entirely different matters. In fact, we are leaving things much as they were before and therefore much as they were when the appeals system was set up in 1970 under the Immigration Appeals Act passed by the Labour Government in 1969.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Asian community, in particular, is very well organised and has many representative bodies? How many representations of complaint has he received from those bodies? There is a very large Asian community in my constituency, but I have received no complaints at all about this procedure.

Mr. Waddington: I can tell my hon. Friend that we listened with great attention to the representations that were made to us by a number of bodies. As a result, we have not carried out any of the radical changes canvassed in the consultation document. That is why it is so extraordinary that the Opposition are making such a fuss today. I remind them of the propositions canvassed in the consultation document. It suggested combining the right of appeal against a refusal to vary leave with the right to appeal against a decision to deport. We have not done that. The document suggested removing the right of a short-term visitor to appeal against the refusal of his application to have his stay extended or, alternatively, making that right of appeal exercisable only from abroad—we have not done that. The document suggested removing the right of entry clearance and work permit holders to be given leave to appeal from an adjudicator to the immigration appeal tribunal, and abolishing the right of appeal against

a refusal to revoke a deportation order. At the same time, the possibility of the introduction of two additional rights of appeal was mentioned: a right of appeal from the tribunal to the High Court on a point of law, and a right of appeal before removal for illegal entrants.

As to the procedure rules, several changes, including an extension of the powers of adjudicators to determine appeals without a hearing, were suggested in the document. Comments on the discussion document were received from the appellate authorities, the Council on Tribunals and from many individuals and organisations interested, including UKIAS and JCWI. Those commenting were generally opposed to suggestions aimed at removing or reducing rights of appeal or an appellant's right to an oral hearing of his case, and most of those commenting were in favour of introducing a right of appeal before removal for illegal entrants.

The comments on the discussion document and suggestions made by interested parties for other reforms of the appeals system have been very carefully considered, and the Government's proposals formulated in the light of the changing situation within the appeals system. The proposals in the discussion document were aimed at reducing delays in the system, but since the review was carried out, a concerted attempt by both the Home Office and the appellate authorities to reduce delays has been successful to the extent that at the end of November last year, the number of appeals awaiting a hearing was approximately 9,500 compared with 16,350 at the end of 1979, while the average delay at the appeal hearing centres has been reduced over the same period from 14 months to three to four months. One might have expected Opposition Members to congratulate the Government on having produced a much more satisfactory situation than that which existed when they were in power, instead of cavilling during the past hour.

In the light of that improvement in the overall position, it has been decided that amendments of the 1971 Act limiting rights of appeal are not necessary at this time. At the same time, we do not propose at present to extend the appeal rights of illegal immigrants.

I know that concern has been expressed about illegal immigrants not having a right of appeal before removal, but it must by remembered that their position at present is exactly the same as that of persons not holding entry clearances or work permits who are refused entry at the ports, and we see no justification for treating more favourably someone who has deliberately managed to enter clandestinely or has obtained leave to enter by deceiving an immigration officer, than someone who has been honest about his intentions and has been refused entry as a result. That would be to reward dishonesty over honesty.

The hon. Member for Battersea mentioned only one of the rules — rule 6. I was surprised that Opposition Members made a fuss about that. Rule 6 now embodies the particulars that must be contained in a notice of appeal. This will enable notice of appeal to be given by letter, for instance — that is, far less formally than at present. However, there will also be a gain in administrative convenience. The intention is to continue to issue appeal forms, but the fact that they do not have to be statutorily prescribed means that changes to the forms that might subsequently become desirable can be achieved without having to amend the statutory instrument. That seems to me to be wholly desirable.

As I have said, I am extremely surprised at the Opposition's attitude. I can only assume that, like the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, they have not taken the trouble to compare the representations made by JCWI with the new regulations. They will find that a number of representations were made to us, and we were asked to drop all the radical proposals in our consultation document.

I took the view that as a result of the magnificent efforts of our staff and the fact that we have got rid of so many of the delays in the appeals system which existed under Labour, it was not necessary to carry out these radical changes that were canvassed in the discussion document. If Opposition Members——

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 4 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)).*

The House divided: Ayes 49, Noes 146.

Division No. 88] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Bruce, Malcolm
Clay, Robert
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dubs, Alfred
Eadie, Alex
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Foulkes, George
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maxton, John
Meadowcroft, Michael
Nellist, David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Snape, Peter
Steel, Rt Hon David
Wallace, James
Welsh, Michael
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and
Mr. Greville Janner.

NOES

Ancram, Michael
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Butcher, John
Cash, William
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Cope, John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gow, Ian
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*

Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
MacGregor, John
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Newton, Tony
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Ian Lang.

Question accordingly negatived.

COMPETITION

Motion made, and Question proposed, pursuant to Standing Order 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the Anti-Competitive Practices (Exclusions) (Amendment) Order 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1919), dated 10th December 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

Question agreed to.

BBC External Services

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

11.41 pm

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath):

"Let me begin on a note upon which there will be no disagreement in any quarter of the House: that is, the support and admiration of all of us—and of course I include Her Majesty's Government—for the work of the External Services of the BBC. There is nobody who does not recognise the excellence of what they do. Certainly so far as I am concerned, I believe them to be an important arm of Government foreign policy. Indeed, I think we have got to look at the whole of our defence and foreign policy as one, and external broadcasting has a most important part to play in the influence that Britain can exert throughout the world."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 30 July 1981; Vol. 423, c. 811.]

Those are not my words, but the words of Lord Carrington, when he was Foreign Secretary, in opening his speech on this subject in another place in July 1981. But, of course, I agree with him completely.

Three years later in a television interview Lord Carrington said:

"When I was Foreign Secretary, I was told I had to save money on the overseas service of the BBC. I think that was really totally counter-productive and the money saved was trivial compared to the amount of damage done. I think the time has now come, really, when the Treasury and the Government ought to look at cutting out a function in Government rather than cheeseparing on the things that are essential and have to be done."

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss in the House the future of the BBC external services and to draw attention to the appalling way in which those services have been treated by Governments of both parties in recent years. Those two quotes that I read admirably outline my case, and I hope that the second will at least prevent my hon. Friend the Minister from suggesting in his reply that no damage has been done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Sir A. Kershaw), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, rightly pointed out during a debate in the House in July 1981;

"We have two assets in the BBC—the English language and its high reputation, based on its activities during the Second World War, which it has managed to maintain. We are to be asked to approve reductions in expenditure on the overseas services at a time when our country has reduced political power and when there is an increase beyond imagination of the power of the spoken word that reaches out beyond frontiers and speaks to each man in his own tongue."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1981; Vol. 9, c. 579.]

Exactly so, and the position has become worse since 1981.

The Government have put a thick smokescreen over the figures. I could devote my speech to debating with my hon. Friend, whose difficult task it is tonight to defend a bad record and a worse case, the detailed statistics, but the heart of the matter is that the reduction of £1·2 million envisaged for 1985-86 will be the ninth cut in the working revenue of the external services in 10 years. I have the size of the reduction in the working revenue for each of those 10 years in front of me. Incidentally, £1·2 million is roughly what the National Coal Board pays out by lunch time.

The cuts of 1982 ended Spanish for Europe, the Italian and the Maltese services. French for Europe and the Brazilian service were halved. In the Falklands war, the two nations in Europe least sympathetic to us because of

their historical ties were Spain and Italy, with France not far behind. In the BBC handbook for 1984, I find these words:

"The role played by the External Services in coverage of last year's events in the South Atlantic is generally accepted to have been a vital one. The Argentine invasion of the Falklands came at a time when the External Services had just suffered the most wide-spread operational cut for many years. Morale amongst highly-motivated staff had been considerably shaken and many talented broadcasters had been lost."

I am told that morale is still shaky, and talented broadcasters are still being lost.

The grant to the vital transcription service, which supplies recorded programmes for re-broadcasting to over 100 countries, has been reduced by £300,000 and the number of programme hours reduced from 500 per annum to 350. I am well aware of the admirable capital expenditure programme that the Government are funding over nine years, to replace transmitters—some of which were installed during the second world war—at home and abroad. However, our praise for that costly programme must not prevent us from appreciating the crisis that is approaching. On present projections, and if the Foreign Office is not able to make up the loss resulting from a falling pound, which has already added well over £1 million per annum to costs, in the next three years services could be faced with cuts of about 10 per cent.

On the Order Paper is an early-day motion put down by six of my hon. Friends and signed by some 70 hon. Friends, calling for an increase in resources for the services. The recently published Public Expenditure White Paper suggests that an increase in resources is unlikely. Without an increase, half a dozen language services could be faced with the axe. What I find so depressing and deplorable is that above the Whitehall table there are golden words of praise for these services, while below the table the knife is cutting deeper into the bones, the flesh having been removed years ago.

The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs has strongly reiterated its view that funds should be found to enable the BBC to resume the Caribbean service, which was cut in 1974. This would cost approximately £250,000 per annum. Post the invasion of Grenada, this would appear to be an obvious move, but I learn that the service is not to be resumed. There is an overwhelming case to broadcast to Afghanistan for more than a miserable half an hour a day.

I must warn my hon. Friend that unless there is a change of heart by the Government, the row that has been going on between Front and Back Benches since 1979 over the future of these services will reach a crescendo. I do not believe that the Conservative parliamentary party will sit idly by between now and the general election, and watch the life blood of a fine organisation dribble away.

Over many years, I have found the whole system of funding to be wholly unsatisfactory. The Foreign Office has been responsible for accounting for grants in aid only since 1977-78. For the three years before that, the responsibility rested with the Home Office, and before that with the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. Since 1979 there has been equal misery all round within the Foreign Office Vote. It is essential, as any of the great commercial organisations could explain to the Government, that Bush house should be funded for at least three years at a time. I note that the review, which I praise for its detailed scrutiny, is at least moving in that direction. There is bound to be inefficient use of capital at present. In theory the head of the external services should be responsible to the BBC board of governors but, like the review, I accept that close links with the Foreign Office are desirable. The present position would be laughable if it did not damage our reputation abroad, as I am sure our ambassadors, high commissioners and representatives are confirming in their dispatches.

The House will know that international broadcasting is a growth business. I am told that in 1955 there were thought to be 237 million radio sets in the world; today there are 1,600 million. The Voice of America has been given $1·2 billion dollars for its expansion plan. The intention is to increase the number of languages in which it broadcasts from 42 to 60. It is worth noting what has happened recently in France. As part of an austerity budget its foreign relations expenditure was reduced all round except for one item, which was external broadcasting. This has increased by the equivalent of about £3 million. The Japanese are expanding their overseas radio as well. The Soviet Union has expanded its output and dominates the airwaves in terms of hours broadcast. It broadcasts for 2,200 hours per week compared with the BBC's 727. There are 98 other international broadcasters, many of whom are anxious to obtain unused frequencies.

In 1987 the World Administrative Radio Conference meets in Geneva to discuss the allocation of frequencies and hard bargaining is expected. If the Government are to force Bush house to cut further language services, skilled operators and audiences will be lost. There is a real possibility also that frequencies will be lost as well.

In 1979 it was proposed that Turkey should be cut out, but Parliament prevented that. The following year the Foreign Office came back with a request that broadcasts to Turkey should be increased. It is a schoolboy howler to put it about that Britain does not need to speak to her friends. Our relationships with our European Community partners have been damaged by both ignorance and misunderstanding of our position on a range of sensitive issues.

The Government sometimes behave like a small boy who is given a gold watch and is quite unaware of its worth. Britain has the largest overseas audience—100 million—and the best overseas broadcasting services, and we treat them shamefully.

Like most of my hon. Friends, I want our past successes in overseas broadcasting to be built on and not pulled down. I want them expanded and I should like to see the Government supporting the BBC's plans for an international television service with an investment of about £5 million over two years. Without such a service I fear that Britain might be beaten by other countries or commercial operators in world television broadcasting.

Finally, I draw to the attention of my colleagues a remark by, of all people, Colonel Gaddafi. He said:

"All the Arab radios rave from dawn 'till noon but nobody listens to them because everyone switches on London."

Are there those in high places in the Government who can see not only what the BBC external services have achieved in 53 years but what they could achieve for our country and for our dangerously divided and turbulent world in the 21st century? Without vision the people perish.

11.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Renton): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Tim Renton]

Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) for raising the future of the BBC's external services on the Adjournment. I welcome the debate and my hon. Friend's comments about the high regard in which the House holds the BBC's external services. I do not agree with his remark that we have treated these services shamefully. I hope to show him why I disagree.

The future of so valuable an asset as the BBC external services is naturally a matter of interest and concern to us all. It was precisely with this in mind that, following discussions between the Foreign Office and the external services' management, the BBC board of governors invited a review of the external services in July last year —the first of its kind for 10 years. The team appointed to carry out the review submitted its report simultaneously to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and to the chairman of the board of governors.

We have now heard from the board that it, like us, welcomes this thorough and thoughtful examination of the activities of the external services and has agreed to publish the main report. I have therefore arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Hon. Members will not yet have had a chance to study the report in full detail, but it is lengthy and contains numerous recommendations. We are still considering our response to it, but I should like to take this opportunity to underline some of the main points in it.

I am happy to say that the review team confirmed the external services' reputation for the quality, accuracy and impartiality of its output, which serves to enhance Britain's image abroad. It was impressed by the dedication, professional skills and motivation of the external services' staff.

There were some criticisms, though. The review team emphasised, for example, that, for the external services to maintain their position in the world, the resources available must be used in the most efficient and sensible ways. It recommended some changes to Foreign Office procedures, and an increased flow of information between the BBC external services and the Foreign Office, to enable the Foreign Office to carry out more effectively its responsibilities for the prescription of the services and for the control of the grant-in-aid to the external services.

The team recommended improved systems and organisation within the external services to achieve more effective use of resources. In addition, following a detailed study of some activities, some changes were recommended, which are estimated to result in annual savings of up to £1.6 million during the next few years.

The team recommended that consideration should be given to fixing the grant-in-aid at the same time as the BBC licence fee—and for the same period—to improve the management and efficiency of the external services. This is a crucial recommendation, which we are naturally studying with special care.

On the future of high frequency transmission and the possible impact of new technology on external broadcasting, the team concluded that the situation should be kept under regular and systematic review. Clearly, new technology in communications is developing quickly and we must examine the opportunities carefully. Detailed discussions will now begin between the Foreign Office and the external services on the follow-up to these recommendations.

We welcome this report and the contribution it will make to improving the effectiveness and economy with which the external services are run. The relationship between the Government and the BBC in respect of the external services, including the Government's responsibilities for prescription and funding and the management responsibilities of the BBC board of governors, are clearly laid down in the royal charter and the licence and agreement. Nothing in the report implies any change in that relationship and those responsibilities, or in the traditional editorial independence of the external services.

We hope that the report will provide a firm foundation for the future development of the external services and that it will lead to improvements in the efficiency, effectiveness and economy with which they are run.

My hon. Friend referred to the capital programme. It is clear that many people have been misled by unfounded speculation about cuts. They have perhaps lost sight of the first objective — the improvement of the external services' worldwide audibility.

As my hon. Friend said, the Government are devoting over £100 million in 1981 prices to a 10-year development programme which is now almost half-way through. As a result of new medium wave transmitters at Ofordness and short wave transmitters at Rampisham, audibility has already been improved in many parts of Europe, including Eastern Europe, and new aerials in Cyprus have improved the quality of broadcasts to the Soviet Union and the Middle East. We had hoped to be well advanced at this stage in the construction of a short wave transmitting station in the United Kingdom at Bearley in order to make further essential improvements in audibility in Eastern Europe. However, after a lengthy public inquiry it was found, as my hon. Friend will know, that the site was unsuitable on environmental and technical grounds. We accepted this decision, of course, but it means a considerable setback to this very important part of the audibility programme. We are giving consideration to finding a solution to this problem and I am hopeful we shall overcome it.

On the other hand, work on the construction of a relay station in Hong Kong has been accelerated so that a start was made last year and, with an extra £2 million which we are pumping in in 1985-86, the project will now be completed in 1987-88, a year ahead of schedule, bringing significant improvements in audibility in the Far East, particularly in China and Japan. Plans are also far advanced to build another relay station to improve audibility in East Afica and I hope it may be possible to accelerate the present schedule so as to build that station over the next three years.

On cuts, my hon. Friend referred in astringent terms to the damage that, in his judgment, has been done, I appreciate that his main concern is about the alleged cuts in the currents expenditure of the external services, but in fact the grant-in-aid to the external services over the past five years has shown a real increase above inflation of some 18 per cent. At the same time the BBC has maintained broadcasting levels of between 716 and 725 hours a week in English and some 36 other languages.

My hon. Friend referred specifically to the cuts in services in 1982, but I should like to point out to him that in 1982 only the half-hour Maltese service was cut completely. The Spanish to Europe service, to which he referred, and the Italian direct services were replaced by recorded services for rebroadcasting locally, and the

French to Europe, Portuguese to Brazil and transciption services were each reduced by rather less than one-half. In return, these reductions were offset by increases in other services. For example, the Latin-American Spanish service was increased by 8 hours 45 minutes a week, following the Falklands invasion, and the Pushtu service to Afghanistan was doubled to 3½ hours a week. Therefore in 1985-86, contrary to popular belief, the grant-in-aid will not be cut but will be maintained at its 1984 level, uplifted by the factors applicable to all public expenditure.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: The BBC external services are very sensitive to the falling pound and the increased costs and are hoping that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will have some happy news. Would my hon. Friend like to be in the happy position of being able to give them happy news tonight?

Mr. Renton: No, I am not in the position of being able to give new happy news to the external services, but I should like to repeat to my hon. Friend something that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has said before: that, in addition to the factors applicable to all public expenditure that I have just mentioned, the external services will receive an extra £700,000 towards BBC pay increases above the civil service norm.

My hon. Friend talked of the £1·2 million that the external services will not receive. I appreciate that they requested that sum for disbursement mainly on increased pay-related allowances in 1985-86. As a result of the severe pressure on all Government spending, it was not possible to exempt the external services completely from the economies that have affected the whole range of our representation overseas. We therefore asked them to find this sum from their own resources. My hon. Friend talked of life blood being drained away, but I must point out to him, and I am pleased to say this, that the external services have informed us that, despite difficulties, they will indeed be able to make the necessary savings without cutting any of their broadcasting services.

In the few months during which I have been a Minister at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office I have been struck that so many people that I have met, from Norway to the sub-continent, have paid great compliments to the external services of the BBC. Those remarks were echoed in the opening sentences of my hon. Friend's speech tonight.

I recently visited Pakistan and Bangladesh, two important countries, where I found a large number of people who told me of the pleasure with which they listened to the BBC. At any given time many millions of people throughout the world are listening to the external services of the BBC. The House will appreciate that it is that fact that makes it so important that their transmission of British news should be accurate and impartial. A major responsibility lies on their shoulders to convey a fair picture free from bias at all times and I have no doubt that they are well aware of that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 February 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HIGHLAND REGION (KINLOCHBERVIE) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time upon Thursday.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Closed Shop

1. **Mr. Walden** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many employees are now estimated to be covered by lawful closed shop agreements.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Peter Bottomley): Only a few thousand out of the 4 million or so employees covered by closed shops have so far been given the chance of voting in a secret ballot. This means that the vast majority of apparent closed shops, including all the large ones, have now lost any protection the law previously gave them and that it is automatically unfair to dismiss any of the employees covered by them on the grounds that they are not union members.

Mr. Walden: Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment at this state of affairs? Is the Department considering what else might be done to encourage people to move in the right direction?

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend and the House will appreciate that if a ballot is not held the effect is the same as if a ballot is held and the right number of people do not vote for the continuation of the closed shop. In effect, the closed shop is lost whether it is not balloted for or whether a ballot is held and an insufficient number vote for it.

Mr. Fatchett: Is not the reality that most employers are happy to disregard the Employment Act 1980? Does the Minister agree that they want sensible industrial relations and the maintenance of closed shops without the interference of the Government and/or legislation? Does he accept that that is the best way to preserve good industrial relations?

Mr. Bottomley: Everyone wants sensible industrial relations. Trade unions have shown that, by opposing the holding of ballots, they are happy not to have closed shops.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Will my hon. Friend persuade his ministerial colleagues that the time has come to embark upon a policy of bringing to people's attention the fact that they cannot be dismissed if they choose not to belong to a closed shop?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, Sir. I have written to hon. Members on both sides of the House giving this information, and I hope that everyone will pass it on to his or her constituents.

Mr. Skinner: Is it not bordering on hypocrisy for the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) to talk about closed shops for trade unionists when he has a moonlighting job as a lawyer at the Temple which supplements his parliamentary salary? The lawyers have the biggest closed shop in Britain. The hon. Gentleman would not be able to make a penny piece in the law courts if he were not a member of a closed shop. Is it not worth noting also that the Government had to tell the coal board when the NACODS agreement was drawn up——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Member has made his point.

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) have both demonstrated that they can speak well for themselves. The closed shop legislation gives the same chance to all union members.

Gainsborough (MSC Funds)

2. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the Manpower Services Commission's funds devoted to the Gainsborough employment area.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Peter Morrison): I regret that precise figures are not available, but the commission estimates that over £500,000 will be spent in 1984-85 on employment programmes in the area served by the Gainsborough jobcentre and about £9 million on training programmes in Lincolnshire as a whole.

Mr. Leigh: As we come to the end of the second year of the youth training scheme, does my hon. Friend agree that the scheme's outstanding success — both locally where a TVEI project is on the rail and nationally where 420,000 young people are covered—gives the lie to the Opposition's claim that we do not care about youth unemployment? We do care, and we act.

Mr. Morrison: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I agree that some Opposition Members fail to appreciate the fact that the youth training scheme is extremely popular among the trainees involved and their parents.

Employment Prospects

3. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on employment prospects for 1985.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Tom King): The number of people in work has been rising for over a year. The latest reports from both jobcentres and major private agencies indicate a significant improvement over recent years.

Mr. Soames: We are obviously concerned about unemployment. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Britain still has a higher proportion of its working population in employment than either France or Germany?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing out that point. Obviously, unemployment concerns every hon. Member. We should recognise the truth about employment. According to the latest figures, in Britain 66 per cent. of the population of working age is in employment compared with only 61 per cent. in France and in Germany.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Secretary of State confirm reports in the Sunday newspapers that the Government have set up a new interdepartmental committee, under his chairmanship, to consider the serious impact of unemployment? If so, what are the committee's terms of reference?

Mr. King: If the hon. Gentleman is not supposed to believe what he reads in the newspapers, at least he might do me the courtesy—if he was not able to be here—of refreshing his mind from *Hansard* about the recent debate on employment, when I made clear the close interest that the Government were taking and will continue to take in measures that will help to alleviate this difficult problem.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that employment prospects for 1985 would be much improved if, for example, the Civil Service unions did not ask for a 15 per cent. pay rise and the teachers' unions did not ask for a £25 a week increase and realised that such increases must be paid for from productive industry, which is already under enough pressure?

Mr. King: As I said in connection with last week's unemployment figures, the greatest single contribution that all of us in work can make is to show good sense and moderation in pay bargaining. It is beyond question that good sense in pay bargaining will be the largest single contribution towards alleviating the problems of the unemployed. I certainly endorse my hon. Friend's statement.

Mr. Leighton: As the Government have set out to increase, not to diminish, unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, when will the Department respond by developing programmes that will pay the unemployed rather more than they are receiving in benefit and will encourage them to do something useful for themselves and the country instead of allowing them to rot on the dole?

Mr. King: I believe that the hon. Gentleman, who is Chairman of the Select Committee, has recognised the improvements that we have made, for example, to the community programme. Those improvements are specifically designed to help to alleviate the problems of long-term unemployment. I believe that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the increase in the enterprise allowance scheme, a third of whose members have come from long-term unemployment. The scheme is designed specifically to help those people to start businesses of their own. We are conscious of the fact that this is a worrying matter during the present difficulties.

Mr. Stokes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that employment prospects will become much better in the next few years, when the numbers coming on to the employment register, due to the fall in the birth rate, will be much lower?

Mr. King: It is true that, although we are creating more jobs, we have, as yet, failed to achieve a reduction in unemployment because of the increased numbers coming into the working population. As my hon. Friend said, those numbers should be a declining feature because of the change in the demographic base. By the end of this decade it may work in the opposite direction.

Mr. Bell: Does the Secretary of State accept that his words will give cold comfort to those who live in Corringham Walk, Netherfields, Middlesbrough, where 91 per cent. of the heads of households are out of work? That means that of 500 heads of households who are fit and available for work, only 45 are working. What message does the Secretary of State have for those brave, valiant and unfortunate people who are suffering from the consequences of the Government's economic actions?

Mr. King: With the interest that he shows, I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would know that I have made it abundantly clear that the Government recognise the difficulties of which the north-east and the extreme south-west are the worst examples. In answer to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) I referred to the work that we have done, the consideration that we have given, the improvements that we have already made and the work which is continuing to see how the Government, with the general improvement in the economy, can ensure that we get more jobs. Anything that the hon. Gentleman can do to encourage moderation will help the plight of those people.

Mr. Penhaligon: Will the Secretary of State tell the House what he believes to be the greatest threat to employment prospects in 1985—a small increase in inflation, or a substantial increase in interest rates?

Mr. King: I do not want to make that choice. In view of the problems that we face at present, the Government have given a clear signal of the importance that they attach to keeping on top of inflation. The benefits are shown clearly by the improvement in job prospects. That gain must not be thrown away—it must be built upon. By controlling inflation, I hope that we can achieve a sensible reduction in interest rates.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Is my right hon. Friend not worried that a high proportion of the new jobs being created go to married women, often working part-time? Does he agree that some features of our tax and national insurance system encourage that? Will he undertake to consider reforms which aim at having one breadwinner in every family rather than two in some families?

Mr. King: Serving, as I do, in the Government, I do not want to enter into that argument, but I recognise that there are some anomalies and problems in the present structure which tilt the balance unsatisfactorily. I confirm that there are matters that we are considering in that respect.

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State often lectures others about what they can do to reduce unemployment. As a member of a Government who have thrown many thousands out of work in the Civil Service, particularly in his own Department, is he aware that the proposal that he has before him about the Manpower Services Commission's skillcentres, which involves 1,000 redundancies in 1985, has led to pressure in a letter from the MSC to those employees threatening that if, using their

constitutional rights, they protest to Parliament about redundancies in 1985, it will use the Industrial Relations Act 1971 to intimidate them?

Mr. King: I hope that the whole House will support proposals which are directed towards the maximisation of training and the most efficient use of resources. The Government are committed to using resources as effectively as possible to ensure that training is brought to people. If in the process there must be some reorganisation —the hon. Gentleman knows the decision that is before me for consideration at present—I have made clear to the Select Committee the criteria by which I shall judge it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is another question on that matter.

Basildon

4. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are employed in high technology industries in Basildon, by industry; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Alan Clark): It is not possible to give a precise figure for the number of people currently employed in this type of industry. The latest available figures from the 1981 census of employment showed that nearly 5,000 people were employed in Basildon in industries associated with technical innovation.

Mr. Amess: Is my hon. Friend aware that there are many high-tech industries in Basildon, including Rayridge, which is one of the few British robotic companies? Does he agree that Basildon is an excellent place for such job opportunities because of its fine housing and excellent air, sea, road and rail communications?

Mr. Clark: Yes, Sir. My hon. Friend's claims for his constituency are borne out by the news of industrial development in the area. I am aware that £9 million is being invested in a new data processing centre and that GEC Avionics is moving into the old Rothman's factory, about whose closure so many hon. Members agitated last year.

Voluntary Projects Programme

5. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the operation to date of the voluntary projects programme.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have been very encouraged by the achievements of the voluntary projects programme, which, in the course of this year, will be providing some 55,000 unemployed people with the opportunity of constructive activity. The Government announced in November that the programme was to be extended for a further three years.

Mr. Freeman: Is my hon. Friend aware that this popular and important programme helps two projects in my constituency, one of which, Furniture Turnaround, certainly helps the poor and the unemployed? Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State argue with the Treasury for funding all such future programmes on a longer term albeit declining, basis, so that the voluntary societies can make plans with greater certainty?

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend's encouragement and support are most welcome. However, if initial funding is given, with the possibility of extension, it is possible to see whether the projects are worth supporting in the future. Many projects are in their second or third year of funding.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is the Minister aware that his hon. Friend the Minister of State was generous enough to visit my constituency to view the CATS project in Bramley? Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to step outside the narrow limitations on the number of VPP places available in any one city, in order to assist an especially large project, such as that one, which is in need of help?

Mr. Bottomley: We are always interested in views that are put forward. The extension of the programme for three years gives greater support than there would have otherwise have been. The hon. Gentleman's comments will be noted.

Young Persons

6. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people under 21 years of age have been unemployed for more than one year.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 10 January 1985 the number of claimants in the United Kingdom under 20 years of age who had been unemployed for over one year was 121,000. The available analysis by age does not separate those under 21.

Mr. Yeo: As it is the lower paid jobs that offer that particularly tragic group of youngsters their best hope of employment, will my hon. Friend use his considerable influence within the Government to try to achieve an increase in the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions from £34 to £100 per week?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend's central point is right. Young people must not be priced out of jobs. That is why we have a young workers' scheme, and we regret it when the wages councils frustrate that objective. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services is at present engaged in a review of social services costs and charges. I shall draw my hon. Friend's views to his attention.

Mr. Boyes: In Tyne and Wear, 500 people under the age of 18 have been unemployed for over a year. Has the Minister had time to read page 106 of the latest issue of "Social Trends", according to which there is a direct relationship between high unemployment and long-term illness? Are not the Government, who are guilty of creating long-term unemployment, also guilty of creating long-term illness?

Mr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to those young people who have been unemployed for over a year. That category causes us great concern. We have spent £2 billion on special employment and training measures. The level of resources and the way in which they are applied are subject to continuous review and discussion. The group to which he refers is at present under consideration.

Mr. Rowe: In view of the considerable success of the enterprise allowance scheme, will my hon. Friend look again at the extreme partition between those who receive benefit of some kind and those who receive a wage? There should be room for overlap.

Mr. Clark: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. There have already been changes affecting the community programme, and I welcome them.

Mr. Flannery: Is it not a fact that scores of thousands of young people who have left school have never known what it is to work? When will the Government realise that that terrible crisis is an act not of God but of their monetarist policies, which it is time they brought to a close because they are uneconomic and loss-making?

Mr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman is not entirely right. Certainly there was a category of young person, as his hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) mentioned, prior to the introduction of the youth training scheme, who could not get a job and had been unemployed for more than a year. Since the introduction of the YTS, there is no reason why any youngster should leave school without the possibility of obtaining a place on the youth training scheme.

Job Creation and Protection

7. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons are now being employed on the various job creation and protection measures covered by the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Peter Morrison: At the end of December, 662,000 people were being helped by our employment and training measures. Of these, 478,000 were on schemes administered by the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Taylor: Are not those dramatic figures an answer to those who say that the Government are doing nothing about unemployment? Nevertheless, has my hon. Friend found an answer to the problem of JEGS Electrical of Southend, which would like to add to those figures, but has been told by the Department that it cannot get a grant if it pays young workers more than £40 a week, and by the wages council that it will be sent to prison if it does not pay them £40·05? Can he find a solution to the problem and make those figures even more dramatic?

Mr. Morrison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said about the schemes run by the Manpower Services Commission. Contrary to what the Opposition say, those schemes are extremely popular. My hon. Friend will have heard the reply of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary about wages councils in that regard.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that many of the young people in west Cumberland who are in trouble with the police, on whatever charge, whether poaching or vandalism, are in trouble only because they do not have, but want, work? In so far as the community programme gives them the opportunity to work, particularly that age group, will the Minister ensure that when the Budget is announced every representation will have been made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure an expansion of that programme because we desperately need those places in west Cumberland?

Mr. Morrison: I am aware that in Cumbria all 16-year-olds and, in effect, all 17-year-olds, have the opportunity of a place on a youth training scheme. I am also aware that the hon. Gentleman has worked hard on and been of great support to the community programme. I listened carefully to what he had to say about it.

Labour Statistics

8. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of unemployed and the number of long-term unemployed, respectively.

9. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the latest unemployment figures.

14. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently unemployed in Great Britain; and what percentage that is of the work force.

Mr. Tom King: On 10 January the number of unemployed claimants in Great Britain was 3,218,000, and in the United Kingdom it was 3,341,000, representing a rate of 13·7 per cent.

Of those, 1,316,000 had been unemployed for more than 12 months.

Mr. Dormand: Is the Minister aware that those figures, particularly those for the long-term unemployed, demonstrate more clearly than anything the sheer incompetence and insensitivity of the Government? Is he further aware that within those figures is the fact that in the northern region 243,492 people are out of work, which is 19·1 per cent., and the highest figure for any region outside Northern Ireland? Is he also aware that those figures have increased every month in the five years since the Government came to power? Did the Minister see the letter in *The Times* yesterday from the chairman of the northern region Confederation of British Industry, the chairmen of the chambers of trade and other employers' associations about the need for a radical change of policy? If his cronies are suggesting that, what on earth is the Minister going to do about it?

Mr. King: I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman's contribution. He knows perfectly well that slogans on such a serious subject do not help. I do not stand here and criticise the Socialist Governments in France, Spain or Italy of insensitivity because in those countries unemployment during the past year rose significantly faster than it did here. I hope the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the best hope for this country is to create more jobs. I hope also that he will welcome the fact that during the past year, after the great loss of jobs that we suffered from the lack of competitiveness in British industry, we have started again to create more jobs.

Mr. Parry: The Secretary of State should hang his head in shame at such abysmal figures. In addition to almost 3·5 million people unemployed, 679,000 people are on Government-funded schemes, and a further 500,000 people do not register, making the true figure 4·5 million unemployed. That is the highest figure of any major industrialised nation. Why does not the Secretary of State, who is pathetic, do us all a favour by offering his resignation and packing up?

Mr. King: I address exactly the same comment to the hon. Gentleman as I did to the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand). It is no good making such political comments about this serious problem. He chose to advance the size of our programme as a criticism of the Government. I take pride in the fact that, for the first time, a Government have provided a proper training and work preparation scheme for our young people. I take pride in

the fact that we have increased to more than £2 billion our investment in training and special measures. I do not take that as a criticism.

Mr. Pike: Does the Secretary of State accept that, to millions of people, the present level of unemployment is unacceptable, as was the Prime Minister's comment last week that the figure was "disappointing". That was an extremely poor word to use, even in parliamentary terms, for a figure that is completely unacceptable. When will the right hon. Gentleman persuade his colleagues in the Government to stop playing around with the problem of unemployment and to start spending money in the public sector and on infrastructure to create jobs, because that is the only way to reduce the present unacceptable total?

Mr. King: The present level is not unacceptable to some people in the House—it is unacceptable to every hon. Member of the House. The House owes it to the country to address responsibly the question of what is the most effective way to reduce unemployment. The hon. Gentleman peddles again the belief that a wand can be waved to reduce unemployment. He should ask the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) why he did not wave that wand when he was Secretary of State for Employment and when unemployment doubled.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Does my right hon. Friend accept that people made redundant in traditional industries have special problems in finding new work? In this respect, will he recognise the work done by the information technology centres in training for new technologies, and extend that training to older people made redundant from traditional industries?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He will have noticed that the central thrust of the new proposals in "Training for Jobs" is that more public expenditure will go towards training the unemployed, including the long-term unemployed, to helping the information technology centres, and to putting training into the community programmes to help the unemployed back into work. That is a key element in our programme.

Mr. Madel: As it is important to get many more youngsters off the dole queues and into training courses, why do not the Government abolish the 21 and 15-hour rules as they affect benefits, which would not only give youngsters a better opportunity but would help industry to overcome some skill shortages?

Mr. King: I note what my hon. Friend says. He will be aware, as several hon. Members have said, that there are undoubtedly problems in helping the maximum number of youngsters into work. Not the least of those problems is the fact that, in many industries, the starting rate for a 16-year-old is 50 per cent. of the adult rate, whereas in many industries in Germany it is 25 per cent. of the adult rate. It is interesting to compare the relative levels of youth unemployment in Germany and in Britain.

Mr. Hickmet: Bearing in mind that, as a direct consequence of the miners' strike, the British Steel Corporation is paying £3·5 million a week to move illegally blacked coal and ore and that, consequently, it has had to cut capital investment and its maintenance programme, as has the National Coal Board, may I ask my right hon. Friend to advise the House what effect he believes that had on unemployment during 1984, and what effect he expects a solution of the strike to have for the unemployed in 1985?

Mr. King: It is extremely difficult to get a precise figure as to what the impact will be. It is something that I would like to see, because there is no doubt that the miners' strike and the length of time that it has lasted has been very damaging to employment prospects in the country. In 1983 we had the highest growth rate of any country in Europe. The miners' strike has been a setback to that growth rate. Even so, we achieved an average rate of growth in 1984, and the forecast of the OECD is that we should look forward again to the highest rate of growth of any country in Europe. That will provide the best possible prospect of jobs if this unnecessary and costly strike is settled.

Mr. McGuire: Is not the greatest indictment of the Government that the figure we have been given, whether the real figure of 4·5 million or the massaged figure of approximately 3·5 million, is being added to at the rate of a net loss of 20,000 jobs every month? On the Government's own estimates the figure will rise to over 250,000 to be added to the total already given. Is that not the greatest indictment of the Government? When the Government came to power they promised that they would release an entrepreneurial flair which would reduce the 1·25 million unemployed, a matter they boasted about in a huge slogan "Labour isn't working". If it was not working with 1·25 million, it is not working now.

Mr. King: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not listen to the earlier answer. He is quite wrong. There is not a net loss of jobs, there is now, at last, an increase in the number of jobs. There is also an increase in the working population and that is why we have to see that increase in jobs further enhanced.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Do not the figures which the Secretary of State announced today prove that the Government's policies over the past five years have utterly failed to help make British industry more competitive? Does not the fact that the public expenditure figures, which have recently been produced, show that there will be unemployment for 3 million-plus for the next few years demonstrate what a scandal it is that the Government still claim that they have the right policies to reduce the unemployment figures?

Mr. King: I do not agree with the assertion of the hon. Gentleman. I would expect the hon. Gentleman to have recognised, after a period of undoubtedly serious shake-out in industry in which the overmanning which should have been tackled many years ago but which was allowed to fester was tackled—the inevitable consequence of which was some increase in unemployment—that at last we have moved into a situation in which we are creating more jobs. The result of the policy of reducing inflation has been to make Britain more competitive and to make that possible. What we now want to do is to reinforce that advance.

Mrs. Jill Knight: Will my right hon. Friend consider, as he rightly and regularly publishes unemployment figures, publishing the figures for job vacancies also? To some people it is strange that, in many areas where

unemployment is worryingly high, the local papers each night carry 15, 16 or 17 pages of small ads placed by employers wanting people to fill jobs.

Mr. King: It is certainly true, if one looks at the flow of vacancies through jobcentres and at the forecasts of Manpower and other private employment agencies, that they forecast the best prospects for new jobs for five years. With the high flow of vacancies through jobcentres, there is clear evidence of a significant improvement, not only in the south-east, to which obviously much of the improvement is directed, but in other parts of the country.

Mr. Foot: When the right hon. Gentleman dares to compare the record of his Government with that of their predecessors, will he recall that in the last months of that Labour Government the unemployment figures were coming down each month? If his Government could achieve any comparable figures, he would say that it was the biggest miracle since the loaves and the fishes. Will he also apply his mind to the fact that he should stop the closure of skillcentres, as the whole country is crying out for more skills?

Mr. King: What I do recall is the part played by the right hon. Gentleman and some of his right hon. Friends in deliberately obstructing the restructuring of major parts of British industry and the nationalised industries at a time when they faced a serious loss of competitiveness, condemning many people to much more serious unemployment. The steel industry is the most obvious illustration of that. I recall the contribution which the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends made to Britain's ill-prepared state when the recession struck. I think the history books will recognise that a precious opportunity was lost through the incompetence of the Labour Government at that time.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that there are now more potential sponsors under the community programme than approved projects in the Edinburgh area? Will he keep that thought in mind as there seems to be substantial scope for expanding that programme in future?

Mr. King: I note what my hon. Friend says. Contrary to the unhelpful comments by some Opposition Members, the success of the youth training scheme and of the community programme has been achieved through the willingness of employers, other organisations and the trainees themselves to work together to make a success of those programmes. There has been a real national effort to make a success of both programmes, and I pay tribute to that.

Mr. Evans: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that if the 660,000 people on the Government's special employment schemes are added to the number of unemployed claimants that the right hon. Gentleman has just announced, as well as the 400,000 people who were fiddled out of the unemployment statistics in 1982 and 1983, that makes a total of nearly 4·5 million people who are without real jobs and that that figure is more than three times the figure when Labour left office? Will the right hon. Gentleman also acknowledge that there are now more long-term unemployed people than the total number of unemployed in Great Britain when Labour left office? Is not that the real picture of the inhuman misery that the Government have unleashed upon this country?

Mr. King: That is the most disgraceful supplementary question that we have had during this Question Time. The Labour party tried to launch a scheme on the same principle as the youth training scheme, but could not get the support of the Labour Government. The youth training scheme has been launched and carried through with the support of employers, trade unions and the trainees themselves. The hon. Gentleman's supplementary question is an insult to many trade unionists who have worked hard to make a success of the YTS. I take pride in the increased resources. I do not think that it is disgraceful that we have increased resources to help make a success of the scheme.

Race Relations Act 1976

10. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he is now in a position to announce the date when he will introduce legislation to amend the Race Relations Act 1976 in respect of the code of practice for the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity in employment, published by the Commission for Racial Equality; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is our firm intention, as soon as the parliamentary timetable permits, to amend section 47 of the Race Relations Act 1976 to enable my right hon. Friend to amend codes of practice before their presentation to Parliament for approval.

Mr. Proctor: Is my hon. Friend aware that when our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was Secretary of State for Employment he pledged, shortly before the general election, that amending legislation would be introduced? When will the pledge be redeemed?

Mr. Clark: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is well aware of that pledge and the importance that many of his hon. Friends attach to it. He is particularly aware of the concern that has been expressed by the Select Committee on Employment. As my hon. Friend knows, the CRE will put forward revisions to the code, following a review, within three years, and plainly it is desirable that amending powers should be available by then.

Ms. Clare Short: Will the Minister comment on the leak from his Department, which suggests that the Government are considering exempting businesses in general, and small businesses in particular, from the operation of the Race Relations Act? How does requiring businesses not to treat black people unjustly impose financial obligations on them? Does the real explanation lie in a further leak that has come from his Department, which suggests that in a departmental meeting he referred to the black citizens of Britain as people from Bongo-Bongo land? Does not that remark make him unfit to hold the responsible office that he does?

Mr. Clark: I am delighted to congratulate the hon. Lady on her elevation to the Front Bench, and I look forward to many adversarial confrontations with her. As to her allegation of what is being planned in my Department, I have no knowledge of this.

Skillcentres

12. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations he has had with the Manpower Services Commission about the future of skillcentres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The chairman wrote to my right hon. Friend on 24 January with a full report of the commission's views.

Dr. McDonald: In view of the grave disquiet over the plans to close 29 skillcentres and over growing skill shortages, and as fears have been expressed that this will lead to a decline in the skillcentre training agency, will the Minister urgently arrange for a debate on the matter in the House? Will he further arrange for a stop to be put to the disgraceful plans of the Manpower Services Commission?

Mr. Morrison: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has heard what the hon. Lady has said about a debate. She will no doubt agree that money voted by the House should go on training rather than on bricks and mortar and on supervisors who do not have anybody to train.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. King: As, so far today, another 600 mineworkers have gone back to work, and as the overwhelming view of the House last night was that a negotiated settlement on the basis of uneconomic pit closures had to be reached, can my right hon. Friend confirm that the NACODS agreement is still there for the National Union of Mineworkers to pick up? If the NUM has trouble arriving at an agenda agreeable to it in which the closure of uneconomic pits is item No. 1, can my right hon. Friend use her good offices to make it item No. 2, with "apologies" as item No. 1?

The Prime Minister: I confirm what was said last night. As I have frequently said to the Leader of the Opposition, the strike would be over if the NUM accepted the NACODS agreement and the NACODS approach. I believe that the National Coal Board was right to make the fundamental issue of this strike—the closure of pits on uneconomic grounds—item No. 1 in the agenda. If the NUM would agree to the wording for item No. 1 sent to it by the NCB, negotiations could start.

Mr. Steel: Will the Prime Minister find time today to send a message of congratulations, on behalf of the whole House, to the Archbishop of Canterbury on the success of his envoy through the patient diplomacy in Libya?

The Prime Minister: I gladly join the right hon. Gentleman, the Leader of the Liberal party. The Libyan decision to release the four hostages into Mr. Waite's custody is a welcome development. We are deeply grateful to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and to Mr. Waite for the patience and skill that they have shown in the past few months. We now look to the Libyan authorities to complete quickly the formalities for the early return of the four people to their families in Britain.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the Prime Minister recall that last Thursday she told me on the Floor of the House that she had never predicted that unemployment would start to fall? Does she also recall that in November 1983 she said on the Floor of the House that she hoped to see a "reduction" in unemployment in the coming months? Does she also recall that in December 1983, she said: "Unemployment . . . appears to have peaked"? —[*Official Report*, 8 December 1983; Vol. 50, c. 461.] Will she now be more honest with the House and tell us that unemployment is remorselessly rising? Will she show any remorse for the part that her Government's policies have played in that?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has struggled to find quotations and has been wholly unable to find one that predicted the state of unemployment and gave figures either for the end of a year or for the future. The hon. Gentleman astonishes me. Yes, I do hope that unemployment will fall. I hope that the hon. Gentleman hopes so too.

Q2. **Mr. Neale** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Neale: Has my right hon. Friend noted that retail spending in December was the highest on record in terms of both value and volume? Does she agree that one of the best ways to create more home-based jobs would be to meet that increased demand with home-produced products and services which are both enterprising and competitive, rather than to surrender a substantial part of that demand to our overseas competitors?

The Prime Minister: Yes, retail sales were very high indeed. It shows that there is no shortage of overall demand. I hope that more and more people will buy British goods because they are the best and I hope that more and more manufacturers will realise that the components that they buy can be manufactured just as well in Britain and upon as competitive a basis.

Mr. Kinnock: After another year in which industrial production was down, the pound was down and the trade balance was down, while manufactured imports were up by 10 per cent., interest rates were up by 15 per cent. and the unemployment rate was up by 150,000, was the Chancellor of the Exchequer correctly conveying the Prime Minister's view when he said last night that the Government's strategy "has achieved what it set out to achieve"?

The Prime Minister: The Government's strategy has achieved the lowest inflation for 15 or 16 years, which is absolutely vital, the highest output, which is absolutely vital, and record investment. On top of all that we have honoured our pledges to the pensioners and have achieved a 20 per cent. real increase in the National Health Service. That is far better than the record of the right hon. Gentleman's party.

Mr. Kinnock: We are used to hearing the Prime Minister's tales of recovery.

"To be told that we are in the fourth year of recovery with unemployment at 3½ million is a definition of an economic boom unknown to me."

Those are the words of the Conservative Member of Parliament for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) in the current edition of *Reformer*, the journal of the Tory Reform Group. Its president is the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker). Does the Prime Minister not realise that businesses and managers all over the country take the same view of affairs as her hon. Friend and that her policies and strategies are not an achievement but an act of economic sabotage on a grand scale?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that, he must apply exactly the same strictures to the German economy, which announced today record unemployment of something like 10·4 per cent. Germany also has conscription. It has also sent home a number of its gastarbeiter. What the right hon. Gentleman is refusing to do is to recognise that we are in a technological age and can turn out manufactured goods with far fewer people, and that therefore we have to aim for more employment in the service industries, which are labour-intensive. But that the right hon. Gentleman refuses to do.

Mr. Kinnock: I am most concerned about the real Britain. The three chairmen of chambers of commerce, the Northumbrian branch of the British Institute of Management, the northern region of the Confederation of British Industry and the north-east branch of the Institute of Directors yesterday asked the Prime Minister in *The Times* to engage in a programme of public works. They dismissed the idea of income tax cuts as a way to promote recovery and asked the Prime Minister to do something now to bring down unemployment. The hon. Friends of the Prime Minister are telling her that, business men and managers are telling her that, we are telling her that. Why does not the Prime Minister listen and learn and change her policies?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman were to look at the CBI forecast he would find that it is optimistic and confident and that both industry and trade, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) said—with record sales, record output, record investment and rising profits—are well pleased.

Q3. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: What reassurance can my right hon. Friend give to my constituents on airports policy following last week's debate? Can she confirm that it remains Government policy not to build a fifth terminal at Heathrow and to introduce the 275,000 air traffic movements limit when the fourth terminal is opened later this year?

The Prime Minister: I realise that my hon. Friend has a constituency interest in this, but I am sure he will understand that it would be best for me to make no further comment whatever until the Government have considered everything that has been said and decided what policy to bring before the House for its approval.

Q4. **Mr. Frank Cook** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cook: Will the Prime Minister afford the Chamber some time this afternoon to explain how it is that Sarah Tisdall could be subjected to Government-inspired charges for circulating a somewhat unclassified document, while much more senior officials are to be allowed to give evidence to the Australian Royal Commission on nuclear testing and yet be exempted from perjury? Will she explain how one person can be imprisoned for telling the truth while others can be let off scot-free for telling lies under oath? Will she explain whether, when she refers to law and order, she is referring to her law and order or Parliament's?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept the premise in the hon. Gentleman's question. Prosecutions are not a matter for Her Majesty's Government, as the hon. Gentleman knows full well. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will think it right that we should give every assistance possible to the Australian commission of inquiry. That is what we are doing.

Q5. **Mr. Fox** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fox: Will my right hon. Friend accept that, following the opening of the border between Gibraltar and Spain, a cloud hung over the ceremony—the issue of sovereignty? Will she take the opportunity today to reassure our friends in Gibraltar that their views on that issue will be paramount?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the opening of the border between Gibraltar and Spain today was generally welcomed, but I understand the purpose of my hon. Friend's question. Let me make it clear that the statement of 27 November 1984 underlined Her Majesty's Government's intention fully to maintain their commitment to honour the freely and democratically expressed wishes of the people of Gibraltar, as set out in the preamble to the Gibraltar constitution of 1969. As my hon. Friend says, Her Majesty's Government have given assurances to the people of Gibraltar that Gibraltar will remain part of Her Majesty's dominions unless and until an Act of Parliament provides otherwise, and, furthermore, that Her Majesty's Government will never enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition may not take much notice of that; we cherish the freedom of the people of Gibraltar to decide their future.

Q6. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hardy: Will the right hon. Lady agree that since she took office as Prime Minister her Government have received £50,000 million in revenue from offshore activity? What has the country to show for it?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to the economic debate that we had the other day

he would have heard the point made — I thought effectively—that when we no longer have the North sea oil assets it will be vital to have replaced them by other income-producing assets. When we came to power we had £15 billion worth of assets overseas. We now have £70 billion worth, sufficient to give us a goodly income now and in future years.

Q7. **Mr. Heddle** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Heddle: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to consider the position of local councils which have lent on mortgage £4,000 million over 15, 20 or 25 years? Would it not be better if those local councils made that money available to building societies and other financial institutions and so re-invested the money in rehabilitation, modernisation and improvement of the 23,500 houses which they have left empty for more than 12 months?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I believe that my hon. Friend is right. I notice that he has tabled a question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about some of the complexities of what would emerge from such a policy, and I shall leave my right hon. Friend to answer that in fuller detail.

Sub Judice Rule

3.31 pm

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On 28 January the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised with you a point of order concerning the remarks of a Member of another place about the pending case of Osprey *v.* British Shipbuilders. He quoted the following remarks of Admiral Hill-Norton:

"'One cannot help feeling that, like the Clive Ponting case, they are doing it to suppress something which may be damaging to the reputation of Government Ministers and officials. The whole thing stinks'." — [*Official Report*, 28 January 1985; Vol. 72, c. 36.]

He sought your ruling on the matter and you replied that you would certainly do that. I understand that you have written to the hon. Member, but you have not ruled in the House.

First, it is presumably not a matter for you what a Member of another place says, but what is a matter for you, I submit with respect, is whether the fact that this case is not yet set down for trial enables us in this House to ask questions about the background to the case. Perhaps you would also comment on the leader in *The Times* this morning and say whether it has got the sub judice rule right, as I believe it has.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) did raise that point of order on Monday of last week. He asked me to reflect upon the issues raised in the comments made publicly by a Member of another place on matters at present before the courts of law. I went into the matter in great detail and I wrote to the hon. Member giving my conclusions. There was nothing secret about what I wrote. Nevertheless, when I write letters to hon. Members I do not expect copies to be given to the press, at any rate not without my authority. I must say in fairness to the hon. Member for Linlithgow that he has apologised for doing that.

So that there should be no ambiguity about the matter, I will arrange for the publication of my letter in *Hansard*, in accordance with the statement made by my predecessor on 5 November 1981 about the publication of private rulings from the Chair.

Mr. Steel: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The point on which I am asking you to rule is whether it is correct that it is open to hon. Members to ask questions relating to this case until such time as it is set down for trial.

Mr. Speaker: I think it would be wise for the right hon. Member, and indeed for the House, to see my letter in detail. I will say this in clarification. Matters awaiting or under adjudication in a civil court may not be referred to from the time that the case has been set down for trial or otherwise brought before the court. The Select Committee of 1971-72 drew this point to the attention of the House when it said that the House should not expect to see documents in the possession of the court and that the House should be aware of the power of the court over the disclosure of documents submitted to it.

I remind the House that it remains open to any Member to pursue general points about the discovery of documents or in camera heatings in any parliamentary way open to him. Indeed, several hon. Members have already used these procedures.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. While I do not want to prolong matters, may I ask how a Member can know when a case has been set down for trial, it being a matter between the solicitors on both sides?

Mr. Speaker: There are means of finding that out.

Mr. Ryman: There are?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is a lawyer. He should know.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said that you did not expect private letters written to hon. Members to find their way to the press. May I have an assurance that once you have retired from your present job the details of any private conversations that you have had with hon. Members will not, certainly until 30 years are up, find their way into various publications? Although I had no objection to two private conversations of mine finding their way into a book, I raise the matter because the principle involved should be of concern to the House.

Mr. Speaker: I know to what the hon. Member is referring, but it is not a matter for me. It may be of comfort to the House to know that I have no intention of writing anything.

Prime Minister's Question Time

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. At Question Time today a question was asked of the Prime Minister about Gibraltar. It may or may not have been what is commonly known as a plant. Whether or not it was, it had all the appearance of one. More important is the fact that a carefully prepared lengthy statement was read by the Prime Minister in reply to that question. We recognise that inevitably the right hon. Lady must carry voluminous notes with her. On this occasion, however, she read that statement from beginning to end in what was precious Back Benchers' time. Was that not an abuse of the House?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must say, in fairness to the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Fox), whose question it was, that, although I have heard of the planted question theory, I know nothing about it.

Members of Parliament (Lobbying by Constituents)

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your advice on the important matter of the right of individuals to approach their Members of Parliament in the House. You will be aware that at Question Time I attempted to ask the Secretary of State for Employment about the rights of employees of his Department to approach this House next week to protest about redundancies and closures. I have been told that, even if they come here to lobby their Members of Parliament in their own time, they will be threatened with the Industrial Relations Act. How can we seek to defend the rights of people who wish to see their Members of Parliament about the Government's actions?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that that is a matter for me.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). Although I recognise the force of your view, Mr. Speaker, that the approach by citizens to this place to see their Members of Parliament may not directly be a matter for you, the right of citizens to come here to see their Members of Parliament has been a jealously guarded privilege of simply being a citizen of this democracy. If, by virtue of the employment of people, the Government are able to threaten them with action as a consequence of their coming here in their own leave time to lobby Members of Parliament, to whom should those people go for protection in respect of what is perceived to be a basic right to come here to lobby Members of Parliament? Your guidance on this issue would be appreciated, Mr. Speaker, otherwise we shall be in the extraordinary position of having a Government as an employer seriously impeding by threats the right of people to see their Members of Parliament at Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: I fully accept that there is a right on the part of citizens to lobby their Members of Parliament, but whether they are given leave to do so cannot be a matter on which I can be held responsible. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman suggests otherwise. If he is suggesting that privilege is involved, he should write to me in the usual way and I shall certainly consider the matter.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Before you give a ruling on this matter, Mr. Speaker, may I ask you to read the report of the Committee of Privileges of 1940, which sets out that a serving officer approached Captain Duncan Sandys, who was then a Member, with information about deficiencies in the nation's defences, as a result of which the War Office took action to prosecute the officer concerned. The Committee of Privileges took up the matter, interrogated the then Prime Minister, and reported that any matter brought by a citizen to a Member of Parliament with a view to action in the House was itself privileged. That was an important judgment 45 years ago and is directly relevant to the issue which my right hon. Friend has brought to the attention of the House. It would be a terrible thing, Mr. Speaker, if in an aside you were to cast off the privilege——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is intolerable that the right hon. Gentleman should seek to prejudice any consideration that I may give to this matter. I shall look into it in the greatest detail. I resent it that the right hon. Gentleman should take the view that I propose to cast privilege aside.

Mr. Benn: With the greatest respect, I was making no such implication, Mr. Speaker. You said, Mr. Speaker, that a question of of privilege might be raised. I took up that point and observed quite correctly, because I remember the case very well, that the House ruled that it was a privilege of a Member to receive information from his constituents with a view to action being taken. I said that it would be a bad thing if that precedent were cast aside. I was casting no implication or reflection upon your ruling. I made my remarks in defence of those who come to Parliament for justice, a right which it should be the duty of the House to uphold.

Mr. Speaker: If the right hon. Gentleman reads the report of these exchanges in *Hansard* tomorrow, he will find that that is exactly what I said. I said that there is a right of citizens to come to this place. I said also that I would look into the matter. As I understand it, the right hon. Gentleman may raise the issue as a matter of privilege. In that event I shall look into it most carefully.

BILL PRESENTED

Insurance Fees

Mr. Secretary Tebbit, supported by Mr. Ian Stewart, Mr. Paul Channon and Mr. Alex Fletcher, presented a Bill to provide for the payment of certain fees by insurance companies and the Council of Lloyd's : And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 74.]

Freedom of Probate

3.43 pm

Mr. Ken Weetch (Ipswich): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Solicitors Act 1974, as it applies to England and Wales, to enable approved trust corporations to apply for grants of representation to the estates of deceased persons in certain non-contentious cases without the intervention of a solicitor.

The Bill is a simple and limited measure, but it has important and beneficial implications. It seeks to bring about a simplification of, and improvement in, the procedures for obtaining grants of representation, the most important of which relates to applications for probate. Essentially, the main purpose of the Bill is to amend section 23 of the Solicitors Act 1974 in a way that will eliminate a restrictive practice which at present has statutory authority.

Every year thousands of people wish their wills to be executed by trust corporations. Usually, these are departments of banks and insurance companies which specialise in executor and trustee work. Many of these institutions are household names in the business and commercial world. When they act on instructions as executors or administrators, it can be said that they have generations of experience, expertise and specialist knowledge, and financial probity which is beyond doubt.

Unfortunately, when acting as executors or administrators under a will, trust corporations are obstructed by two restrictive practices which have statutory authority —the Non-Contentious Probate Rules 1954 and section 23 of that haven of restrictive practices, the Solicitors Act 1974.

In simple terms, trust corporations in thousands of cases do all the time-consuming and complex work involved in executing a will. For example, they can construct a balance of assets and liabilities, undertake all correspondence, make allocations to beneficiaries and settle most complex tax matters. In a sentence, they can do all the real work. The only thing that they are not allowed to do is to prepare the application form, which is a simple exercise. They are prevented from posting the application to the probate registry to be dealt with, which is an exercise even more simple than the first. Although this is one of the simplest tasks of all, and is straightforward clerical work once the details have been supplied, according to section 23 of the Solicitors Act the work must be completed, and the application made, by a solicitor. The solicitor's task is confined to copying information provided and posting the application.

All that is totally needless and indefensible. It is also expensive. If officials of the trust departments could make simple applications themselves, in an average case the consumer would be saved between £100 and £150. This would happen time and time again. The unnecessary framework of correspondence could be avoided, time could be saved and beneficiaries could receive more quickly what was due to them.

The Bill recommends nothing that is new in principle. The ground has already been well researched and explored from consumer and legal angles. The whole matter was investigated by the Royal Commission on legal services. Recommendation 19.3 reads:

"Trust corporations should be permitted, in non-contentious cases, to apply for grants of probate without retaining a solicitor for the purpose."

Substantially the same recommendation was made by the National Consumer Council in its report on banking services and the consumer. I refer the House to section 11 of the report on executor and trustee services.

In recent years professional services have been brought under critical scrutiny by many people, including the present Government, and not before time. Some of the worst restrictive practices are within the framework of professional organisations in one form or another. The Bill continues this process of scrutiny. If the measure becomes operative, it will make dealing with probate matters in the circumstances that I have described cheaper, more cost-effective and quicker. The Bill promotes legitimate competition for the consumer.

Although the Bill represents a limited reform, it breaks an undesirable monopoly and a restrictive practice. It is the first step along the way to reform and improvement in a complex part of consumer affairs. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ken Weetch, Mr. Austin Mitchell, Mr. Robin Corbett, Mr. Robert McCrindle and Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth.

FREEDOM OF PROBATE

Mr. Ken Weetch accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Solicitors Act 1974, as it applies to England and Wales, to enable approved trust corporations to apply for grants of representation to the estates of deceased persons in certain non-contentious cases without the intervention of a solicitor: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 May and to be printed. [Bill 75.]

Orders of the Day

Films Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 1

FINAL PAYMENTS BY BRITISH FILM FUND AGENCY

'(1) Where the British Film Fund Agency receive any amount from the Secretary of State in accordance with section 3(2A), that amount shall be added to the moneys available for distribution by the Agency under the distribution regulations in respect of the final distribution period.

(2) With the consent of the Secretary of State payments under the distribution regulations in respect of the final distribution period may be made by the Agency after the date by which they would otherwise have been required to be made by virtue of the regulations.

(3) Where—

(a) any claim made under the distribution regulations or any corresponding earlier regulations has been accepted by the Agency and they have allocated an amount for the payment of that claim; but

(b) owing to any lack of information relating to the claimant, or owing to any other circumstances outside their control, they have been unable to secure the payment to the claimant of that amount,

they shall take such steps as they consider appropriate for the purpose of facilitating the securing of that result.

(4) Where the Agency take such steps as are mentioned in subsection (3) with respect to any claim but are nevertheless unable to secure the payment to the claimant of the amount in question before the relevant date, the Agency shall on that date discount the claim for the purposes of the distribution regulations, and the amount in question shall—

(a) in the case of a claim in respect of a period other than the final distribution period, be added to the moneys available for distribution by the Agency under the distribution regulations in respect of the final distribution period;

(b) in the case of a claim in respect of the final distribution period, be paid to the Secretary of State to be dealt with by him as if it were an amount received by him as mentioned in section 3(2)*(b)*.

(5) In subsection (4) "the relevant date", in relation to a claim falling within paragraphs *(a)* or *(b)* of that subsection means such date as may be fixed by the Secretary of State for the purposes of that paragraph; and that date may—

(a) in the case of paragraph *(a)*, be earlier than the date by which payments in respect of the period immediately preceding the final distribution period are required to be made by virtue of the distribution regulations;

(b) in the case of paragraph *(b)*, be earlier than the date by which payments in respect of the final distribution period are so required to be made.

(6) In this section "the distribution regulations" and "the final distribution period" have the meaning given by section 2(1) (but subject to section 24(4)*(b)*.)'—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.50 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Lamont): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 3, 4 and 8.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether I could raise now, so that you can consider it rather than at the last moment, when we reach it, your ruling, as shown on the selection list, that amendment No. 7, to which I have put my name, and amendment No. 32, which appears two amendments later, should be taken separately. It may not be apparent, but many of the points that I wish to make on amendment No. 7 are relevant to and overlap those in amendment No. 32. I wonder whether, for discussion purposes, you would rather consider taking the two together.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to support the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst). It may well be for the convenience of the House if the debates were taken together in that way.

Mr. Speaker: Is the Minister happy about that?

Mr. Norman Lamont: I hope that this will not be the only time this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, that there will be a degree of consensus on something. What has been suggested would be the logical thing to do.

Mr. Speaker: If the House agrees, that is admirable. We shall take the debate on amendment No. 7 and link it with the debate on amendment No. 32.

Mr. Lamont: Essentially two purposes are served by the new clause. The first purpose is achieved by subsection (1), which deals with the distribution by the British Film Fund Agency of the surplus funds of the National Film Finance Corporation. When the NFFC is dissolved, its forward commitments—that is, its contractual obligations to provide finance for particular films together with enough of its cash to meet them—will be transferred to the "son of the NFFC" or, as the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) may have noticed from the newspapers, the British Screen Finance Consortium as it is now called. It is likely that that will still leave a significant surplus of assets. As the hon. Gentleman will recall from Committee, it is the Government's intention that that surplus should be transferred to the BFFA and distributed by the agency to the makers of eligible films in the same proportion as that paid in the final distribution period to the makers of eligible films out of moneys deriving from the levy.

The amount payable in respect of any one film, when aggregrated with the sums due from the levy, will not exceed the normal amount specified in regulation 6(3) of the distribution regulations—£500 million for films of over 33 minutes and £50,000 in all other cases. We believe that the new clause represents the fairest and most sensible way of disposing of those assets by ensuring that they return to the industry in accordance with the Eady pattern.

The second purpose, which is achieved by subsections (3) and (4), is to absolve the BFFA from any potential liability in respect of moneys held by the agency which have not been paid to potential recipients for a variety of reasons. The current duty of the BFFA is set out in regulation 4 of the Film (Distribution of Levy) Regulations 1982, which reads:

"The British Film Fund Agency . . . shall make payments in accordance with the provisions of these Regulations, out of moneys available for distribution, to the makers of eligible films in respect of those films."

The procedure for making claims on the fund is set out in regulation 11. By regulation 11(4) the agency can require supporting certificates or further information to be provided. However surprising it may seem, there are cases each year when potential recipients of Eady money fail to comply with the regulations of fail to cash cheques sent to them by the BFFA, and in the legislation we need to make provision for such cases. Subsections (3) and (4) of the

[Mr. Lamont]

new clause provide that any claimant who has failed to notify the agency of a change of name or registered address, or who has failed to accept any moneys paid to him by the agency, shall, after a period to be fixed by the Secretary of State, be debarred from claiming his money.

Subsection (5) of the new clause is concerned with the time limits to be placed on payments to be made by the agency. Our intention is that the payment allocated by the BFFA should be taken up within two months of the penultimate distribution payment. If it was not, it would be forfeited and the money would be added to the sum to be distributed by the BFFA in the final distribution period.

With regard to claims relating to the final distribution period, the intention is that the potential recipients will have two months from the termination of the levy in which to make their claims and to comply with any requirements set by the BFFA. If the BFFA accepts a claim and allocates a payment in the final distribution, that payment will have to be taken up within two months of the final distribution being made.

If, as is possible, there is still some money left at the end of the final period which the BFFA has been unable to dispose of in that way, we intend that it should be vested in the Secretary of State, who shall deal with it as he thinks fit for any purpose connected with the British film industry. Such sums are likely to be very small.

I hope that hon. Members will agree that this sensible and technical new clause is desirable and will support it.

Mr. Gould: I thank the Minister for that explanation of what he correctly described as a technical new clause and body of amendments. We do not intend to detain the House on this matter. We accept that, for good and practical reasons, the Eady levy has gone, and that inevitably there will be transitional problems to be cleared away because of the statutory duties at present imposed upon the NFFC and the BFFA.

As I understand it, the Minister is trying to make room for more discretion and flexibility on the part of the BFFA, both in respect of what it might do with any surplus and what the Minister might do with assets from the NFFC which might not be passed over to the consortium under clause 2. We accept that these are technical matters, and we are content to accept the new clause.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I might have done well to give the explanation in my own words in the first place. We are simply allowing the BFFA to distribute the surplus within the NFFC to the makers of films in accordance with the formula of the BFFA. The son of NFFC has its own separate arrangements. The Committee heard about them. It will be given its money. However, surplus assets within the NFFC are to be distributed to film makers, when it is dissolved, according to the formula which has applied in the past via the BFFA. We need to amend the legislation rather than the regulations relating to the BFFA, so that money given to it by the Secretary of State can be distributed in that way.

On reflection, my own explanation is the better of the two.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 2

PROVISIONS RELATING TO TERMINATION OF LEVY ON FILM EXHIBITORS

Mr. Norman Lamont: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 5, at end insert—

'(1A) In relation to the final levy period section 2(3) of the 1981 Act (minimum and maximum amounts to be yielded by way of levy in respect of each levy period) shall have effect as if for "neither less than £2 million nor more than £12 million" there were substituted "not more than £12 million".'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 2.

Mr. Lamont: The amendment removes the requirement in section 2(3) of the Film Levy Finance Act 1981 that the Eady levy must not be less than £2 million annually. The purpose of the amendment is to enable us to fulfil the commitment that we gave in Committee that the Eady levy would cease at the earliest possible opportunity, consistent with commitments made to Eady beneficiaries. I remind hon. Members that current recipients of Eady levy funds include the National Film and Television School and the British Film Institute Production Board. There is also a statutory obligation for a pro-rata payment to be made to the National Film Finance Corporation.

As I said on Second Reading and in Committee, we consider that the Eady levy is an increasing burden on cinemas, and it is our intention to end it as soon as possible. However, the commitments that I have outlined must be met. While on the basis of past experience we cannot forecast with precision the rate of build-up of levy receipts, nor therefore the date when sufficient sums will be available to meet those commitments, we see no advantage in requiring the yield in the final levy period to be higher than absolutely necessary.

4 pm

There is widespread sympathy for the plight of the cinema sector and general agreement that the Eady levy should be ended quickly. The amendment will facilitate that process. It will enable us to end the levy more quickly while honouring our commitments. Therefore, I commend it to the House.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his statement. When I tabled amendments to persuade the Secretary of State to scrap the Eady levy as early as possible, he promised that that would be achieved and that the amendments were unnecessary. We have now a happy compromise, as long as the commitment to scrap the Eady levy remains. The period set down in the Bill is still too long. I would have preferred a shorter period. I hope that the Secretary of State will exercise his option at the earliest convenience.

We should not leave this part of the Bill without saying that the Eady levy has been destructive to the cinema industry in taking away much needed finance for the improvement of cinemas. Great tribute should be paid to cinema owners for trying greatly to improve the facilities, to make the public feel that the cinema is more attractive than it has been for 30 years, and to bring them back to the places where films should be seen. No one who has

seen films on television can say other than that when a film is shown in a cinema, its scope, sound, vision and colour is improved, as is the experience of seeing it.

I should be grateful if the Secretary of State will exercise his option as soon as possible to ensure that more people are encouraged back to the cinema to see films as they should be shown.

Mr. Gould: I cannot fully endorse the strictures of the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on the effects of the Eady levy on the cinema industry. I would have more sympathy for his point if there were genuine evidence that the money that the cinema exhibitors were going to save through not having to pay the levy would be channelled back into the refurbishment of cinemas. He may be able to assure me that he believes that to be the case. Unfortunately, I see little evidence that we can be as sanguine as that.

On the other hand, I entirely accept his point that the attraction back of cinema audiences is by no means a lost cause, as the experience of French cinema proprietors has shown recently. Therefore, I hope that, whether or not they are exempt from the levy, cinema exhibitors will try their utmost through the refurbishing of cinemas and perhaps lower prices to attract audiences back to cinemas.

I accept the Minister's statement that these are essentially technical amendments to overcome some of the transitional problems. Given that we see no issue of principle in the abolition of the Eady levy at present, at least in terms of the simple disappearance of the levy, we are content to accept the amendment.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) for what he said. I agree with what he said. It is our intention that the levy should be ended as soon as possible, because it has been a great burden on cinemas. During our proceedings we have sometimes concentrated too much on the problems of the film industry, without considering how they relate to the cinema industry. Without a flourishing theatrical exhibition industry, there is a great problem for the film industry. The rate at which cinemas are closing is truly alarming. That is a problem not just in itself, but in maintaining a British film industry, which is extremely important.

I understand the reservations of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). However, when he says that he hopes that seat prices will be reduced as a result of the removal of the Eady levy, I hope that he is not under any illusion about the state of the finances of the cinema industry. That is the problem. We hear a lot about the domination of Thorn-EMI and Rank, but even Rank cinemas are hardly a gold mine. To be honest with the House, I must say that it will be a struggle to maintain the cinema industry in the United Kingdom. We want to maintain it. The Government are doing everything that they can, but we should not be other than hard-headed and realistic about the problems that it faces.

Mr. Gould: I do not doubt for a moment the financial precariousness of cinema exhibition. I hoped to show that the way forward did not necessarily lie in constantly increasing prices while failing to invest in cinemas. I hope that cinema proprietors may take to heart the lessons learnt in France, the United States and elsewhere—that better cinemas and lower admission prices can substantially increase audiences.

Mr. Lamont: I agree with that; but to reinvest in cinemas one must be either earning or have a good prospect of earning profits. The hon. Gentleman referred to what has happened in France. However, cinema attendances are different in different countries. It is not easy to explain why the pattern of decline is different in the United States or in France from the United Kingdom. Given the precariousness of the finances of the cinema industry in the United Kingdom, we should be extremely careful before we are too critical of it.

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): First, congratulations are in order. The Government have been forthcoming. We urged them to adopt the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the barring question. It is a good thing that independent cinemas, such as those in Glasgow and Manchester, will now have the opportunity to have films earlier than they would normally have them. I should have thought that the Government might say to cinemas in those areas that, because they are to have pictures earlier than normal and because the Eady levy is being removed, they should adopt a policy of reducing admission prices and do more than they are doing at present. They could refurbish their cinemas and attract more people to them, and see, during the experimental perod of 12 months, whether that works. If they do that during the experimental period, we may be able to judge whether it is a good thing for the industry. It would be worth while if the Minister applied his mind to that aspect, given the Government's response to the pressure from both sides of the House to adopt the MMC's report.

Mr. Hanley: I wonder whether the House is aware that throughout British Film Year the ABC, Odeon and Cannon Classic chains are spending £1 million a month on refurbishing British cinemas, irrespective of falling attendances and even before the Eady levy is finally dead and buried. Therefore, the commitment to the cinema industry by organisations which must satisfy shareholders is great. That commitment can only increase if the Eady levy is scrapped as soon as possible.

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) for drawing attention to that fact. In recognition of British Film Year, companies such as Thorn-EMI are investing in their cinemas. As everyone has agreed, a circular problem with the cinema industry is that declining attendances have been accompanied by poor facilities, and poor facilities have led to a further decline in attendances. It is welcome news that Thorn-EMI believes that the present position of that section of the industry is not irreversible.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) for what he said about our response to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report and the experiment that will be carried out in two cities. We are going rather wide of the amendment—I imagine that this matter will be discussed on Third Reading—but I agree with what Opposition Members said about competition in the exhibition sector. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) is right. Had there been more competition in the exhibition sector during the past 20 or 30 years, the state of the cinema industry might be different today. If it had been easier in the past for entrepreneurs and independent cinema operators to enter that sector, the present position of the industry may have been very different.

[Mr. Lamont]

However, as the Minister responsible for such matters, I must deal with the present position. If any hon. Member were tempted to ask, "Why only an experiment?", I would have to reply, "Because even with Thorn-EMI and Rank I must consider the finances of their cinemas, and an experiment is the most sensible way of proceeding in the present state of finances." On the basis of what has happened in those two areas, we shall see the effect on independent cinemas and make decisions of value to the exhibition sector as a whole. However, the MMC report and our experiment are important points.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 2 in page 2, line 6, leave out 'the final levy period section 4 of the 1981'
and insert
'that period section 4 of that'.

No. 3, in page 2, line 16, leave out subsection (3).

No. 4, in page 2, line 32, leave out 'this section' and insert
'section *(Final Payments by British Film Fund Agency)*'.— *[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Mr. Norman Lamont: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 2, line 39, leave out from 'order' to end of line 44.

Hon. Members will not be surprised to learn that the Government consider it necessary to remove the provision, which was inserted in Committee, that the ITV companies and the BBC should be levied on the basis of audience figures for the films that they broadcast. The Government's position on this important matter was made clear in the lengthy debate in Committee, but I wish to go over some of the points again and to explain why we believe it right to remove this provision.

I shall deal later with the practical arguments against imposing a levy on television, but first I shall deal with the principle. When the provision was inserted by the Committee, against the Government's advice, it was one of several amendments embodying in one form or another the principle of a levy. Some were directed at a levy on video tapes, whether blank or pre-recorded, some were based on the principle of compensating the copyright owner, and others were concerned with replacing the Eady levy as a mechanism for filling a production fund to finance new films or even to support the National Film and Television School. The amendment that attracted most support, or least opposition, was the provision now incorporated in clause 2(5). It proposes that a levy should be imposed on the BBC and ITV companies to recompense film makers whose films are shown on television on a basis that is related to the number of viewers who watch those films.

Underlying the proposition is an assumption, or perhaps an assertion, that the BBC and ITV pay too little for the films that they show. The argument is that if millions of people watch a film on television the price paid by the broadcaster should reflect the size of that audience, at a level closer to the film industry's assessment of what the film is worth—in other words, the seller's valuation should prevail. The advocates of the proposition argue that the prices paid for films are too low because of the so-called duopoly of the BBC and ITV.

The recent publicity about the purchase of "Dallas" by Thames Television has, it is claimed, revealed the existence of a gentleman's agreement between the BBC and ITV, and that is said to support the view that the broadcasters, through their duopoly, can depress the cost of the programmes that they buy. Whatever may be the case with a television series, whether a new one or one that has already been shown in Britain, I do not believe that the "Dallas" episode is relevant to our discussion, which is concerned with the purchase of feature films.

4.15 pm

The BBC and ITV have represented a duopoly, in that, until recently, they were the only television channels available. But that is changing, with Channel 4 and its impact on film making, and the introduction of DBS and cable television. I have yet to be convinced that those negotiating with the BBC and ITV companies cannot fight their own corners effectively without the state lumbering to the rescue, brandishing a cumbersome and unwieldy levy as a blunt instrument. We must accept that some films will, in their nature, be more attractive to one channel than to the other, and in such cases there will be only one effective buyer. Some films will be regarded as unacceptable for showing on television, but the majority are films that both channels would be happy to broadcast and, therefore, there is competition for them. With the advent of cable television and satellite broadcasting, the duopoly argument, flimsy though it was, begins to diminish. I am not persuaded that we need an artificial statutory recycling mechanism in a market which, whatever its limitations, is capable of operating without the distortion that would be introduced by a levy.

Leaving aside the question of principle, this provision raises several practical problems. One of the first questions is, how should we fix the amount of the levy? Presumably we must start at the other end and ask, "How much do we want to raise," and then spread it over the number of viewings. But viewings of what? The clause refers to feature films, but should we include films whose producers have retired from the industry or who are no longer alive? If so, it is difficult to see what benefit the provision would produce in terms of film production. Indeed, we must face the fact that the vast majority of films shown on television are foreign films, mainly American.

Mr. Gorst: Is my hon. Friend aware that if the considerations that he is now enumerating had been discussed when the Eady levy was introduced any competent civil servant would have disposed of them almost as quickly as the Minister is enumerating them now?

Mr. Lamont: I am not sure that the Eady levy was such an outstanding success. Indeed, the Bill is removing the Eady levy because of its effect on the cinema. I have not yet deployed the important argument that a levy would have a significant impact on the amount of money that the BBC and ITV companies could devote to film production.

Mr. Gorst: May I help my hon. Friend on his point about the success or failure of the Eady levy? It is extraordinary that the levy has lasted through one Government after another for decades, if what I infer from my hon. Friend's comments about its failure is true. It is going now because cinema attendances have fallen and it has outlived its purpose.

Mr. Lamont: Many would think that it would have been better to have removed the Eady levy some time ago. I cannot see that it has done anything but harm to the cinema in recent years.

My hon. Friend, in his two interventions, has slightly shifted his ground because he started our interchange by discussing the practical problems rather than the principle. I was about to say that, in addition to the principle, I think that there are these practical problems. One of them—and this is again a parallel with the Eady provisions—is that many, if not most, film makers, if by that is meant the producers, have often signed away their television rights to distributors. My hon. Friend, who is expert in these matters, will know that that is what happened in many cases with the Eady levy. Film producers signed away their rights and the Eady levy proceeds in some cases did not go to the people for whom they were intended by legislation. Thus the proceeds of the levy might not be payable in most cases if the producers have not retained their television rights.

Should we assume that we are meant to consider only films originally intended for theatrical release? If so, that would exempt made-for-television films, notwithstanding that their mode of manufacture is not easily distinguished from cinema film making. How would we treat films such as those financed by Channel 4 with cinema and television exhibition in mind? A film like "The Draughtsman's Contract" comes to mind immediately.

Even if it is possible to devise some definition of film that suits everybody, that still leaves the problem of assessing how much should be levied on the films in question. The provision proposes that the levy should be based on the numbers of viewers watching the film, but this is by no means as simple as it sounds. For one thing, there is no reason that a film shown in the afternoon should be given the same value per audience number as something shown at peak time. If we are to take account of this, not only must we introduce a system requiring extensive calculations relating to the levy on each film to the audience that watched it, having further identified which films are levyable, but we must weight the audience numbers according to the time of day when the film was shown, and this is surely not sensible.

Mr. Tim Brinton (Gravesham): On the narrow point in which my hon. Friend asserted that there was no reason that a film shown in the afternoon should have the same levy put on it as one shown in the evening at peak time, surely this is right because the afternoon audience is smaller than the evening audience. It is therefore perfectly equitable.

Mr. Lamont: I merely said that this is a point that can be argued. There are people who agree with my hon. Friend, and obviously this is the basis on which advertising fees are negotiated. If it is to be weighted in this way, some people think that it raises considerable complications. That is my only point. I do not wish to come down on either side of the argument because I am not in favour of the levy anyway. This question has to be resolved and, if it is resolved in a particular way, it raises considerable complications.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): My hon. Friend deploys the argument beautifully, but he must be aware that the muliplicity of calculations is no argument at all. It is a calculation that is made every time a television commercial is shown for repeat fee purposes. There are infinitely more commercials shown on television than even the number of feature films.

Mr. Lamont: My objection, as I have made crystal clear, is based upon principle as well as on what might be thought of as practical difficulties.

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend said that another difficulty is the definition of a film—what exactly is a film in this context? I submit that it is surely anything that must receive a British Board of Film Censors certificate.

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is obviously able to solve this problem just like that. If there were to be a levy, my hon. Friend would be an admirable person to implement it. These questions have to be addressed. As I have said, my main objection concerns not the practicality but the principle of the matter. I wish to outline some of the questions that have to be addressed.

Would it not be simpler then, if some of my hon. Friends' arguments are to be followed, to charge the BBC and the independent television companies a sum related to the number of films shown, or should we not cut through all the complication, make it simpler still and ask them all for a compulsory contribution to a film production fund, perhaps £5 million each? After all, it seems to me that it does not matter how crude or sophisticated we make the basis of the levy if the end in sight is the same—to squeeze money out of television to finance a film production fund. That is what it is all about. At least it would have the twin merits of administrative simplicity to collect and of concentrating the proceeds on the British film industry. But there remains the interesting question of how and by whom the spoils should be divided.

The results of any levy scheme—and I think that this is an important and central point—must be to reduce the funds available from the BBC and ITV. The BBC's income is finite, limited for the most part to the income from the licence fee. A surcharge on the cost of films must therefore mean reductions elsewhere. This would probably be true also of the ITV companies. The most likely result is a reduction of what the channels would be prepared to pay to buy levyable films; otherwise the cuts would probably fall upon the most expensive television programmes — drama programmes. Thus, helping the film producers might be at the expense of those — directors, technicians and actors—working in television.

Any cuts would also be likely to fall on work commissioned from independent producers, which none of us would want. Instead of promoting an outward-looking approach to film and cinema by television, a levy seems likely to have the opposite effect.

Alan Howden, who is the BBC's general manager for programme acquisition, offered some interesting and relevant observations in a recent article in the journal *Broadcast*. He accepted that, as has been alleged, many films are purchased cheaply, but pointed out that they are often old material for use during the day and late at night. He said:

> "They are there because they are cheap; if they were subject to levy we would have to replace them with other cheap imported material".

On the other hand, even routine feature films are bought at high prices when compared with other purchased material such as American series, despite the fact that

[Mr. Lamont]

films rarely command the huge audiences that they once did, and are nearly always beaten in the audience ratings figures by programmes like "Coronation Street".

Mr. Howden gives a gloomy but I think realistic forecast of what would happen if a levy were introduced. He said that films

"would be swept away in favour of old American television and other imports; purchases of new films would be cut back; prices would be pushed down to offset the levy wherever possible and the net return to the film industry would almost certainly be reduced".

I cannot believe that that is what hon. Members want. In my view, it is necessary for those who are in favour of the levy to demonstrate that imposing this extra impost on the companies or on BBC television will not result in a reduction in the resources devoted to film making by the companies or by the BBC or merely an increase in imported material. We hear constantly about the cheapness of American imported material. I recall that Sir Ian Trethowan and others who appeared before a Select Committee of the House referred to the cheapness of American material that they could use. If we are to have this levy, it is up to hon. Members who wish to support it to demonstrate the need for it. I have not heard any argument that has demonstrated to me that that would not be the inevitable consequence of imposing such a levy.

Mr. Gorst: I remind my hon. Friend that many films —the Bond films are an example—are shown time and again on television. I cannot think of the number of times that my children have watched "Towering Inferno", for example. I invite my hon. Friend to agree with me that the fact that they are shown so often is not necessarily because they are cheap but because there is a demand to see them time and again. I invite my hon. Friend to contrast that with the present situation in which the BBC and ITV are pouring money into certain programmes. These programmes are not repeated anything like a similar number of times. That must have something to do with popularity and with the fact that the BBC and ITV purchasers are unwilling to pay a fair price for something which is attractive to the audience.

4.30 pm

Mr. Lamont: That is true. My hon. Friend refers to the popularity of films, particularly the Bond films. However, unfortunately, the popularity of those films and the proportion of television time that they take is falling. We have been told again and again by the BBC and ITV companies that the proportion of television time for films is falling. I am a great watcher of the Bond films, which my hon. Friend mentioned, but sometimes I feel that I am rather old fashioned. However, I am told that the viewing figures that those films command today are less than they were some years ago, not just because they have been seen many times on television, but because they are taking up a smaller proportion of screen time than before. It is about 11 per cent. of screen time on Channel 4 and 8 per cent. for the ITV companies. We have been warned that that figure is likely to diminish further and that the imposition of the levy might mean that films would take up even less time.

Mr. Gould: I am always extremely suspicious about an argument that rests on a proportion. I am sure that the Minister will concede in this case that any such argument, would have to take account of the fact that the hours of television broadcasting have been very much extended by, for example, breakfast television when one does not normally watch feature films. Although I do not wish to contest in detail the statistics that the hon. Gentleman may wish to use, he should take account of the fact, as we do, that an argument of the sort that he has just addressed to us is not necessarily convincing.

Mr. Lamont: I would not rest the argument on the figures or proportions. I say this on the basis of what I am advised and told by people who know much more about these matters than I do. We are talking about the trends and viewing figures that feature films command on television. It has been clearly stated to us and the Select Committee that the feature film is not commanding the viewing figures that it did a few years ago. Therefore, if the levy were imposed, the temptation would be for the budgets on such films to be reduced.

Notwithstanding the arguments about a duopoly, this is the central point. I do not see why it is not open to the makers of films in this widening market, where there will be a voracious demand for film in future years, to set their price and argue with those who want and need to have more films. It seems that that is a better system and a more sensible way to do it than to introduce an artificial mechanism taxing the companies and recycling the money back to the industry.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): If the Minister is arguing that the makers of film should effectively bid up the price of their product, will he comment on the argument advanced in an article in *The Sunday Times* in December, reporting a conversation with Mr. Halliwell, the man in charge of buying foreign films and series for ITV? The article states:

"The high-gloss peaktime series cost an average of $1m per hour to produce, but because of an unspoken agreement not to bid up the price, ITV and the BBC are able to buy them for around £25,000 an hour."

That is an incredible difference in price. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that unspoken agreement, which depresses the price available to the fiim makers.

Mr. Lamont: I know of no such arrangements, though I am certainly prepared to look into that. However, the hon. Gentleman is talking about series rather than film features. In the newspapers, we have seen what has happened with the bidding over "Dallas". If there is some such arrangement, it seems to be creaking at the seams, but I entirely agree that the matter deserves some examination.

Nevertheless, we are talking about feature films for which the total cost and the cost per time is somewhat less. It may not be a perfect market, but there is an element of competition. There will be an expanding market and a voracious appetite by the media for more feature films. I cannot see how the imposition of the levy will other than put the squeeze further on a sector that is already under considerable pressure. Therefore, that is not the appropriate way to deal with the problem. I commend the Government amendment to the House.

Mr. Gould: I think it is fair to say that the Opposition gave a far from hostile welcome to the first two groups of Government amendments, but I am afraid that it is at this point that hostilities commence. The Minister opined that

we would not be surprised that he had felt obliged to table the amendment. It is true that we are not surprised. Unfortunately, the decision has been trailed in several press reports, but we are disappointed because we believe that the Committee reached the right view and, by a majority, and after extensive discussions, hit upon a means whereby the future of the film industry could be made much brighter than it would be without any such source of revenue.

We are also a little perturbed that the campaign of the television companies seems to have succeeded, at least with the Government. We feel that that may be a worrying portent of things to come; a sign of the way in which some of the major battalions in the industry can organise and structure the industry to suit their own interests. In Committee the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry conceded that the television companies had specified, when they offered to help the National Film and Television School, that that offer was conditional upon there being no levy upon the television companies. We are left with the grave suspicion that the further efforts which the television companies are said to be prepared to make to help the film industry have equally been made conditional upon receiving an undertaking from the Government that there will be no levy. It would be most unfortunate if an issue which had been fully debated and decided upon by a Committee of the House were, in a sense, to be taken away from us and made the subject of more or less secret negotiations between the Government and those who were to be subjected to the levy.

Mr. Gorst: Since there has been discussion about unspoken agreements and understandings, it is fairly remarkable that as one casts one eye around the Chamber today one sees, except for the tip of an iceberg on Conservative Benches, no spokesman who is identified with commercial or BBC television, and one has the suspicion that a back-door market arrangement has been made, so that discussion and argument about it in this forum are almost unnecessary. However, perhaps we shall see.

Mr. Gould: As so often, the hon. Gentleman is on the point. I have heard other descriptions of his hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) than the tip of an iceberg.

It appears that the independent companies feel that they have accomplished their objective and reached an agreement with the Government which satisfies their needs. However, it is important to remind the House of the arguments that carried the day in Committee. As the Minister will recall, they were deployed over four or five hours in Committee, at great length. All the matters to which the Minister referred in his speech were also raised in Committee. After long deliberation, the Committee, by a substantial majority, decided that the levy was an appropriate mechanism to put into the Bill.

Our arguments began where the Government began their arguments, with the impracticability of the Eady levy. Everybody concedes that, whatever its merits, and whatever can be said for its principle, it has outlived its practical life. Therefore, we are left with the problem whether to replace it—in which case we have to look for some other redistributive mechanism—or simply to say that the film industry can manage without a levy. The Committee decided that we should try to replace it and that the British film industry was not so healthy and thriving as to be able to dispense with what is now an admittedly small sum of money, but which has historically been of considerable importance.

Both sides of the Committee set themselves to work out how to apply the principle of the Eady levy in modern circumstances. The cinema audiences which have melted away, largely because of television, are still watching feature films, but no longer go to the cinemas in large numbers. Instead, they are to be found sitting in front of their television screens. This is not the case of an industry whose product has become outmoded for technological or social reasons. There is still a substantial demand for films. In other words, the principle is still valid. What has gone wrong is that the mechanism whereby consumers of film contribute in a certain way by the payment of a levy on admission to a cinema is no longer practicable.

The problem is simple. If we are concerned about the future of the industry and wish to maintain its financial support, we have to find a way to levy all those who watch the products of the film industry, but this time seated in front of their television screen.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Has not another method been found, and one that is working most successfully? That is the agency of Channel 4, which has committed £96 million to feature production. It is true, as the hon. Gentleman and many of my hon. Friends have said, that some of those productions are not films of the sort that would have the same impact on the wide screen as some of the more traditionally made films. Nevertheless, Channel 4 is catering for the needs of the film industry and the products are seen and enjoyed by those who watch films on television. Therefore, it is fulfilling an important obligation to the industry as a whole.

Mr. Gould: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and I shall come to that when I examine the case that has been deployed by the independent television companies.

I am surprised that the Minister and Conservative Members, to whom presumably the market mechanism is a matter of some importance and value, do not recognise that with this levy we are seeking to ensure that the market mechanism overcomes the artificial obstacle that has recently arisen. That market mechanism should operate to do what a market should do, which is to reward, through the desires and appetites of the consumer, those who produce the product. That is the simple principle that we are seeking to achieve.

The market mechanism does not work at present because television has intervened, but also because, as the Minister implied by referring to it often in his remarks, the market is not a free market. The purchase of feature films for television is in no sense a free market. The term "duopoly" has often been applied to it, and we are all familiar with the recent example of "Dallas". Most of us would see that episode as demonstrating that the unspoken gentleman's agreement had on this occasion, and perhaps on this occasion uniquely, broken down. This is truly a case of an exception proving the rule. The purchase by Thames Television of "Dallas" caused such a stir and commotion precisely because that unspoken agreement had not been complied with and was, presumably, threatened for the future. That is why Mr.

[Mr. Gould]

Brian Walcroft was summoned to the IBA to account for his actions, and that is why various assurances have been given that this will not happen again.

4.45 pm

The consequence of this—and this has been accepted on both sides of the House, as it was in Committee—is that the price paid for films is abysmally low, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has been instrumental in bringing to light. I understand that the average price is about £7,000 or £8,000 a film. I know that the hon. Member for Wealden will say that there are major exceptions, and I accept that. However, I am talking about a well-authenticated figure of the average price for films.

The independent television companies offer a rather engaging explanation as to why that should be, but such a pitiful price is of little value to those who make the films in the first place, and of still less value to those who will have to continue making films for an almost insatiable market.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify what he has just said, for the benefit of the House? Is he suggesting that the person who made a British movie last year, or not long ago, is, on average, to be paid only about £6,000 or £7,000? I do not understand that to be the situation. If one is making a new, big and important film, there is a great deal of competition to acquire it. The price of $2 million for "Chariots of Fire" has been quoted, as well as $4 million for another movie and $500,000 for "Champions". These are substantial sums.

I suggest that the average that the hon. Gentleman is quoting is for old films, many of which are foreign imports. If he can substantiate his claim that modern British films are fetching only this derisory rate he has made his case, although it does not follow that the levy is the correct way to deal with the matter.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that the important factor is the replacement cost—the cost of making films now. The antiquity or otherwise of the films constantly being shown on television is hardly relevant to that simple, economic point.

The fact of the low prices is admitted, in a somewhat engaging way, by the independent television companies. The Minister referred to the remarks of the spokesman for the BBC, who made a similar point. The independent television companies say that the average prices are low because of old material, much of it American, at the bottom end of the market. Many television viewers will say, "Hear, hear" in response to that. Television companies may hope to disarm criticism by the frankness of that admission. However, even old feature films, as the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) pointed out, are shown time and again on television, particularly at peak viewing times.

Last Christmas, for the umpteenth time, I saw a film of which I have fond memories from my childhood, and which I thought had passed from public memory for ever until about 10 years ago. I enjoyed the "Wizard of Oz" all over again, but it must have been shown over a dozen times on television over the past few years, and the same can be said of films such as "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang". These films are shown at peak times to large audiences, and at virtually no cost to the television company. They are popular films, otherwise they would not be scheduled. Some 65 were shown on the four channels over the Christmas period, and in total about 1,500 feature films were shown on television throughout the year.

The argument that these are low-grade films which attract small audiences is very difficult to sustain. Television companies know when they are on to a good thing. Those who made these films, and to whom television and the country generally are now turning for the new generation of feature films, are not, through a distortion of the market mechanism, being paid the normal price for their product. It is to correct that distortion that we supported the amendment in Committee and now oppose the Government's attempt to remove it.

It is also worth making the point that the Committee was not alone in believing that a levy on the television companies was a useful device in this context. We had occasion in Committee to refer to a document which had been produced by six of the industry's leading organisations. They came from all sides of the industry and included the trade unions, the producers and the National Film and Television School. Those organisations do not normally find it easy to reach agreement on a common platform. Their document enabled the Committee to illuminate some of these difficult points. It has now been elaborated, and I am certain that all members of the Committee and many other hon. Members who are interested in the film industry will have seen a copy of it.

Those elements of the industry make it quite clear in their document that they support a levy on the television companies. They looked at some of the practical problems and believe that if they could be overcome a fund of major importance would be provided for revitalising the film industry. In the presence of the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton) it is also worth making the point, which he will no doubt wish to emphasise, that the Select Committee of which he was a member in 1982 also looked at this problem and reached the same conclusion. Therefore, we are not conjuring up some oddball remedy out of thin air. This matter has been looked at by many people with knowledge of the industry. They believe that this would provide a workable remedy for some of its problems.

The industry needs money. It is virtually bereft of any tax incentives as a result of last year's Budget. It receives very little public money. No doubt this matter will be debated when we reach a further group of amendments. The industry has now lost the Eady levy. Although it is now relatively small in value, at the time that the Eady levy was introduced it produced a very substantial sum. Rather than let the industry languish without any form of financial support from any of these sources, we believe that it is important to introduce a levy which we calculate should produce about £10 million per annum.

Practical problems are involved in introducing a levy and the amendment does not seek to resolve them, although it was very instructive that during the course of a few minutes the Minister found how easy it was for his hon. Friends to resolve some of the practical problems that he raised. It was also instructive that the Minister quickly moved off that ground and came back to the point of principle upon which he had taken a stand.

The fact is that the amendment suggests one possible basis upon which this money could be raised—the levy

of a very small sum of money per estimated viewer of feature films on television. I could have understood it if the Minister had come to the House and said, "We have looked at the practical problems and we should prefer to achieve this objective in some other way." I am very disappointed that the Minister did not do so. He said that he wants to strike out the amendment altogether. But there are other possibilities. In an excellent, recently published monograph Robert Hutchinson looked at the problem and made the interesting recommendation that, to achieve a levy of £10 million per annum, a purchase price should be paid by the television companies for feature films. Perhaps that is a simpler calculation.

It may be that the Minister is right. I was tempted to get up and say that we accepted his suggestion of a simple contribution to a public film finance fund of some kind, but my guess is that the Minister did not pursue that idea and that he is unwilling to pursue any other idea for a levy because it would lead to some kind of public film finance body deciding how the money should be distributed. I suspect that ultimately it is an ideological objection: that if this money were raised in such a fashion he would have to provide a public sector mechanism to decide how the money should be distributed. What underlies and animates the Bill is what we believe to be the mistaken view that all these matters can be settled in the market place.

In conclusion, I deal with the defences that have been advanced by the independent television companies, which I assume have written to all those who are interested in these matters. The television companies rightly say—the hon. Member for Wealden has already made this point —that they are already supporting the film industry in a very substantial way, primarily through the mechanism of Channel 4. We agree with that, but it will come as no surprise to the hon. Member for Wealden to learn that in Committee I made a distinction which became very familiar to its members. There is a substantial difference between films made for television and films made for the cinema. I shall not weary the House by rehearsing all the arguments and distinctions that were widely accepted by the Committee. Although the Minister has not done so today, he and some of his hon. Friends were prone to boast of the success of "Gandhi" and "Chariots of Fire" as evidence of the strength and health of the British film industry.

Mr. Norman Lamont *rose*——

Mr. Gould: Let me make this point and then the Minister can intervene. I say that he cannot make that boast without at least accepting that there is a distinction to be drawn between films of that character and films which are generally produced by the television companies and shown on Channel 4.

Mr. Lamont: This is a trivial point, but, as the hon. Gentleman has made it repeatedly, perhaps he will give me the opportunity to say that if he can find that I have ever made any reference to "Gandhi" I shall buy him a very good lunch.

Mr. Gould: I am tempted, in the longueurs that lie ahead, to peruse the proceedings of the Committee to find just such a reference. However, it is certainly true that frequent reference was made to it. I see that the Minister's Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), is immediately confessing to it, in case he is challenged to a similar wager.

The notion that money spent through Channel 4 can in some senses be attributed to film production reached its apotheosis in the remarks of the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen at the end of the Second Reading debate. In an attempt to boost artificially the amount of money which the Government and other sources were funnelling into the film industry, the hon. Gentleman cited the £45 million which the independent film companies were paying towards the cost of Channel 4. Even the hon. Gentleman will recognise that this was an overestimate. However, it warns us against not making a distinction between film and television.

The next point which the television companies made was that they already contribute to the National Film and Television School. Of course they do, and they have undertaken to continue to do so, although one is bound to record, as the Minister conceded, that their offer was conditional upon there being no levy. It is also true that in supporting the school the television companies are in many respects pursuing their own interests, since it is a television as well as a film school.

The television companies then argued — somewhat pathetically, I thought—that this would be very hard on them, since their profits are down. Although the days may have gone when the famous remark of Lord Thomson would be apposite, nevertheless the television companies remain one of the few really profitable aspects of our economy. While there is some evidence that advertising revenue has fallen recently, I believe that if one looks at the trend over a period of years it is very difficult to argue that the independent companies are still not flush with money. Indeed, as the Government themselves recognise, there is an excess profits levy to recognise that fact.

The hon. Member for Wealden and I had an exchange in Committee as to the relationship between the levy that we are discussing and the excess profits levy. I am not competent to go into detail, but the profits of the independent companies would be calculated after that levy had been subtracted. Therefore, their profits would not be in double jeopardy but, rather, one element of their excess profits would be directed not in the general levy to the Treasury but to a special fund to help the film industry on which they so much depend.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is covering many points and posing many questions. I hope that he will answer some of them. The television companies are the master of what they spend on films. How will he ensure that, as they do not want to pay the levy, they will not spend less on films?

5 pm

Mr. Gould: Of course the companies do not want to pay a levy. Who would? But if they were to pause for a moment and think about their longer-term interests, they may see a more powerful case for doing so. They are, as we hve constantly said, one of the major consumers of film and they have a long-term and obvious interest in ensuring that that supply continues. However, I take the Minister's point. In the short term it is difficult for the independent companies to say that they are so strapped for cash that if they are forced to pay this relatively small sum of money

[Mr. Gould]

they will have to make major economies elsewhere, particularly in the realm of buying films. Otherwise, why are they having to pay an excess profits levy?

One may ask, what about the poor old BBC? Would it not be most unfortunate if it was forced to add 30p to its licence fee? I am relatively unmoved by that sort of argument as well. It could be addressed to almost anything that the BBC proposed. Those are matters which have to be decided by the broadcasting authorities. They are under statutory obligations of various sorts to maintain standards. It is up to the Government and other interested bodies to ensure that that is done. None of those arguments should enable them to get on the cheap the products of an industry that is in danger of dying as a result.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The question is not whether they would make major economies, but what is to stop them offsetting the effects of a levy by adjustments on what they spend on films? They know what they want. They know the number of films that they require. What is to stop them offsetting the effect of a levy by adjustments in their budgets?

Mr. Gould: Surely the Minister is not conceding the case that anything other than a free market operates. Surely competition will ensure that if there is a demand for the product the price will be bid up, irrespective of a levy or anything else, to a proper level.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Is it not remarkable that the Minister manages to say that the companies would have such control of the market place that they could do that, but that they would not have such control of the market place that they could wind up the price that they would offer for films?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman is right. The Minister has great difficulty in riding those two horses at once.

Mr. Gorst: There is an extraordinary quirk and a contradiction here. I note from a letter which hon. Members have no doubt received from a man with the fascinating title of "Head of Briefing" that the IBA limits the number of cinema movies that can be included in schedules in the interests of stimulating the maximum amount of original television products. That gentleman with the fascinating title also claims that the levy would be seriously detrimental to the creative development of television. Rather than attempt to force the television industry to subsidise the film industry by law, he says that the future can be seen in terms of—a most extraordinary proposition—increasing creative cross-fertilisation.

Mr. Gould: I am sure that that phrase leaves the hon. Gentleman almost as puzzled as it leaves me.

The Minister has not so far mentioned, as I thought he might have done, that the forthcoming Green Paper on copyright—a well-trailed possibility—might provide a levy on blank tapes of various sorts. I fully understand why the Minister has not raised that point. I think we are all agreed that, for the moment at any rate, that is not relevant to our discussions. However, it is worth making the point that that is a copyright measure and we are talking about a redistributive mechanism. Therefore, as I understand the principle that we are advancing, it is not necessary to find the long-dead maker of a particular film in order to recompense him. Far from it. That would be true if some sort of copyright principle underlay the proposal, but we are suggesting that that redistributive mechanism should cycle money back to a general fund, which would then be made available generally, and not to particular film makers or producers of films shown on television.

That helps us to dispose of the independent companies' suggestion that this would be an unfair tax on them. It is preferable to regard it as simply a redistributive mechanism within the same industry—an industry which begins with the producers and ends with the consumer watching the film in front of his television set.

My hon. Friends, I believe with some support elsewhere, believe that it is immensely important that the British film industry is not left without a buoyant and reliable source of revenue which, in many respects, the industry itself produces. We are asking only that the Minister should recognise that the market operates so imperfectly as not to provide the producers with that revenue, and we are simply asking him to remedy that deficiency.

Mr. Gale: The amendment tabled in Committee was founded upon two fundamental Conservative principles, although it had the support of Opposition Members. One is that people should be prepared to pay a fair price for what they get—the television companies in this case—and the other is a move towards the ending of restrictive practices.

I have to declare an interest in a company called Shaw Cable, which hopes to take the lead in the cable television industry and the boon that we hope will come in that direction. Therefore, I might be expected to have an interest in the purchase of cheap television. Historically, films on television have been cheap. If I pursue my interest, I should be on the other side of the argument. I am not, because I believe that the future of the British broadcast television industry and the future of the British cable industry depends, at least in part, desirably, on the provision of an adequate supply of British material.

If we allow the British independent film production industry to go under, a major purveyor of British material —films—will have been lost to us. Therefore, it is in the interests of the broadcast television industry and the embryo cable industry to see that Britain's film industry is supported and survives.

Earlier I mentioned restrictive practices. There are two in this industry. There is the restrictive practice of the buying cartel, about which we have heard a certain amount. My hon. Friend the Minister has said that, were the levy to be introduced, the television companies would replace the material that we are discussing with cheap imported material. But, of course, many of the films that we are talking about are exactly that, and they are very cheap television indeed. The availability of such material enables British television companies—both the BBC and the independent companies — not to use home production.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) said that we are not talking about modern British television films, because they are not cheap. That is absolutely right. They are not cheap, and, in part at least, they are the films that people wish to see. When there is genuine competition for the material, on occasion a fair price is paid for it, but only when there is genuine

competition. It is the joint buying cartel of the Independent Television Companies Association and of the BBC that is stifling that freedom of competition.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I quoted the figures incorrectly. It is $500,000 for "Champions" and $2 million for "Chariots of Fire." I should be interested to know what good new British-made movies have been victimised by this so-called cartel, with the consequence that a derisory sum has been paid for them. Where is the evidence?

Mr. Gale: We have heard a great deal about what I would describe as the blockbuster independent, if there is such a thing. "Chariots of Fire" and "Gandhi" are, I think, the only two films in the blockbuster category which have been mentioned throughout this entire discussion.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Three—"Champions."

Mr. Gale: If any hon. Member can name a fourth I shall happily give way. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Star Wars."] I believe that "Star Wars" falls into the category of the genuine blockbuster, like the James Bond films and others, and those are not the sort of films that we are discussing this afternoon. We are discussing the small, I hope British, independent productions, which will not fall into the award-winning "Gandhi" and "Chariots of Fire" category, but which can be and often are films of considerable merit. It is those films that the buying cartel has damaged.

There is another restrictive practice — craft union agreements within the independent television companies particularly, but also to some extent within the BBC. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and I were both employed—before he returned to this place and I came here for the first time—by Thames Television, which has its own subsidiary, Euston Films. Unlike the hon. Member for Dagenham, I do not discriminate between independent films made for television and independent films made for the cinema. I believe that there is a high degree of interchangeability between them and that the essential quality of a film as opposed to a television production is inherent in both. I therefore support both.

Thames Television has its own film production company. If every independent company and the BBC had their own film production companies, the argument that we are deploying this afternoon would be much weaker, but they have not. It is a fact that in many independent television companies there are closed shop agreements between the union and the management which prevent the commissioning of outside independent productions. If an independent producer or director wishes to make a film for an independent television company, he or she, or they, may be employed individually by that company, but the product will be made by the company, not by an independent producer. That, of course, does not stimulate the British independent film production industry that many hon. Members on both sides of the House seek to stimulate.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to the element of competition. I suggest that the element of competition is sadly lacking. In seeking to remove, at least in part, the restrictive practices of the buying cartel and of the union closed shop agreements, we are seeking to stimulate the Conservative element of competition.

5.15 pm

The hon. Member for Dagenham said that he was suspicious of any argument which rests on proportion. I am suspicious of any argument which rests in the main on parliamentary drafting—and, with respect, much of the argument of my hon. Friend the Minister did just that. I dealt with the points that he made against the mode of calculation of fees. I must repeat that that mode of calculation is used for every commercial shown on television to calculate performance fees, repeat fees, the payment of the artists, and, in terms of time of viewing, it is applied to the price charged for the commercial itself. If that formula can be applied to a commercial every time it is shown, either locally or on the independent network, it can just as readily be applied to a feature film.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley)—who I know will be rejoining us shortly — dealt with the question of what is a film. His argument is unassailable. A film is a piece of material carrying a certificate from the British Board of Film Censors. It is as simple as that.

This clause was carried in Committee by a sizable majority — indeed, an overwhelming majority, when allowances are made for the normal parliamentary conventions. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister, who spoke of principle in his argument, to accept the principles that the Committee sought to insert into the Bill: first, that the television companies—the independent companies and the BBC, which is just as culpable in this respect—should be required to pay a fair price for what they get and show; and, secondly, that in doing so we and they should support the British film industry upon which, at least in part, the future of broadcast and cable television in this country will depend. I urge my hon. Friend to accept the amendment, with any drafting weaknesses in it that exist, and to use the opportunity in another place to correct them, but not to remove this provision from the Bill.

Mr. Ashdown: As hon. Members who served on the Committee will know, I did not have the privilege of serving on the Committee, but I am happy to be here today and to able to take part on Report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud), who did serve on the Committee, has provided me with a very good background, and I have some ideas of my own. I should like particularly to comment on what the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) said, because I think he hit the nail on the head. Certainly I believe that it is a shame that the Government should seek to throw out this amendment made in Committee, where it received a lot of support. I must say that, having read the Committee reports, it seemed to me that the Government not only had the voting against them, but, substantially, the arguments as well. It seems to me that this is the very heart of the Bill. It is the clause which is now being brought in that has countered the opposition to this Bill from a very broad section within the industry.

The removal of the Eady levy without an appropriate replacement is nothing less than the removal of the background stability that the industry has enjoyed. I think we can all accept that the Eady levy was an inappropriate mechanism to provide that background stability, but another method could be found. Without that background stability, without what might be called an infrastructure or something to provide a long-term stabilising force for the industry, it seems likely that we shall move towards a situation in which, as the hon. Member for Thanet, North has said, we shall see the demise of the British independent film maker and a shift away from a broad-based film

[Mr. Ashdown]

industry which is capable and successful both in commercial terms and in artistic and rather less commercial terms. The country has a great artistic cinema heritage which has been preserved by the Eady levy and could be preserved in future more effectively by some substitute in a more appropriate form.

Some have suggested that we might have a levy other than the one proposed in the subsection, and the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) commented interestingly on that. For example, it has been suggested that we might have a levy on video tapes. For various reasons, not least those mentioned by the hon. Member for Dagenham, that would be an unwieldy alternative source of finance for the industry.

I also share — it was about the only part of the Minister's speech with which I agreed—the Minister's unhappiness about the unwieldy nature of what is proposed in the subsection. I agree that there are more elegant mechanisms for achieving the aim than to base it entirely on how many bottoms are on seats in front of TV sets. That is an inadequate and perhaps even inaccurate method.

If we are to have a levy, it might be better to impose one based on a percentage of the fee paid to distributors for the distribution of films. The industry would thereby have a real interest in getting the best price for its wares, and a television contribution paid by way of levy based on such a system might be more stable—because the facts would be known in advance—less fluctuating and less dependent on the caprice of the moment, such as the weather or what is showing on other channels.

In the absence of a more preferable system, the advantage of what the subsection proposes to delete—as the hon. Member for Thanet, North said, it could be amended in another place—is that at least it provides a basic structure for future stability. It establishes the idea that to have a good industry we must have a method of financing it. Thus, in the absence of a better system, I shall have to oppose what the Government are aiming to do.

I came to the debate with that view in mind, and my view was enormously reinforced when I heard the Minister's speech. The hon. Gentleman said that he accepted — it is clear from his rhetoric and from the terms of his remarks that he does—the important role that the television companies have to play in providing finance in future.

The Minister may reject the unspoken agreements about which we have heard — although there is enough evidence about them for us to take the matter seriously —but he is a member of a Government who believe in the basic ideology of a free market. He is thrusting the whole of the support mechanism for this important industry right into the hands not of a free market, because he admits that it is not a free market, but of a duopoly. The Government have taken a public monopoly and in the name of free enterprise turned it into a private monopoly. I refer to British Telecom. Here they are thrusting the dependency for a decent system of finance into a market place which is dominated by two parties.

The Minister told the hon. Member for Dagenham that mechanisms would no doubt be found for winding down prices to accommodate the levy which the hon. Member for Dagenham had suggested. Precisely the same, if it is not already happening, could happen in future. Is that the chosen method of the Minister in expressing a free market philosophy?

The Minister went further. He seemed to prefer—perhaps he was using the old debating trick of trying to destroy the argument by becoming ridiculous—a lump sum paid by television companies to the film industry. Would he really prefer that to a system by which the returns on a film are based on its acceptance by the public?

Mr. Gorst: The Minister is not considering much of a lump sum, either.

Mr. Ashdown: I am sure that he is not, but in seeking to destroy the chosen mechanism in the subsection he is, in effect, saying that he prefers the other way, which seems to be totally contrary——

Mr. Norman Lamont: But more logical.

Mr. Ashdown: More logical perhaps, but I thought that the Minister was a believer in the free market. What does he find difficult about having a levy system based on the number of people who want to watch a film—or a system based on the level of public demand?

Like the hon. Member for Dagenham, I suspect that the weaknesses in the Government's argument betray an ideological commitment against the National Film Finance Corporation. The Government know that if we were to set up a system based on the scheme in the subsection, or perhaps on a somewhat amended system, they would have to return to the NFFC.

At the heart of it all is the old ideological closed mind of the Government. They know that the film industry must be supported, and they recognise the important role that the television companies have to play. Yet they thrust it all into the so-called philosophy of the free market, which in this case is nothing of the sort. There are more effective ways of dealing with the matter.

The removal of the Eady levy without an effective replacement is, as many people in the industry say, a significant blow to the future of the British film industry. I do not say—as others, overstating the case, might say —that it is the end. However, it could be the beginning of the end of a sector of the British film industry. It could be the beginning of the end of a British film industry that is renowned not just for its popularity and commercial success, but for the range, the plurality, of its films and for their artistic merit.

For those reasons, and without necessarily agreeing with every detail of the subsection, I shall vote against the Government in this matter.

Mr. Brinton: The old style Eady levy, the passing of which the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) regrets, has received little support during the passage of the Bill. It was astonishing in Committee that the whole of the British film industry was united in saying that the old Eady levy should be updated and that changes were necessary.

Mr. Ashdown: I must have expressed myself more inadequately than I thought. I did not mean to suggest that the Eady levy should be continued. I said that it needed to be updated, but that the system of providing structural support for the industry was important, albeit that we should find other measures for providing that support.

Mr. Brinton: In that case, the hon. Gentleman and I are united in our objective.

I should at the outset mention my potential or actual interests in the subject. I am an adviser to a public relations company called Communications Strategy; I advise the British Videogram Association; I am a director of a company called Airtime (Publicity) News Flash Ltd; and I am a member of the ACTT, the technicians union, and of Actors Equity Association.

A difficulty in discussing the question of how we support the British film industry is that almost everybody speaks subjectively. When I say that the British Videogram Association, which I try to advise, is dead against putting a levy on the showing of films on television, whereas I am for a levy, hon. Members will see that possibly there are problems between us, albeit on a debating scale. One's view on this whole question depends on which side of the fence one sits, and possibly the only place where we can hope to look at the problem with any objectivity is in this House.

The Minister delighted me by admitting, contrary to beliefs in the BBC and ITV, that a great change to the duopoly was on the way. We would be having cable and satellites and so on, he seemed to say. When I was broadcasting with the chairman of the BBC last Sunday week, he told me that cable was a dead duck. If the Minister is right and the duopoly really is falling to bits, there is possibly less of a case for what has been proposed, though many — particularly those who are subjectively interested in retaining the duopoly — say that the duopoly is sticking. Therefore, the unfair competition in buying films will presumably continue in its present form.

5.30 pm

In supporting the idea of a levy for the showing of feature films on television I wish to see a continuing and, I hope, thriving British feature film production industry. The Bill is providing for the bottom end of the industry in creating the son of NFFC, which, given a helpful wind and a fair start, will do much good for smaller budget films. It will be able to contribute £200,000, for example, to stoke them up. That is the scale of the budget of Channel 4 films and that is why Channel 4, to its credit, has become involved, as has the British Videogram Association. That is the proposed scale of operation of the son of NFFC.

My difficulty is that that is only part of the British film industry. I look to some way of keeping a thriving industry that produces feature films with a budget of between £2 million and £7 million. I am not talking about the great blockbusters with considerably larger budgets. I often compare today's medium budget films with those which were produced in the 1950s with budgets of about £200,000 or £300,000. I am old enough to remember those films. There are those who tell me that films such as "The Blue Lamp"——

Mr. Hanley: Hear, hear.

Mr. Brinton: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend's backing.

It is said by some that such films do not portray acceptable techniques these days, but the issue is not one of technique. The same amount of care is lavished on producing that scale of cinema with modern techniques as opposed to film for television, plays for television which are produced on film and minifilms to be shown in arts cinemas. That is what the son of NFFC can and will do successfully, and all credit to it. However, that must be backed with some funding for medium-sized feature films.

There is an alternative to asking the television companies and the BBC to pay a levy, but it is one that the Treasury would dislike intensely. The alternative is to ask the BBC and ITV companies to make feature films, to fund them properly on the scale of which I am talking and to give them suitable fiscal relief for doing so. That would be a way of encouraging the industry. Such a system would let ITV companies off the big levy which is paid on television profits. Advantages of a commensurate nature could be found for the BBC. My conversations with those in the relevant organisations lead me to believe that there would be a keenness to produce the sort of feature films of which I am talking.

If nothing else, I hope that I am reasonably practical in my thoughts. I know that the alternative to the levy system would not be acceptable to the Government. That being so, I must look around to ascertain who best can finance the level of funding for British films that I have in mind.

I am driven to the conclusion that we must channel funds back to those who will produce the feature films from the consumer or customer as directly as we can. The hon. Member for Yeovil said that he did not like the idea of measuring the amount to be paid by the number of bottoms on seats. The virtue of the old Eady system was that the film fan paid for a ticket and, as he could be identified as a film fan, he made a contribution to the future of British films. That was the principle behind the levy. The nearest that we can get to that in terms of electronic transmission is to try to measure the size of the audience and to base the alternative funding system on the results obtained.

The amendment which was made in Committee set down a principle that can be altered easily. As my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) said, mechanisms are available that could make the necessary calculations with great ease, or I am sure that a percentage could be calculated. It must be remembered that the audience for the sort of feature film that I am discussing is currently with television, not with the cinema. Even more threatening is the fact that in a few years television will run out of British films with budgets of between £2 million and £7 million if we do not do something now.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, who has been constructive and helpful throughout our proceedings since Second Reading, asserted with great vehemence that he wanted to support the British film industry. If we do not get a commitment of the sort of which the amendment is a prime and constructive example, my hon. Friend will not be able to fulfil his commitment. That is why I shall vote against the amendment that seeks to remove the provision which was inserted in the Bill in Committee.

Mr. Chris Smith: I oppose the Government's attempt to remove from the Bill the principle that was inserted in it in Committee. As we are in the business of declaring our interests, I shall tell the House that throughout our discussions I have received considerable research assistance and support from the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians, of which the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton) is a member.

The Minister said that he wanted to base his argument primarily on points of principle rather than on practicality. The thinness of his practical arguments demonstrated the wisdom of that statement. I shall address myself to what seem to be the two major points of principle.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The hon. Gentleman talks of the thinness of my practical arguments. I do not want to sound too stunned by that accusation. I was merely saying that there are many unanswered questions which are not addressed, even remotely, by the amendment. Those questions can be addressed in various ways, but no one has tried even remotely to do so.

Mr. Smith: The Minister has elegantly extracted himself from the specific hole that I dug for him. However, there are unanswered questions on practicality and some of them have been mentioned by my hon. Friends. There should be no real difficulty in answering the remaining questions in practical terms.

I wish to address myself to what seem to be the two fundamental points of principle which led some of us to support the amendment which was agreed to in Committee and which cause me to defend it now.

The first point of principle is that the Government, in abolishing the Eady levy—they were right to do so as it was outdated — have not put in its place sufficient support and funding for the future development of the film industry. They have not created the necessary mechanism and they have not provided the funds to do so.

There were a number of discussions in Committee about the money that would be available under the new mechanism proposed by the Government to provide for the production of the sort of British films that the hon. Member for Gravesham has mentioned. We have read the Government's proposals in the White Paper and the Bill and discussed them on Second Reading and in Committee. The Minister has informed us of the proposed arrangements which have been drawn up for the body that will succeed the NFFC. Unfortunately, the money that will be made available will not be sufficient to do the job properly and ensure that British film making can continue.

We need look only at the contact made early in Committee by the ACTT with a series of financial institutions. The association discussed with financial institutions, film companies and banks what would be needed to encourage private commercial funding to go into new British film making. Each of those institutions replied that the types of funding that the Government outlined in the White Paper were insufficient to enable them to take the risks involved in setting up new film-making enterprises. That clear example shows why I believe the Government have been wrong in terms of the amount of funding they are prepared to put in as seed money for the promotion of commercial private film making.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Although I expressed in Committee—I shall do so again if I catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye — a view not dissimilar to the hon. Gentleman's, I do not believe that his is the final answer. What figure does the hon. Gentleman have in mind? I am sure he has devoted a great deal of time to this aspect.

Mr. Smith: As a bare minimum, I would go for the £10 million mentioned on a number of occasions in Committee. If I were in charge of making the arrangements, however, I would probably wish to double that figure. Given the financial stringency that seems to operate in Government circles these days, I would say that £10 million is a basic minimum. We are nowhere near that figure in terms of what the Government are prepared to accept for any future funding provided by the son of NFFC.

There is another major difference in principle betwen the two sides of the House. I would like a national film authority to be established. That body would be in charge of distributing the money, and ensuring that it goes to the right places and creates the right initiatives. However, we shall have an organisation totally dominated by the people involved in the distributive industries. We have debated that point at great length, and it is not worth pursuing it further at this stage.

The amont of money that will be available is inadequate, and that is the first important point of principle. Establishing the levy—which we attempted to do in Committee and are attempting to preserve now—is one mechanism by which we ensure that money is available for injection into the future growth of British films.

The second important point of principle then comes into play. If one simply says that the amount of money is what is at stake, one could go for crude, rash donations from the television companies or for a levy on blank tapes. Both would be acceptable. The second important point of principle comes into play when we discuss a levy on films shown on television. I believe that there should be a return to the film makers for the artistry, talent and effort that go into making and producing films. At present, there is an insufficient return from films shown on television for the initiative, talent and effort that goes into making them.

Hon. Members have mentioned the low prices which, with some individual exceptions, are paid for the great majority of films shown on television. During 1983 television showed 1,500 films, and there were 4,000 million individual viewings of those films. That compares with 66 million cinema admissions. There is an enormous difference between the number of times a film is viewed by people watching television and the number of times it is viewed by people at the cinema. The price paid for those films when shown on television is, on average, extremely low. The return that goes to the people who put the imagination and talent into making the film in the first place is extremely low when the film is shown on television and far lower when it is shown in the cinema. Some tribute should be paid by television to the film industry for the provision of so much of this material in so many film viewings.

5.45 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I support my hon. Friend's argument. Does he agree that television and the wider public are responsible for training? Although we welcome the level of skill in the British film industry, there can be no guarantee that that will continue if we are not prepared to reinvest and make training a major priority.

Mr. Smith: As always, my hon. Friend is correct. The money raised by the levy could and should be used in support of the National Film and Television School. I hope that we shall discuss that aspect later.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) pointed out, the replacement of films for viewing is extremely important, and the Government's proposals do not provide sufficiently for that aspect.

Because of the inadequate amount of money that is available and because tributes should be paid to the makers of films by television for using the products of the film industry, it is extremely important that we should reject the Government's attempt to remove this provision from the Bill.

Mr. Hanley: Many said on Second Reading and in Standing Committee that I should declare an interest in the Bill. If having a father, mother, sister and many of my family friends and constituents — perhaps more constituents than most hon. Members—totally absorbed in the film industry is a reason to declare an interest, I declare that interest. It is not a financial interest. If a deep commitment to the film industry throughout one's life is a reason to declare an interest, I declare that interest. I am interested not in helping the survival of the film industry —it will survive whatever the Bill or the future produce because of the gifts and imagination of those within the industry—but in helping to maximise the return that can be made through the talent within the film industry. That is my greatest interest, and it is in the national interest.

I have previously voted for the amendment on which the House will vote later today, because the Bill deals with the making and financing of films. Films can be made only if one has the money necessary to make them. With more money, one makes not necessarily better films but a range of films, and that will mean the production of the best films that the industry can make. If the film industry has just enough funds, it does not risk its money. It does not try out the exciting and the new—rather it tries out the old, tried and true. The "tried and true" did not create the best films in our British film history. Many of the films mentioned in Committee and on Second Reading were not expected to make a lot of money, but they did. Those films gripped the imagination not just of British audiences but of world audiences. They were not made to earn Oscars. They were made as a result of the integrity and skill of those who made them and their confidence in their integrity and skill. They had the financing, but only just.

To be fair, the Bill shows the Government's commitment to the film industry. It shows that the Government give their wholehearted approval to the industry and to the brilliant, cultural contribution that it has made not just to the whole range of entertainment but to the spreading of the name of Britain and the British way of life throughout the world for the past 50 years.

I am pleased with the interest that my hon. Friend the Minister has shown in the film industry. The Bill has been a learning experience for him and he is enriched by it. The trouble is that the Bill gives wholehearted approval to the film industry but it then says, "O.K. lads, it's up to you. We will give you a little start and now off you go." It is a waste of an opportunity and of the excellence of technicians, authors, producers and directors. I do not regard it as anything to be proud of. The trouble with the wholehearted approval that the Government have given by setting up the NFFC is that they have produced a firm foundation, but they have not delivered the plans and financing nor, as far as I can see, do they have any great confidence in the future of the film industry.

The Bill is a modest start to a new era. I should have preferred the Government to have found a more enriching start to that new era. I was not looking for more money from the Government. The Government have the opportunity within the Bill—the amendment created that opportunity — to help to redress some of the unfair balances in the film industry.

I pay tribute to the NFFC's four partners. The name of Rank is synonymous with film and film making over the years. The man with the gong is probably better known than any other symbol within the film industry. Channel 4 is a new type of film maker and with its tremendous vision, imagination—it is exciting and experimental—entrepreneurial skills and proven successes it has made a unique contribution. We should remember that that contribution is also a contribution by all the other ITV companies to which I pay tribute. The £100 million that goes to create Channel 4 comes straight out of the production budgets of the other ITV companies. There is a partnership within ITV to support the new "son of NFFC".

The Bill is about films and film making, but we must also consider viewing habits. That point has been made by many hon. Members today. If we are to provide the finance that I crave, we must provide it in the fairest way. That is the nub of the amendment and the reason why it was tabled. Films are watched in the cinema, on television, and on video by pre-recorded cassettes. Cassettes are used for recording and time-shifting existing television programmes. There will be cable and, no doubt, DBS.

The Bill, however, is not the films-made-for-television Bill; it is the films-made-for-cinema Bill. We must always remember that cinema films make an important contribution to television. There is also a little of the films-made-for-television-that-are-shown-in-the-cinema Bill about it. We must remember how films are priced when they are bought for television. They achieve their price because they are still popular in the cinema, and because there is a demand to see films as soon as possible. Thank goodness, the cinema is the only way to do that.

The Bill provides an opportunity to ensure that those who see the films pay for them. Those who watch and benefit from the films pay nothing like a fair price at the moment. The price paid by the BBC and ITV companies is not fair. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, the duopoly has been against the interests of the film industry. I do not go so far as to say that it has been exploitation, as some of my hon. Friends do.

Even my hon. Friends who are connected with the television industry will admit that they try to pay the lowest possible prices for the films that they put on television and that films shown on television are the cheapest possible television created today. There is no cheaper way of filling out TV schedules than to put on a feature film. There is no more expensive product to make than the feature film.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: There probably are cheaper ways—re-runs of "I Love Lucy", for example.

Mr. Hanley: Re-runs of former television programmes are cheaper, but it was not cheap to make those programmes in the first place. The point I am making is that it is not cheap to make films. There is a bigger difference between the cost of making a film and using it on television than anything I know.

The history of the world's economy over the past 200 years has shown that we have been taking away from those who create, make and dig and giving to those who exploit resources. We must make the world economy fairer.

Mr. Chris Smith: That is Socialism.

Mr. Hanley: That is not Socialism. Even Conservative Members recognise that a fair price must be paid for commodities. There is a level beyond which there is exploitation. I do not believe that one quarter of a penny per viewer per film is too great an expense. If that were

[Mr. Hanley]

the level of the levy, it would raise £10 million. It would still only increase a licence of £46 or £65 by 30p. It is difficult to split a levy as with, for example, lending rights to authors, but the principle is more important than the distribution. If the BBC had to pay 30p of its £65 to the film makers to help create films, it would be worth it.

A levy of £1 on each blank or pre-recorded cassette would raise £20 million. The Government are not trying to provide the money. They are trying to set a scene where a fair return for those who make the films can be constructed. The public would not carp at 30p of the licence fee going to help create a better, bigger and brighter future for the film industry. I am sure that we shall return to the argument about a levy on videotapes, but it is not germane to the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Minister said that we were not addressing ourselves to the point, which was whether the BBC and the ITV companies would buy fewer films. I do not believe that they would. They would merely have to pay for the pleasure that they are giving their audiences, and the business that they are giving to their advertisers. They would be giving a fair return to those who produce the films. They might be more selective about the films that they buy. Many films are, with respect, rubbish. I do not believe that every film made, even by the British film industry, is good. If television companies had to be more selective, the talented people who make films would benefit.

The amendment is the fairest way to create a satisfactory financial framework for the film producer and the industry. The BBC could do a great deal. It could sell its dead time between 2 o'clock and 6 o'clock in the morning to independent film producers. They would leap at the chance of showing their films and having a shop window at that time. That would raise revenue. In return, I believe that the television companies should produce the funding to keep a great industry going.

6 pm

Four Conservative hon. Members initially supported the amendment. We have worked very hard on the Bill. There was total attendance from the four of us and, indeed, from the vast majority of members of the Standing Committee. We have devoted to the Bill much more time than I believe any hon. Member can afford to give, in these days of difficult modern politics when we are subject to so many disparate pressures. I do not believe that any of the four of us has in any way moved his position. Indeed, after the discussions I believe that we have been entrenched in our positions.

I am not attacking television or the television companies. We are all grateful for their support for the industry. We merely believe that that support must be paid for fairly. We hoped that the Bill would provide a medium through which that could be done.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): It was a great disappointment to me not to be asked to serve on the Committee on the Bill. I had participated in the Second Reading debate. However, it was one of those things. I was appointed to the Committee that was considering the fluoridation of the water supply. They tell me that fluoridation will improve the teeth and therefore the looks not only of children but of all of us. People will have a good set of choppers when they go before the film cameras.

It is a tragedy that we are debating a Films Bill that is worded in this way and doing what it is supposed to do for the British film industry. Many hon. Members are interested in the film industry. I know that on the Government Benches, in particular, there are a number of hon. Members who have had a fair amount to do with the industry.

On Second Reading I commented on the debonair manner of Ministers. The hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) suggested that the Ministers found the Committee stage of the Bill a real education. If education—at least about film making—is added to the Ministers' debonair manner, we may see some different faces at the Department of Trade and Industry. The present Ministers may go on to better things. One never knows.

I must admit that I have not agreed with the arguments put forward by either side of the House. The Government are wallowing about all over the place. They do not know where they are going—and not only with the Films Bill. The nation, like the British film industry, is going down and down. It is high time that the Government woke up. They were told on Second Reading, they were probably told in Committee and I am telling them now that they are not improving the situation at all. I am suspicious of the easy way out that is being taken by the Government.

I agreed with one of the points made by the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton). If the Government intended to live up to their responsibilities, not only to industry in general but to the film industry in particular, they should have picked up the idea of some sort of relief to be offered by the Treasury. On Second Reading, the Minister wept buckets of tears over the situation of the film industry and said that the Government wanted to help. One way in which they could help would be by arranging some Treasury relief.

On the question of the television companies and the levy, I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) that he need have no fears about me. He will find me in the right place. However, I do not agree with either of the suggestions that have been made. We have heard that the television companies may buy older films in order to keep costs down. Although I do not agree with the Minister in general, I agreed with one point that he made. If there is a levy on a film made only two or three years ago, it will be much cheaper for the television company to choose an older film. I am afraid that the levy will drive the television companies away. We all know the saying about biting the hand that feeds. I believe that that saying is applicable here. The television companies will be driven away from buying new films.

There are about 10 million pensioners in our nation. I am not one of them.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Go on.

Mr. Haynes: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is unaware that there are nearly 10 million pensioners in our country. His comment shows that he is in the dark.

I remember the time when the hon. Member for Gravesham used to read the news. I remember the period when films were made more cheaply than they are now. Today, costs are massive. I must declare my interest. No, I am not a member of Equity. I have not been to

Hollywood. I am certainly ugly enough for a horror film —but let that pass. I am a member of the films group in the House, and I am proud to be a member. I try to carry out my responsibilities in that connection. I am sorry that I am not wearing my studio tie today. I have visited a number of British film studios. When one talks to people who work in the industry, one really gets the message about how the industry has gone down and down. Many studios have had to close.

The country's 10 million pensioners look forward to films such as the beautiful film that I saw on television on Sunday night. It was a Warner Brothers film starring Bogart and Cagney. On the previous Sunday there was a real masterpiece — "Show Boat". I listened to Paul Robeson singing "Ol' Man River" in his rich bass voice. That film was made in 1936. I am old enough to remember it but I wanted to see it again. Such films are catching on on television. The hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) mentioned the Bond films and others like them. There is no doubt that many youngsters are interested in such films, but those who are retired or approaching retirement are more interested in older films.

Television companies will be encouraged to show such films if we do what the Government suggest. Well, they are not suggesting a great deal—they are wallowing about and trying to get someone to dig them out, as per usual. I do not favour either of the suggestions that have been made, but would prefer the Treasury to make a contribution if the Government are genuinely interested in the British film industry.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I agree with the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) that nostalgia for first-class movies made in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s is growing. They are quite cheap and the hon. Gentleman might be right in saying that television companies will find them more attractive if a levy is imposed.

I should like to outline why the Government should be supported—they have not enjoyed much support today. No hon. Member has proved by using facts and figures that the proposed levy on television companies is fair to those companies. Nor has anyone shown that the price that television companies pay to show British films is unfair. I have quoted the prices that have been paid for contemporary British productions of quality, and nobody has shouted me down.

Mr. Hanley: When television companies bid for films that they want to show, is there a straightforward auction between the two companies or do they agree in advance which shall make a bid?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Hon. Members have suggested that there is not a fair competitive process but that there is a cartel. It is some cartel that fetches up $4 million for "Star Wars", $2 million for "Chariots of Fire" and $500,000 for "Champions". People in the business suggest that competition works, and I have no evidence to show that it does not. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) said that the price paid for small budget productions is too low in relation to the talents and costs of such productions. I wonder which films he was referring to. Are they the types of film that some hon. Members suggest are produced for the real cinema, or are they those which are produced for television and which are criticised by my hon. Friends who support the levy? If we are considering films that will be seen by most people on television, the Government have made a case, as has the industry. As a result of the establishment of Channel 4, there has been a massive increase in financial support for the British film industry.

6.15 pm

Mr. Gorst: Does my hon. Friend agree that he is arguing that when television companies go shopping at Fortnum and Mason they pay a high price but that they never pay a high price when they go to the real market, which is the high street? Does he agree that most of what they buy is bought at ridiculous prices and that they only occasionally shop at Fortnum and Mason?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Such charges are made, but they have not been substantiated. It is argued that television companies pay a high price at Fortnum and Mason, but do not in the high street. What sort of argument is that? That is one reason why television companies go to the market. There is competition there for many low budget movies. There are so many of them around that they do not fetch as high a price as others such as "Gandhi".

Mr. Gale: May I suggest that the difference is not between Fortnum and Mason and the high street but between the high street and the pawn shop? Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the desperation of the pawn shop that forces producers to sell at pawn shop prices to the ITCA and the BBC? My hon. Friend said that he had heard no argument that controverted his. The reason for that is that, until fairly recently, right hon. and hon. Members were in Committee upstairs, where such arguments were spelt out clearly. Perhaps I might put it on the record here that films shown on television costing £60,000 or £120,000 an hour represent cheap television.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Many television productions are very cheap and many people who want to get into the cable television business will want to show many old television productions which are probably even cheaper than old films. That is how the market works. Hon. Members are trying to work against the market. They are pleading that people who have worked in the movies in Britain or the United States—most of the cheaper movies are American—are somehow being exploited when, 20 years later, their film is seen by millions of people on television. People involved in films cannot expect the high prices that were paid when the film was made to be repeated 20 years later. That does not apply to the products of any other business.

Mr. Gould: As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman's bald point is that we are wrong to say that television companies are paying low prices for films. Does he agree that the examples of high prices that he gave do not relate to the majority of the 1,500 films that are shown on television each year? Does he agree that those low prices militate against the very in-house film production of which he is so proud?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I do not agree that the low prices militate against film production. Old movies are bound to command a low price because there are many of them and there is no reason why television companies should pay a high price any more than someone should pay a high price for a pair of second-hand shoes. Films go downmarket and even classic films cannot be expected to command a premium price year in, year out. To do that

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

would be to exploit the consumer. Television companies—the consumers—are not prepared to go along with that. There are plenty of opportunities for the film industry to recoup its investment if it goes about distribution correctly. Sensible distribution involves doing away with the ridiculous restictive practices of the past, such as the barring of movies from second-run cinemas and from television until they are tired out and a lot of interest has been lost. There are certain modifications belatedly being made to improve the system so that the revenue for film producers can be increased. Obviously there are bargains to be had, but they do not arise from cartels. Anyone in the British film industry can get a high price for a new prestigious production, commensurate with the talents that went into such a movie.

The film industry has had to come to terms with the fact that the cinema has been in decline. If we think that the answer to the cinema in decline is to pump more money into the production end, we shall not solve the problem. We shall merely create some jobs for people to make more expensive movies, which will be seen by decreasing numbers of people in the cinema. I do not know of any other countries that are dealing with the problem of a decline in film production, which are seriously contemplating following the road that the Government have been invited to take. On the contrary—I do not wish to be drawn too far into this because it is a point for Third Reading—they realise the growing interconnection between distribution, different forms of production, exhibition and what the film industry is there for. France, for example, recognises that there is no dichotomy between the film industry that makes commercial films and the film industry that makes arts films. It recognises that this is also an art industry. France has a much more mature, more sensible and, in the end, more viable route to restore the strength of the French movie industry.

Mr. Gould: Since the hon. Gentleman cites the French example, he will wish to concede that the French recognise the principle of redistribution. It just so happens that their cinema attendances have held up better than ours.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: French audiences have held up for other reasons. [HON. MEMBERS: "Television."] It is not because of payment by television at all. In so far as television supports French movies, I agree. It is not through financial efforts that it is because it is appallingly bad compared with our own industry.

All hon. Members agree that the film industry needs an injection of investment, not just for production but to cover the whole spectrum that I have mentioned. It is totally unfair to suggest as a short-term measure because we do not think that the Government have it right—they have not got it completely right and I do not know what other proposals they intend to make if the film industry is to be put in a more viable state—that we should impose the burden on the television industry. The distinction between film making and television making is gradually becoming blurred. To boot, the television industry contributes an ever-growing proportion of its revenue to the film industry. It is a generous contribution. Some hon. Members present served on the Committee which helped to create Channel 4. We hoped that it would be a success and that it would not cater purely for minorities but would have a strong sense of commercial responsibility. That is shown by its contribution, talent, inventiveness and cash in support of the British film industry.

It is not worthy of the House to suggest that an industry that is contributing nearly £100 million to the British movie industry should be condemned because about 50 per cent. of the productions are more suitable for television. People want to view films on television. It is no use suggesting that they should not be allowed to because they should see them in the cinema, unless something is done about their exhibition.

On those grounds, the support that the television industry has given to the movie industry should lead us to believe that it would be wrong to impose additional burdens on it, which might have the reverse effect from that which we expect.

Hon. Members must recognise that, whatever the profitability of television companies, they face difficult problems. The audience is to be fragmented through the development of cable and direct broadcasting by satellite. The BBC, public and private sector television are being asked to finance the satellite, which we all hope will be a British satellite, in the latter half of this decade. That is a formidable bill to face. It will give even greater opportunities for distribution of British films, which is what they want.

I could pump £100 million into the British film industry, as has been suggested, but to some extent it would go down the drain commercially. No British film industry has proved viable on its own because the home market is not large enough. It was thought that Alex Korda, the brilliant producer of "The Private Lives of Henry VIII", had found the key to that. We still persist in believing the myth that if we produce a good British movie we can make the British movie industry viable, but we cannot because it depends on American distribution. That is one reason why the British movie industry often comes a cropper or has false dawns because it has momentary success in America and then crumples again. That is why we must consider the matter from a wider point of view.

Apart from the inelegance of the proposed solution, it is not only unfair but counter-productive. I agree with the guidance given by the Independent Broadcasting Authority. It said:

> "The health of Channel 4 and the independence depends largely upon the well-being of Independent Television. We can see no justification therefore for an additional mechanism which will simply rob Peter to pay Paul."

That is a fair and correct approach. If at some future date—and we shall need to reconsider the industry's position—hon. Members would like to suggest to the Government that their responsibilities do not end with this Bill, I would follow them into the Lobby. But I shall not vote with them tonight.

Mr. Gorst: If I had not just listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), I would have said that our debate had been of an all-party nature. Apart from the odd party political fact that emerged, I have not disagreed with anything that has been said from either side of the House, with the exception of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Minister. However, I wish to acquit him of the suggestion which has been made that he has principled objections to this part of the Bill. I also wish to acquit him of any suggestion that he has allowed dogma to masquerade as principle or prejudice. The fact is that he has no practical objections to this part of the Bill. He

does not see insurmountable difficulties, and has only been voicing unresolved problems, which could easily be dealt with by his civil servants were there a will to do so.

The debate, therefore, is between the two sides of the House and two tips of a television iceberg. One surfaces intermittently in our proceedings with a sad sigh or a selective statistic, and the other is the Minister. At the end of the debate the Government will undoubtedly use their unspoken weapon—a Whipped vote—to get their way. For the time being we must accept any such verdict, if that is the way in which the Minister concludes our proceedings, but I hope that the other place will note our arguments and exercise its independent judgment on those arguments, without fear of the consequences of which we who must obey a different system must take cognisance.

6.30 pm

I do not wish to rehearse all the arguments that have been advanced this afternoon, nor any that I voiced in Committee, because that would be tedious repetition. But one point that calls for more comment is whether the prices paid by ITV and the BBC for showing films on television are fair. My hon. Friend the Minister seemed to be arguing that low prices for old films were fair, but I am not attracted by that argument, and I hope that hon. Members are not attracted by it. If we go along that path, it is difficult to see how we cannot say that old books, gramophone records, plays, ballets and operas should also receive reduced payments. No one would wish to argue along those lines, not even my hon. Friend the Minister. What should influence the price of those films is the demand for them. I am sure my hon. Friend will agree that the television companies should pay a different price for films for which there is a demand than for films for which there is no demand.

I wish to take up the point made by that quaint character, the head of briefing of the IBA, that the levy will harm television. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to remember that if ITV can afford to pay a levy to the Treasury, it can afford to pay a levy to the film industry, especially if the Treasury would be so kind as to remove the obligation to pay its levy. The Treasury takes far more in its levy than would have to be paid willingly by consumers for the opportunity of watching films on television.

I end with a hypothetical suggestion to those two tips of the iceberg to whom I referred. Let us suppose that all films were available to the television audience only through the medium of pay television and that the competition from ITV and the BBC did not contain any cinema films. Do my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden and those who think like him believe that the amount of money collected by a pay television channel, with a similar penetration of the nation, would be less than, the same as, or more than is paid in aggregate by the BBC and ITV? If they maintain that it would be the same, they live in a dream world. If they believe that it would be more, they must concede our case and accept the levy so that fairness can operate.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith *rose*——

Mr. Gorst: I see that my hon. Friend wishes to challenge me.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I know better than to do that, because we wish to draw this debate to a conclusion. From what my hon. Friend says, I assume that he is in favour of pay television. I also favour it, and one reason why I object to the proposal of my hon. Friend is that he supports a levy on British television companies and, in addition, he supports pay television, which will fragment the audience of the companies, which rely on advertising. He cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Gorst: My hon. Friend, with his usual charm, wishes to draw me away from the substance of my argument, which is that if the audience could show what it wished to pay for, the answer would be different from that given by him and by the Minister.

Remorselessly, I come to the conclusion that if the Government will not concede the retention of this provision, gently, stealthily and gradually they will ease the cinema side of the film industry into an unsung burial ground. That will be a great tragedy for Britain.

Mr. Key: We have had a long debate, and I suspect that I am at the bottom of the pecking order, but that does not mean that my speech will leave any important stones unturned.

I hope that the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) was not offended by my lighthearted intervention in his speech. I was paying him a double compliment, first, because I know only too well that he has a long time to go before he receives his pension, and, secondly, because I meant it literally when I told him to, "Go on." He was proving the point that I wished to make, because he was one of the first hon. Members to refer to the consumer of the product about whose creation we are talking.

I was nearly persuaded by the eloquent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) to vote for his argument. However, despite his eloquence and the fact that it is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend, he will not succeed. My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) said that people wished to watch films on television instead of going to cinemas. I doubt that. When we seal the fate of this clause, and later that of the Bill, we may have convinced ourselves that we are collectively right, but we shall then have to try to convince the consumers of the product that we are right.

I speak with some diffidence, because some hon. Members who have spoken have great experience of the film industry. In Committee and today there has been much lobbying from all sides of the industry, which have been working closely together, but the consumer has had somewhat less say. In the borrowed words of the Minister, we must demonstrate that the consequences of the Bill will be beneficial. Incidentally, I congratulate the Minister on guiding us through the Bill. Popular though it may be to blame the Government for everything, the blame for this point must be placed elsewhere.

We are in danger of too many people having it both ways. It is clear that much of the discussion has been carried on as though there was a free market in films. There is not. The Minister taunted us a little by suggesting that everything will be all right because the cable and satellite television revolution is just round the corner. I must immediately declare an interest as a shareholder in a small company called Salisbury Cablevision, which has been knocked off the bottom rung of the ladder to somewhere below the bottom rung by the Government's actions in respect of the fledgling cable industry.

[Mr. Key]

We cannot say that the proportion of films on television is becoming smaller, so a levy would be counterproductive, but at the same time say that cinema audiences are now sitting in front of their television screens, so Britain, almost alone in the world, will do nothing to encourage cinema-going. Those arguments must be exclusive to each other.

There is no free market in the industry and, furthermore, Britain is not an island. The impact of British experience in the international film industry is well known. Only recently I discovered that British citizens are working in every section of the production of Roman Polanski's new epic "Pirates". There are British actors in main and secondary roles, British technicians are doing all the special effects, there are British costume designers, and the pirates' galleon will sail with British masts, sails and riggings, and the film will be overseen by a British naval architect. Even the jolly roger will be made from British cloth.

Mr. Hanley: May I also suggest that my hon. Friend should declare an interest, as he has a minor part in the film "Amadeus"?

Mr. Key: Modesty had forbidden me from mentioning that fact. However, I must emphasise that it was in a purely amateur capacity, and I had no financial involvement. As I said on Second Reading, it is a marvellous film and I think that every hon. Member should see it forthwith.

May we be specific about what we are discussing in terms of cinemas? The decline in cinemas in the country has been sharp, although not as sharp perhaps as the decline in audiences. Over the 10-year period since 1974 the number of licensed public cinemas has fallen from 1,590 to 1,495, but the total of admissions has fallen from 143 million to 55 million. The number of staff in full-time and part-time employment in cinemas has halved in both categories.

When I was discussing the Bill with constituents, I addressed myself to the question of cinemas. It seemed to me that we had not discussed cinemas in any depth. I wrote to the obvious people, the distributors, to ask them what they thought about cinemas and their significance with respect to the Bill. I was told by the Rank Organisation that the reason that cinemas have declined so fast in the United Kingdom compared with other countries is partly because of language, which has protected the cinema in France and Germany, whereas the United Kingdom has a diet of mainly American films; secondly, that disposable income is much higher in the United States, France and Germany than in the United Kingdom; thirdly, that the quality of television varies widely and is probably best in the United Kingdom; fourthly, that due to legislation, taxation and rates, operating costs are probably higher in the United Kingdom than elsewhere, as is the cost of land, and consequently cinema prices tend to be higher; and, fifthly, that unemployment is higher in the United Kingdom, especially among young people. The next reason given is video penetration and demographic changes. The final point is that the United States on average enjoys much better weather, and that 20 per cent. of American cinemas are drive-in cinemas.

We have had an interesting experience in Salisbury recently. The cinema has been closed. It has been said that the reason for the decline of the cinema is that nobody wants to go and nobody is interested any more. I think that the hon. Member for Ashfield would agree that many pensioners much enjoy going to the cinema, particularly to matinee performances. In Salisbury, when threatened with the closure of the cinema by the Rank Organisation, well over 20,000 people signed a petition to keep open the cinema which, in a town with a population of 40,000, is pretty good going.

Thorn-EMI Screen Entertainment had a somewhat different view from Rank. Rank professed that it did, indeed, have an interest in maintaining its distributor chain. Thorn-EMI was rather more open and honest about its own failings, I suppose, claiming that it did not give a particularly good service to the public in the past, that is, in the provinces, one cannot book seats, one has to stand in queues, often in the rain, there is usually nowhere to sit in comfort and, where cinemas have been twinned or tripled, one can often hear the sound from the adjacent theatre, there is no soap in the loos and one cannot find a towel even when one gets to the loo. All the cinemas are in the wrong areas. They should be near the communities, in shopping centres and so on. The local advertising of films is atrocious. As we know, EMI is remedying that situation as well as it can.

I turned for advice to the British Film Institute also. It pointed out that the remarkable level of penetration of video recorders could not be blamed entirely. Indeed, it was a symptom of the public enthusiasm for entertainment by film in spite of its apparent distaste for cinemas.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I was interested in what the hon. Gentleman said about cinema attendances. Would he care to predict—or, if not, would he encourage his hon. Friend the Minister to predict—the effect on cinema attendances if the Bill is enacted?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not be tempted to go too wide of the amendment.

6.45 pm

Mr. Key: Thank you for saving me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that the Minister will address himself to that point. My hope, however, is that attendances will rapidly increase, and I should say why I think that that is likely to happen.

I refer here to the view of the British Film Institute, when considering evidence from other countries, as to what it believes to be wrong with the United Kingdom situation. First, there has been low or zero investment in cinema fabric refurbishment over many years. There has been no new cinema building in areas of likely audience concentration such as suburbs and out-of- town shopping centres, and that has occurred particularly in the United States. There has been a lack of effective competition between exhibitors to the benefit of the audience and a lack of strategic booking and promotion policies on the part of United Kingdom distributors. Those factors together have as much bearing on the disastrous decline in cinema attendance as has video penetration.

It has been said that Rank and EMI would prefer to be out of the business altogether. I cannot comment on that; it is merely hearsay. Looking at the profitability of that side of their industries, one can understand why they might wish to draw those conclusions. EMI has committed itself to a major programme. Rank has been less forthcoming.

I end on a note of optimism. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden, I do not believe that people do not wish to go to cinemas. I think that they will go to cinemas if the cinemas are in the right place and offer the right kind of comfort and attraction for family entertainment. Having recently been not visibly involved in "Amadeus" but involved in the soundtrack only—I would not wish to put off any hon. Member from seeing the film; it is not necessary to see me — I have seen that end of the operation and the high quality of technology that is going into films. It is a tragedy that more people do not go to cinemas in which there is a high standard of reproductive facility to attract audiences.

I believe that what happened in the United States could happen here if the Government can convince me that they are right and that the supporters of the amendment are wrong. Cinemas in the United States are becoming more sumptuous. There is a complete reversal of the trend towards spartan facilities such as we tended to see in this country. It is significant that in the past two years alone more than 2,000 new cinemas have opened in the United States. Many have 500 or more seats which we are constantly told it is impossible to achieve in this country. The leading cinema owner of Sumner Redstone, president of the North-East Theatre Corporation of Boston, is reported as having said:

"We have to compete for the public now and the only way is luxury."

There have been enormous strides in sound, and ultra-sophisticated equipment is the order of the day.

I believe that there is a great future for the cinema as opposed to just the film. I hope that the Minister in his reply will convince me that a levy is not the answer to this. I hope too that the distributors will convince the consumers that their policies are right and that they will meet demand with adequate cinema provision.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) for making clear what he meant when he said that he had a part in the film "Amadeus". Indeed, until he made it clear, I wondered whether he played the part of Mozart or Salieri. I congratulate him on being involved in the film, and naturally I hope that he will be able to arrange for me to see it, as I have read so much about it.

A large part of the debate has revolved round the principle of the levy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) said, it is not really the practicalities that we have been discussing in the debate. I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) and for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) that no doubt there are answers to some of the questions which I identified in my opening remarks. All that I sought to do was to say that we had not identified the answers to the questions posed in Committee. It is more than just a small point, because the reaction to a levy would vary according to the answers to those questions. Different people would have different opinions upon a levy, depending upon the answers to those questions. However, it is the principle that we have been discussing.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North said, a large part of the debate has been about the restricted market. Questions such as these have been asked: is a cartel operating? Are the prices that are paid for films by television companies unfair? We have heard much about the duopoly. It is an imperfect market. It is literally more than a duopoly. Channel 4, by coming along and financing its own films, is becoming a third force. In the debate we are talking about only part of the market. We are talking about levying part of the market that is available for films. We are talking about levying only part of the television market.

I would not deny for one moment that that section of the market is imperfect. I disagree with the suggestion that somehow the deficiencies of an imperfect market are corrected or made more perfect by introducing the distortion of a levy on top. I do not consider that the appropriate response.

Again and again we hear in the debate that it is not a free market. I hope I have made it clear that I do not think that it is. It is odd that Labour Members tend to say that in almost every debate. In shipbuilding debates, I am told that it is not a free market. I know that it is not a free market. I know that it is not a free market in the film industry as well. It is an imperfect market, but an imperfect market is better than no market at all, or no element of competition at all.

Mr. Gould: The peculiarity of this market is that there are 4 billion occasions on which the demand for the product is demonstrated, but the market reward for that demand cannot be paid to those who supply it because the market is controlled by a duopoly of television companies. The levy is simply a mechanism whereby that constriction of the market can be at least partly overcome.

Mr. Lamont: That is what the whole debate is about, and that is what I am addressing my remarks to.

To my mind, the fact that it is an imperfect market is not proof for the assertion that inadequate prices are being paid for films made by British film producers. That has been asserted rather than proven in the debate. Some hon. Members—not all—have accepted, perhaps uncritically, the claim by those who, after all, have an interest in the matter that producers' remuneration is not all that it might be.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) put a different gloss on that matter and gave a different set of arguments and examples. It was he who said that what we are often talking about are second-hand goods. We are talking about films which have exhausted their life in the theatrical cinema. If they had not, they would be exhibited. That is why the price for so many of those films is low. My hon. Friend also said that the prices must be compared with those that might be paid for cheaper American material that might be purchased by the BBC or the television companies if they had to face the demands of a levy.

Mr. Gorst: It is clear that it is common ground between my hon. Friend the Minister and everybody else that there is a distortion in the market. What is not clear is whether my hon. Friend concedes that, by whatever means, there is a need to help those who operate to a disadvantage in the market.

Mr. Lamont: What I am saying is that there is an element of competition. Of course, it is not a perfect market. It is not a free market. As has been demonstrated again and again, for example by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden, there is an element of competition in the market.

The question whether there is rigging of prices in the market between the BBC and ITV, or between different

[Mr. Lamont]

companies, is a serious one. I am sure that the Director General of Fair Trading will read the debate and note that. I am sure that he will consider what has been alleged and asserted. It is for him to investigate the matter and consider whether there is evidence of improper practice. The fact that people assert that inadequate prices are being paid is not, by itself, an argument for a levy. If there is a cartel, operating improperly, it should be investigated. However, that has not been proven beyond doubt and I do not believe that much evidence has been provided in the debate.

Mr. Gorst *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: I was just about to refer to another point that my hon. Friend made. He put a good question to the House when he asked, if we had a system whereby films were provided through pay television, would the remuneration to film producers be less, the same or greater than at present? It is a brilliant question, but he gave no evidence for the answer, and he seems to think that it is self-evident that they would be paid more. I agree that the question is right, but of its nature it is almost unanswerable. If there is real evidence of price fixing or rigging of the market between the BBC and ITV, the Government or the Director General of Fair Trading should consider that, but it is not enough just to assert that the remuneration of producers is less than it should be simply because they say that that is so.

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister has denied as strenuously as the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) that a cartel is in operation——

Mr. Lamont: I did not.

Mr. Ashdown: I apologise to the Minister. The hon. Member for Wealden denied that such a cartel was in operation, but the Minister said that perhaps it was and should be looked into. Let us accept that no such cartel is in operation. If the Minister accepts that it is not a free market, however uncorrupted it may be now—taking that point as read—how long does he believe that, with only two buyers in the market place, it will remain a fair market that reflects fair prices? I ask the Minister to recall that he is setting up a permanent system to fund the film industry. Surely, with only two buyers in the market place, in time it must become corrupted. Does the Minister recognise that the system of levy is trying to measure demand in some other way as that demand cannot be measured by the free market system because it is an imperfect market?

Mr. Lamont: The Liberals are always accusing us of being dogmatic and theoretical, and always trotting out phrases about free markets and fair prices. Life consists of imperfect markets. That is the real world.

Mr. Ashdown: Answer the question.

Mr. Lamont: I will answer the question. I always do. The answer to imperfect markets is not to add distortions such as those proposed by the Opposition. I have been asked how long it will be before the situation alters. That depends on other matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton) talked about DBS, and my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury talked about cable. I was asked whether there was a reason for believing that this revolution and these changes might be slowing down. I concede that there might be problems. Progress on that front might not have been as fast as many of us had hoped or predicted, but I think most people feel that that is the way for the future. Undoubtedly the market for films will open up. Undoubtedly the restricted market will become wider and the element of monopoly or duopoly will gradually change. If that is the future, it is anachronistic and wrong to impose this levy on television companies.

7 pm

On top of that, we have to face the fact that there will be a voracious appetite for films on television. The EC Commission has calculated that by the late 1980s there will be a demand for about 125,000 hours of fiction per year. That far surpasses the combined film production at present of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. A large market is opening up.

Mr. Gorst: My hon. Friend referred to the Director General of Fair Trading. Is he aware that all the information that one is able to glean about prices comes from the ITV companies? As far as I am aware, the IBA does not know at what price its programme contractors buy in their material. The BBC is extremely cagey about prices as well. Therefore, my hon. Friend's suggestion that the Director General of Fair Trading should look at the matter is not only sensible but welcome, and I hope that he will pursue it.

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend would not wish to misrepresent me. I said that if there were evidence of abuse the Director General of Fair Trading would obviously wish to consider that, and that I was sure he would read the debate. However, I take my hon. Friend's point seriously. I am anxious to look at some of these points about prices. I have had conversations with people in the industry about this vexatious question, and the answers have been no more enlightening than the debate. There have simply been assertions after assertions. I agree that there is a case for finding out more of the facts about it. However, until we have the facts, the argument for the levy does not stand up.

It must be emphasised, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden emphasised, that television companies have a vested interest in film production. He referred to what Channel 4 is doing for film production. The Channel 4 "Film on Four" programme alone has spent £14·5 million on films. The BBC expenditure on films has, in the past five years, increased by about 100 per cent. Would these sums of money be made available if there were a levy? That is open to question.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): My hon. Friend may remember that although I was not on the Committee I took a considerable interest in the Bill on Second Reading. I am a considerable film viewer, but I never go to the cinema. I support the film industry. I think my hon. Friend knows that I have a great interest in the theatrical industry. If I go to the theatre, I pay £15 for a ticket, or else I cannot get a seat. However, I can wait to see "Amadeus" on television, and that is unfair. Whatever my hon. Friend is saying, there is not a glowing future for the film industry. There is not a great expanding market. I can see those films which I like to watch by staying at home and paying £47 or £65 to the BBC. The film industry does not have a great future.

Mr. Lamont: With great respect to my hon. Friend, who is a friend of mine, his intervention or little speech went over much ground. If I reply to all his points, I shall repeat the debate that we had in Committee and a large part of the debate that we have had this afternoon. I am pleased that he has been able to join us at this stage in the proceedings, but he will forgive me if I do not answer all his points.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) did not answer the point about what would stop the BBC and independent television companies from cutting back on the amount that they already spend on television film if there were this levy. This is a fundamental and important point.

Mr. Gould: I offered a number of points, but the fundamental one is that, even with the levy, the buying in of feature films by the television companies is so much the cheapest form of television that the companies would be a long way from giving up the practice. It would still be the thing that they would be bound to do.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman's point illustrates what I was saying. Any pressure put on the television companies by the levy will intensify pressure to buy the cheapest forms of entertainment, such as some American films. The hon. Gentleman, for all his attempts to answer the question, did not address himself to the point, and nor did the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), who is sitting on the Front Bench now, addressed himself to that question when he was on the Back Benches a few minutes ago. His answer was the right one, and I am not sure whether he should not now retreat to the Back Benches again. He was right in saying that there was a great danger that the levy might lead to less money being spent by the television companies on British films.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham attempted to widen the debate to consider the finances of the British film industry. He said that unless there were a levy there would not be adequate support for the British film industry. We were perhaps moving towards the arguments that we had in Committee about the level of funding for the son of the NFFC and capital allowances, and so on. Again, my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden. Even if the Government have got it wrong about the finances for the British film industry, that is not an argument for imposing a levy for British films on television.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury was wholly right to emphasise that one cannot base a film industry largely on the prosperity of the television industry. If the film industry is to survive and prosper, we must reverse the trend of decline in our cinemas. A good British film industry must have a strong cinema sector. It cannot survive simply by showing films on television. To impose a levy on the television companies based on films shown on television would be merely to repeat the errors that we had before with the Eady levy. The Eady levy on films shown on cinemas was a mistake, and to extend that principle to the television sector would be an equally grave error.

For those reasons, I urge my hon. and right hon. Friends to vote for the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 224, Noes 164.

Division No. 90] **[7.10 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Fry, Peter
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Peter
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian

Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brinton, Tim
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foulkes, George
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Gale, Roger
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hanley, Jeremy
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rooker, J. W.
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 3

Dissolution of National Film Finance Corporation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. David Trippier): I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 3, line 18, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

Clause 3 relates to the disposal by the Secretary of State of the assets which will be vested in him on the dissolution of the National Film Finance Corporation. I have on previous occasions outlined the Government's intentions in that respect. Some concern was expressed in Committee that the discretionary nature of the present drafting of the Bill did not impose a sufficient duty on the Secretary of State to ensure that any such property, right or amount would be used for purposes connected with the British film industry.

I accepted the thrust of the argument presented by hon. Members and undertook to table an amendment which would convey the same obligation. Amendment No. 6 is designed to reflect more clearly the Government's intentions in respect of the disposal of the NFFC's assets. I trust that hon. Members will feel that it meets that purpose and that they will support it.

Mr. Gould: The Minister is right to say that he gave the undertaking in Committee. I need say no more than that we are grateful to him for having carried out that undertaking.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Gorst: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 3, line 20, at end add—

'provided that he has laid before Parliament the terms and conditions upon which any such arrangements are to be made not less than 28 sitting days before they are to come into effect'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 32, in page 3, line 34, at end insert—

'(3A) The conditions referred to in subsection (3) shall include a condition that the company to which any right may be transferred under that subsection shall transfer to the Secretary of State one special share which entitled the Secretary of State to exercise a right of veto over the transactions of the company if he deems that they fail to satisfy him as to the matters specified in subsection 3*(a)* and *(b)*.'.

Mr. Gorst: The purpose of amendment No. 7 was to ensure that the company known as the son of NFFC was set up on terms that were known in advance to Parliament. The Minister's arrangements were not available to us in Committee in any detail, and many of us felt concerned about that. Indeed, it was only yesterday that those who have taken an active interest received the heads of agreement from the Department.

The amendment was originally intended to ensure that discussion had to take place on Report. It is fair to say that, having seen the heads of agreement, the amendment has a rather more substantial purpose than purely probing. The question that has to be answered is whether the terms are satisfactory from the point of view of protecting the new arrangement for the British film industry from being dissembled, dispersed or in any other way disposed of after a short or medium period.

Our information was sketchy, general and rather unspecific when it should have been precise. It raised, and still raises, a number of unanswered questions. One is still not satisfied that the Secretary of State's powers are as adequate or complete as they should be in order to guarantee the company. Perhaps they are, but not on the evidence so far available. I concede that the Minister has taken a lot of trouble to inform us, but he has not yet succeeded in satisfying us.

I understand from the draft agreement that a new limited partnership will be formed. I understand from my researches that a limited partnership means that the partners will be divided into those who would be called general partners and others who would be called limited partners, the latter contributing to the partnership assets of a specific amount in money or money's worth and enjoying immunity from liability beyond the amount so contributed. However, an essential condition of that immunity is that a limited partner should not take part in the management of the business.

I presume that the purpose of that rather uncommon arrangement is to ensure that the members of the consortium are unable to interfere too much in matters other than the establishment of policy. So far, I would say, so good. But the problem arises that we do not know whether the initial members of the consortium are to be general or limited partners. If they are general partners, they will have an unlimited liability.

It is clear from the heads of agreement that the Government will not in any sense be a general partner, since it is specifically said that only British companies will have that status. Therefore, I understand that if they are general partners, they will have the capacity, first, to have an unlimited liability, but, secondly, to interfere with the activities of the chief executive, about which a great deal of concern was expressed in Committee. When my hon. Friend the Minister enlightens us further on this point, I hope that he will be able to say exactly what will be the status of the various partners.

Another aspect of limited partnership puzzles me. The 1907 Act, which formed that arrangement, stipulated that there could be not more than 20 partners in such an arrangement, unless they were in surveying, auctioneering, valuing, estate agency, land agency and estate management, which clearly none of the partners is or is likely to be. Therefore, one foresees that the arrangement will be curtailed to not more than 20 participants within one consortium. Can my hon. Friend confirm that or tell me that I am wrong? If he confirms that, will he say why it is to be so severely curtailed? Those are the questions that seem immediately to occur to me on the structure that is proposed.

Various options are open to us in deciding whether to press the amendment. We can give the Secretary of State the benefit of the doubt; we can pass the Bill unamended and wait and see how history works itself out; we can write amendment No. 7 into the Bill so that the Secretary of State must tell Parliament more each year or whenever anything is happening and he is coming to an arrangement; or we can insist on amendment No. 32, which has been tabled by the Opposition, about which we had a great deal of discussion in Committee and in which many of my hon. Friends were sympathetically interested. In other words, we can remain sceptical about the Secretary of State's arrangements and demand that he has a fall-back position in the shape of a special share.

My preference would not be for the first of those three options—to give the Secretary of State the benefit of the doubt—not because I do not trust him, but because, in effect, it is unlikely that the arrangement which is being entered into can be judged in fewer than three years or more probably in five.

7.30 pm

We cannot foretell either the market or what any future Government might feel disposed to do about this arrangement. Therefore, I believe that we should have something far more concrete available to the House for monitoring the position.

I prefer a combination of my amendment and amendment No. 32, which the Opposition have tabled. The truth of the matter — and we went into this in considerable detail on the last group of amendments—is that, because the industry still operates in an unfree, fettered market, the duopoly will continue and the menace of the kid glove, the unspoken agreement, will persist. Therefore, I believe that Parliament's job is to act as some form of long-stop referee.

I hope that my hon. Friend will now be in a position to answer some of the questions, many more of which arise, on the document which he has given to us. I am sure the House will want to be satisfied about those, too, but I shall not delay it any further by going into that kind of detail.

Mr. Gould: Like the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst), I am grateful to the Minister for his sending

[Mr. Gould]

to each member of the Committee, I believe, a copy of the draft memorandum of understanding with the new consortium. That has been extremely helpful. It gives us some more or less tangible idea as to how the Minister's mind is working. However, it leaves us with some difficulties because it is obviously still a draft memorandum and it fails to satisfy at least the Opposition on what is perhaps our central concern — that there should be something, preferably in the Bill, to enable the House to monitor the activities of the consortium and how they are likely to affect the future of the film industry. The difficulty is that the draft agreement, which may in the fullness of time become a legally binding contract, is likely to operate outside the attention of Members of the House.

The draft agreement goes some way, in intention if not in mechanism, to meet some of the points made in Committee. It suggests, although we have yet to see the draft specification for the chief executive's role, that the Government and the consortium recognise the importance of some independence on its part. We have perhaps less reason to be pleased about the extent to which the memorandum recognises that the cultural significance and future of the industry as a whole should also weigh in the considerations of the consortium. In other words, it should be not just the commercial interests of that particular group of companies which should determine its decisions and actions.

One of the problems here is that, as the statement issued by the six constituent bodies of the industry points out, even as the draft memorandum stands, the consortium may exist solely or at least principally to serve the commercial interests of the constituent parts and have very little to do with the future of the industry. For example, that statement — which I again commend to the attention of the Minister—raises the possibility that the constituent parts of the consortium may see it simply as a means of sharing the risk in projects in which they may have lost faith. They will be able to lay off the risk by handing it over to the consortium. If they entrust a particular project to the consortium and find that it has exceeded their expectations, the danger is that they may poach on the consortium and draw the project back into their own grasp. There is very little in the draft memorandum, as we see it at present, to explain how these various difficulties are to be avoided and reduced.

I believe that we still have not resolved the fundamental problem — that the Government are intent on handing over both the resources and the responsibilities in this area to a private firm, whereas hitherto many people have considered that, if there is to be an injection of public money, such responsibilities should be undertaken by an institution in which the public interest is at least represented in some way or other.

One way of achieving that, as the hon. Member for Hendon, North explained, is to ensure that at some point those matters are brought to the Floor of the House. I believe that his amendment would to some degree achieve that objective. I am entirely in agreement with him that some such mechanism for public and parliamentary accountability ought to be put in place.

There is a whole range of further anxieties. I shall not weary the House by rehearsing them all, because many of them were adequately covered in Committee. However, I single out the very short-term nature of the obligation being entered into by the consortium. I am extremely concerned about what might happen if, after three years, the consortium simply said it had not worked and its members proposed to withdraw. We need further assurances from the Minister as to what the Government would do. Who would own the property at present in the hands of the National Film Finance Corporation? Does he recognise that it is in every sense public property — property that has arisen by virtue of a levy, property that belongs to the industry as a whole? Can he give us an assurance that, even if the consortium for one reason or another fails, the Government's support for and interest in the industry will continue and that that property belonging to the industry will continue to be devoted to the purposes of the industry?

I wish to reinforce the questions asked by the hon. Member for Hendon, North about that interesting creature, the limited partnership. I understand that, for some purposes at any rate, this topic will arise on a later group of amendments, but it might be just as well if the Minister could answer some of these questions now. The point that I am particularly interested in—the answer to which I could perhaps have discovered if I had looked up the 1907 Act but with which I think he may be able to provide me —is to what extent the partners can exchange or change roles. Can someone who has been a limited partner suddenly decide to become a general partner and vice versa? Who is to be what? What is the purpose of this distinction in this case? Why has this particular mechanism been set up?

I turn now to amendment No. 32, which suggests that, before transferring what is in effect public property to this new consortium, the Minister should make it a condition that something in the nature of a golden share be transferred to the Government. I find it hard to believe that the Minister could object to that in principle, since he must know that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has heartily and strongly endorsed the whole concept of the golden share in defending his actions in selling off shares in British Aerospace. In a letter, which has been published, he has made a powerful defence of this whole mechanism. It is, of course, a device which is now used by the Government in a whole range of privatised enterprises — Cable and Wireless, Amersham International, Jaguar, Britoil, Enterprise Oil, British Telecom and British Aerospace. It is a very long list. I cannot believe that there could be any objection in principle to something which has been sanctified by Government practice. Therefore, I think the Minister will have to explain why, if in all those other cases a golden share was a proper means of protecting the public interest, for some reason in this case, which in its nature and all its central aspects is on all fours with the others, it is not considered appropriate.

The NFCC was important to the future of the film industry, not just because it was the means by which money was made available to the industry. The corporation did an excellent job in deciding how that money should be spent. Many excellent films — more recently, "Another Country" is a good example — depended for their production on money provided through the NFFC.

The real importance of the NFFC was not just as a conduit for money, but as a statement by the Government,

and by the community at large through the Government, that they had a stake and interest in the future of the British film industry.

My fear about what is proposed in the Bill is that that statement of support will be lost, and that, unless we can somehow inject into the film industry that element of public interest and accountability, the industry will be left to go its own way, and its own way may be a downward spiral.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) and the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) for responding with some modified enthusiasm for the draft heads of agreement which I circulated to members of the Committee. Even if hon. Members do not agree with them entirely—and even if they do not go as far as they would have wished—they at least clarify some of the questions that were raised in Committee. This amendment is a convenient opportunity to enlarge on some of the points that could not be answered then.

My purpose in putting the draft heads of agreement before members of the Committee was to try to reassure them, for I recognised the legitimacy of the point that the hon. Member for Dagenham made about wanting to be assured that this was not just a commercial organisation but a body which would have regard to the cultural aspects of film making and would be a force towards underpinning that important aspect of our cultural life. The provisions of the draft heads of agreement do just that.

I do not wish to weary the House, but in addition to answering the questions that have been put to me I shall comment on the chief executive, the chairman and the role of Government director, points which were raised in Committee.

The principal participants in the "son of NFFC" announced on 25 January the details which we are now discussing. As I pointed out earlier, they have decided to call the new body the British Screen Finance Consortium. It will be structured as a limited partnership, initially comprising the four organisations already identified—Channel 4, Rank, Thorn-EMI and members of the British Videogram Association — together with a general partner. This general partner will be a new limited liability company to be owned jointly by the limited partners and will undertake the management of the business.

The company will have a board on which the major investors, together with the Government, will be represented. The main functions of the board will be limited to the definition of the parameters within which the chief executive will make all major editorial and investment decisions.

7.45 pm

I was asked about the limit of 20 in the limited partnership under the 1907 Act. This can be enlarged by order of the Secretary of State, and an application for such an order would be favourably considered.

The partners could, by agreement at some future date, form themselves into a company. The Bill—which will, we hope, be amended in our proceedings later tonight—preserves flexibility for the "son of NFFC" to be a partnership or a company.

Hon. Members also wanted to know about the chief executive. At one point it was even suggested that the chief executive should be independently appointed. That would be difficult to reconcile with the reality that we are discussing a principal employee of a private company, albeit a private company in which there will be strong Government involvement and continuing Government interest and support.

I recognise the sincere concern that was expressed that the chief executive might be biased or simply an extension of the interests of the various partners in the consortium. I have been given assurances by the partners. The chief executive's role will be to plan, direct and co-ordinate the operations of the company within the framework of policies established by the board of directors so as to ensure both that the company's objectives are achieved and that the company fulfils its responsibilities.

In practical terms, the chief executive is likely to be the ultimate decision-maker of whether to support particular films. It would be silly to assert that the chief executive will be independent in the sense of not being accountable or being wholly without restrictions on his authority or judgment.

I know that none of the partners wishes to exercise day-to-day supervision and that, within broad guidelines, the chief executive will be free to make his or her own commercial and artistic judgments. There will, within a few days, be advertisements for the recruitment of the chief executive.

Hon. Members were also interested in the role of the chairman of the management company of the British Screen Finance Consortium. His appointment is to be subject to Government approval. In broad terms, the chairman will be expected to set the policies of the company and support the chief executive and, in particular, he will need to ensure that the company's objectives, policies, plans, organisation and external results satisfy the interests of the shareholders.

He will also want to ensure that the operations of the company are carried out in a manner that respects the interests of the recipients of the loans and the film community at large. In addition, I would expect him to keep in mind the terms of the contractual relationship with the Government and the need for responsible stewardship of the assets contained in the portfolio.

Lest, when I referred to the interests of shareholders, I detected from Opposition Members a frisson, they will recall what I said about dividends not being expected in the first three years. I hope, therefore, that before they get too alarmed over my statement they will bear in mind what I said in Committee.

The question of the director to be nominated by the Government was raised in particular by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North. It goes without saying that the Government director, like all directors under common law and the Companies Act, must have general responsibilities to the BSFC management company for the control and management of its business. In common with Government nominee directors on the boards of other private sector companies, he will not be a delegate on the board on which he serves. His duties as a director are owed to the management company, but he will have further responsibilities stemming from the fact that the Government have a special contractual and financial relationship with the consortium and will therefore need to take special interest in the consortium's affairs.

We regard the chairman as the principal point of contact in our discussions on the consortium's performance and strategy, but we shall on occasion seek the opinion of the Government director on these and similar matters. For his

[Mr. Norman Lamont]

part, the Government director will seek to ensure that the Government are informed promptly of any significant developments of interest to us, whether as the providers of finance or more generally in the way of the Government having an interest in the film industry. In short, the director will be the Government's watchdog in the sense of seeking to ensure that the terms on which the Government have agreed to fund the consortium are observed.

The hon. Member for Dagenham referred to monitoring. I have been outlining how we shall be monitoring through the Government director. I take his point about Parliament's role and the need for reporting to the House. I hope that I shall be able to respond constructively and favourably to a later amendment which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North. However, the amendment is rather ambiguous and much depends on what my hon. Friend thinks it means. I accept that there should be some monitoring by Parliament and some reporting to Parliament of what has been happening. I shall try to respond in a helpful manner to my hon. Friend and his amendment.

I turn to the discussions that have been taking place with a view to the contractual arrangements with the consortium. Obviously, until the partnership is formed, it will not be possible for the Government to make a contract with it. However, in our discussions with the prospective partners we have reached agreement on what the contract is likely to contain. Indeed, hon. Members have a copy of the document. The document, of necessity, is no more than a statement of intent at this stage, but it represents the agreed intentions of the four participants and the Government and it has been initialled by both sides. I shall draw attention to its salient points.

First, the Secretary of State agrees to license to the consortium the portfolio of the NFFC's rights and interests in films. The hon. Member for Dagenham asked what would happen to the assets and the answer is that they are licensed. In effect, they are on loan. If anything went wrong with the consortium, or if we felt that it was not doing what was in the interests of the British film industry, the Government would be able to retrieve the assets. As the House knows, we shall also make available £1·5 million for five years. That is a commitment that gives some security for the future. It is a commitment by the Government to continue supporting the organisation for five years.

Mr. Brinton: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the £1·5 million that has been offered by the Government for five years will not become involved in taxation? Will he address some of the money for use in investment?

Mr. Lamont: The money will be made available by loans to the consortium. We envisaged originally that the money would be made available by grant, but it will be made available by loan at the request of the partners. They see that as the most convenient arrangement for them for tax purposes. These amounts, which will take the form of loans, will be drawn down only against need and will be used wholly for investment in British films and the reasonable operating costs of the consortium. For its part the consortium will discharge, from funds set aside by the NFFC and transferred by the Secretary of State to the consortium, forward commitments agreed by the NFFC and outstanding upon its dissolution. The consortium proposes to obtain from its members at least £1·1 million a year for three years. The initial members do not envisage that any dividends will be paid during the first three years.

The structure and organisation of the new body will be subject to the approval of the Secretary of State. Future entrants to the consortium are welcomed on matching terms provided that they are bound by the agreed arrangements. The Secretary of State and each full member of the consortium will be entitled to representation on the board and the Secretary of State will also have the right to approve the chairman. I repeat what I said in Committee, which was that we see this as a dynamic and growing body. We would welcome other participants in it and that could be a means by which more finance will be channelled for the benefit of the industry.

The Government have received representations that the commitment of the NFFC to the support of short films should not be allowed to die when the NFFC is dissolved. In the past the Eady levy has provided a valuable, if somewhat artificial, incentive for the distribution of short films to cinemas. The demise of the levy will therefore remove what remains of that incentive. Yet it is widely, if not universally, recognised that the short film—the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is interested in this—is the ideal nursery or proving ground for new talent, be it producers, directors or whatever. Moreover, there is still a place in the cinema programme for a well made short. It has been suggested to us that it is a natural extension of some of the project development activities which the development scheme is intended to foster. We have therefore decided to enlarge the scope of the scheme to embrace the financial support of the production of shorts. Amendments for that purpose have been tabled.

Secondly, both the consortium and the Government recognise the concern that is expressed in some quarters that the performance of this activity by the consortium might be thought to work to the disadvantage of the independent film maker. It was in recognition of that concern that we said that we intended to make it a condition of the agency contract that the consortium must use independent consultants with no financial interest in the consortium or its component companies.

The heads of agreement conclude with a number of safeguards. First, the management company of the consortium must be a British company as that is defined in the Bill. The defintion is based on previous legislation. Secondly, the members of the consortium may withdraw but may not dispose of their interests except with the approval of the Secretary of State and all the other members of the consortium. Thirdly, there are conditions on the exploitation of the NFFC portfolio, and any revenues generated from the portfolio must be used for investment in British films. Fourthly, the Secretary of State may withdraw the licence if the consortium is wound up or if he is not satisfied that the funds that he has made available are being invested in British films.

I think that the heads of agreement take account of the various points raised by hon. Members at earlier stages of the debate. However, it has been suggested that the contract should oblige the consortium to repay moneys advanced if the company failed to honour its commitments. At that time it was assumed that the Government's contribution, as I said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton),

would probably take the form of grants. This matter has not been settled but it seems likelier that the consortium would prefer to receive support in the form of loans. My Department will certainly be monitoring the use made of the portfolio and the Government's contribution, and under the contract it would be open to the Government to sue for repayment of grants. Loans could be repaid if they were misapplied in any way.

Although we have debated this matter and I have considered it, I am not persuaded that it would be reasonable to go further by requiring the repayment of previous contributions that have been properly applied. In finalising the contractural details, we shall ensure that any sums made available by way of grant or loan which are not applied for the purposes intended shall be immediately recoverable.

The discussions that we have had with the respective partners have laid a foundation for a contract that should satisfy any fair-minded observer that there are proper and reasonable safeguards for the NFFC's assets and that public money is given to this body so that we can further the interests of the British film industry. I have tried to build into the agreement the points that worried the Committee.

8 pm

Mr. Gorst: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for the considerable further explanation that he has given. It would be difficult to probe further on this occasion, even if further probing were necessary. If further probing is necessary after the industry and others have given more thought to my hon. Friend's statement, clearly the other place will be the best place in which to do that. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 8, in page 3, leave out line 21 and insert—

'(2A) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (2), the Secretary of State may, in pursuance of that subsection—

(a) pay any amount received by him as there mentioned to the British Film Fund Agency for distribution in accordance with section *(Final payments by British Film Fund Agency)*(1);

(b) arrange for the transfer in accordance with subsection (3) of any right to which that subsection applies.

(3)'.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Mr. Norman Lamont: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 3, line 24, after 'company', insert 'or partnership'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 10, 11, 13, 16, 17 and 20.

Mr. Lamont: This series of amendments relates to the concern that not enough is known about the structure of the new body. The participants in that body have agreed that the option of a limited partnership would be preferable to that of a company as envisaged in clause 3(3). We see no reason not to accommodate that preference. We believe that that body can meet the needs of the industry perfectly well. These amendments are, therefore, necessary for that purpose.

The intention is that a limited partnership will be established, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) identified with his usual perception, under the Limited Partnerships Act 1907, in which each of the participants will be a limited partner and in which there will be a general partner. The general partner will be formed as a new limited liability company with a nominal share capital owned jointly by the limited partners in their profit-sharing ratios and enjoying only nominal profit-sharing rights.

Although it would be undesirable and unnecessarily restrictive to insist that all the limited partners must be British companies, I believe it is important that the general partner should be a British company, and amendment No. 13 makes provision for this.

These amendments provide a degree of flexibility for the structure of the successor to the NFFC, while continuing to ensure that effective control will remain in British hands. I invite hon. Members to support the amendments.

Mr. Gould: In the previous debate the Minister did not answer some of the questions put by myself and the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) about the nature of a limited partnership. Why have the members of the consortium chosen this particular form? Which of them is to be a general partner, and which is to be a limited partner? Is it intended that the members of the consortium should enter a partnership with the limited liability company, or is the partnership to own the company?

Mr. Lamont: I thought that I had given a crystal clear answer. The consortium decided for tax reasons that it preferred to be a partnership. That was done after consultation with, I believe, Coopers and Lybrand about the most suitable vehicle for the members of the consortium.

I thought I had made it clear that the general partner would be responsible for the management of the business. The general partner would be a limited liability company which would be owned by the limited partners.

Mr. Gould: How easily could a limited partner become a general partner and, to some degree, vice versa? Does the Minister have any information on that point?

Mr. Lamont: As far as I know, there is no problem about that. There is the global ceiling of the 20 participants within one consortium to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North referred. That arrangement can be altered. I would not have thought that there was any problem — even if one has 20 participants — about including other people in the general partnership. Other people might decide to join the partnership on different terms. I should have thought that the general partnership could be enlarged to accommodate other people within it. Not everyone will want to put up the same amount of money or to have the same obligations. It may be that the founding partner will remain as the general partner for some time. I have made it clear that we envisage the consortium being a dynamic body which should grow. We hope that it will attract more money.

Mr. Gorst: I had not intended to intervene in the debate, but my hon. Friend the Minister has raised one doubt in my mind. If there were initially a general partner, that would indicate to me that there was a degree of confidence in the future of the operation. However, if there were adverse circumstances, I would be worried about whether the general partner could suddenly turn round and say, "From now on, I want to be a limited partner." If the general partner did that, I would say to myself, "He thinks that this body will go into the red. He

[Mr. Gorst]

wants to limit his liability." Will my hon. Friend comment on that? That is not a possibility which any of us would like to entertain.

Mr. Lamont: I cannot bind people in the way that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North implies. He will know—it is written into the heads of agreement—that the consortium has said that it intends that the £1·1 million should be available for three years. That is the limit of the consortium's commitment at the moment. The members of the consortium collectively have said that they intend that that money should be available. We envisage that this body will go on, and we have shown our commitment to it by making it clear that our £1·5 million will be available for five years. I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured by knowing that, after two years, we intend to review the finances of the consortium and how it is working to ascertain whether the arrangements are working precisely as we want them to work for the benefit of the British film industry.

Mr. Gorst: I suspect that the fault is entirely on my side and that the incomprehension rests with me. I had understood that a general partner had an unlimited liability, and that anyone who was a general partner could not limit himself in that way.

Mr. Lamont: No; that is not right, because the general partner will be a limited liability company. To clarify this point precisely with the full benefit of legal advice, I shall write to my hon. Friend and make the position crystal clear.

Mr. Gorst: I should be most grateful if my hon. Friend would do that, because it seems to me that, although the general partner has unlimited liability, it has limited its liability by being a limited company as well.

Mr. Gould: As the point raised by the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) is, in essense, the one at which I was driving, will the Minister kindly write to me on it as well?

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall be delighted to do so.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 10, in page 3, line 26, after 'company', insert 'or partnership'.

No. 11, in page 3, line 32, after 'company', insert 'or partnership'.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Mr. Trippier: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 3, leave out line 40 and insert—

'(4A) Where in consequence of any such order as is mentioned in subsection (2) any liability of the Corporation becomes vested in the Secretary of State, the Secretary of State may arrange for the liability to be transferred, on such terms as may be agreed between him and the company or partnership, to any British company or partnership in whose case he is satisfied as to the matters mentioned in paragraphs *(a)* and *(b)* of subsection (3).

(4B) In this section—'.

During our discussions in Committee, the Government explained that they intended to pass to the British Screen Finance Consortium the unfulfilled and forward commitments made by the NFFC together with any other cash from the NFFC's assets to meet those commitments. That will mean that film makers who have obtained an agreement from the NFFC to support a particular film need not fear that when the NFFC is dissolved they will be left stranded.

The amendment is necessary to enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to pass such commitments to the consortium. I believe that the amendment is in the interests of film makers and I invite right hon. and hon. Members to support it.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 13, in page 4, line 6, at end insert—

'"British partnerships" means a limited partnership formed in accordance with the Limited Partnerships Act 1907 in which the general partner within the meaning of the Act, or (as the case may be) each of the general partners, is a British Company;'.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Mr. Trippier: I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 4, line 8, after 'person', insert 'or combination of persons'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendment No. 15.

Mr. Trippier: The purpose of this amendment is to meet the anxieties expressed by some hon. Members that the current drafting of this part of the Bill is not entirely clear. In clause 3, the definition of "British company" is a company over which

"two or more Commonwealth citizens are together in a position to exercise control".

However, the definition of "control" speaks of the power

"of a person to secure,"

by specified means,

"that the affairs of the company are conducted in accordance with the wishes of that person."

As hon. Members will be aware, the Interpretation Act 1978 provides that the singular includes the plural. Nevertheless, to give assurance to some hon. Members, and for the avoidance of doubt, we propose that the Bill should be amended to include the words "combination of persons". The amendment is helpful in removing any possible element of ambiguity. I invite right hon. and hon. Members to support it.

Mr. Gould: I am grateful to the Minister for tabling the amendment. The Opposition are delighted to welcome it, but it might be just as well if we were to record the part played by the Copinger Society in bringing the point to our attention and having played some role in promoting this monumental change to the Bill.

Mr. Trippier: I am happy to acknowledge the part played by the Copinger Society.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 4

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE BY SECRETARY OF STATE IN CONNECTION WITH THE PRODUCTION OF FILMS

Amendments made: No. 16, in page 4, line 33, after first 'company', insert 'or partnership'.

No. 17, in page 4, line 33, after second 'company', insert 'or partnership.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Mr. Norman Lamont: I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 4, line 37, after 'person' insert—

'(i)'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With which it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 19 and 21.

Mr. Lamont: The amendments relate to the point that I made earlier on the heads of agreement about the £500,000 which is to be provided for pre-production work. It will enable a proportion of those funds to be used to part finance short films—films lasting less than 35 minutes.

For the reasons that I have given, I concluded that it would be right for part of that £500,000 that has been set aside to be made available for that purpose. The Government envisaged that about £150,000 a year would be used for that purpose. Using those funds for shorts is not thought likely to be to the disadvantage of any pre-production projects.

I understand that in recent years the National Film Development Fund has spent no more than £200,000 on such projects. I hope that that activity will expand in the future, but I do not believe that there will be problems in keeping within the total budget of £500,000. I do not believe that it is necessary for me to give the House any great detail. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has a point, but I believe that this decision will be widely welcomed.

8.15 pm

Mr. Chris Smith: I rise simply and briefly to give a warm welcome to the amendment and to the Government's commitment to this sector of film making. The making of short films, in particular those made by the workshop sector, is one of the most important and growing parts of the industry, in which a great deal of innovation and talent is at present constituted. Therefore, I congratulate the Government on picking up that point and welcome the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 19, in page 4, line 40, at end insert

'or'

(ii) for any purpose connected with the production of short films.'.

No. 20, in page 4, line 41, after 'company"' insert', "British partnership"'.

No. 21, in page 4, line 42, at end insert

'and "short film" means a relevant film with a total playing time of less than 35 minutes'.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

Mr. Gould: I beg to move amendment No. 34, in page 4, line 44, after 'otherwise', insert

'and shall, by way of grant, be not less than £10 million annually'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 22, in page 5, line 3, at end add

'and he shall lay before Parliament each year a report giving his reasons for providing or withholding financial assistance under this section'.

Mr. Gould: I shall be brief because much of the ground covered by the amendment has been canvassed in other debates this afternoon and in Committee.

I draw the Minister's attention to the statement issued by the six bodies representing the industry in which they make an interesting and valuable comment. They are worried that the money made available to the new consortium will not be adequate. They point out that it will be approximately £3 million per year and that the intention is that that will enable the consortium — as one understands it from its public statements—to finance up to 10 films per year.

I believe that the objective is to provide 25 or 33 per cent. for each project. That means that each project will be able to attract on average about £300,000 a year. If that is to constitute between one quarter and one third of the total production costs, it means that we are talking about low-budget films—films with a budget of perhaps £1 million or less. In other words, they are films which are essentially meant for television.

The industry is anxious that that money may well be directed into an area which is already more than adequately catered for. We no longer have the benefit of the presence of the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith). As he said earlier, Channel 4 and the television companies have done a great deal in that sector. It suggests that the money made available to the consortium will not go to that part of the film industry where it will be needed. It will not help, for example, films made for the cinema such as "Another Country", "The Dresser", the oft-cited "Chariots of Fire", "Gandhi", "The Killing Fields", and so on.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has said on many occasions, that sum will be utterly inadequate to attract into that part of the industry the private finance that is desperately needed. ACTT has instituted a number of inquiries in the City and has said that the answers that it invariably receives are to the effect that approximately £20 million would be required to make investment in films for the cinema viable.

In tabling an amendment which specifies the sum of £10 million only, the House can see that the Opposition's suggestions are modest. That modesty is perhaps not entirely appropriate, given that the financial context in which the industry is likely to operate has been severely turned against it. There is the phasing-out of capital allowances. There is the unhappy decision taken earlier today not to replace the Eady levy. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary has repeatedly reminded us of the business expansion scheme, but that, unfortunately, is simply not suited in many respects to the business of producing films. The hon. Gentleman has offered to talk to the industry about ways in which the scheme could be made more appropriate.

However, many of the financial underpinnings of the industry have been removed. The Government's direct subvention is to take the form of a loan rather than a grant, although we understand the reasons why that is so. Even the £3 million a year that is to be made available to the consortium is likely to be short term, since the obligation is to last only for three years. The assistance is certainly conditional, although, unhappily, that condition seems to have been met this evening. It is to some degree irrelevant in that it strikes at the wrong part of the industry. It is in no sense additional, because the partners in the consortium would spend the money for their own purposes anyway.

There is to be virtually no public money, no recycling mechanism, no tax incentive. No real help is to be provided. The position compares most unfavourably with that in almost every other country that has, or hopes to have, a film industry. As we said on Second Reading, in virtually all the countries where there is a film industry the Government provide the full panoply of aids, incentives, grants and loans. We are simply not doing enough. Indeed, we are hardly doing anything.

I do not hope to evoke any response from the Minister. He is very familiar with the arguments and has not made any suggestion that I regard as adequate. I wish only to

[Mr. Gould]

ensure that the industry is aware that the Opposition understand its continuing need for such financial assistance.

Grouped with amendment No. 34 is amendment No. 22 in the name of the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst). Judging from some of his earlier remarks, I believe that the Minister may be able to offer slightly more comfort to the hon. Gentleman than to us.

Mr. Gorst: I endorse the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). At the heart of our discussions on the Bill, both upstairs and downstairs, is a question. Given that the film industry needs money, where is that money to come from? Will the private sector provide enough? Should the public sector also be involved? The hon. Member for Dagenham was right to argue yet again that the Government should invest more in the industry than they have so far offered to do.

The purpose of my amendment is, in a way, to provide a halfway house between what the hon. Member for Dagenham proposes and the current position of the Government. If accepted in the present or in some similar wording, it would enable Parliament to question the Government of the day about the level of the financial support that they were providing for the film industry. I hope that the Government will accept that we should be given that information annually. They have frequently told us that everything looks rosy. They say that they have done enough. They say that private capital can now take over and that the showing of films on cable and satellite television, the BBC and ITV will provide all that the film industry could reasonably expect. I believe that Parliament will need running proof that that optimistic prediction—which we all hope will be fulfilled—was correct. The amendment will give Parliament a chance to check and assess whether the Government's optimism was justified.

Under the Bill there will, I believe, be no official reports from the film industry to Parliament such as the Cinematograph Films Council's annual report. It would not be unreasonable to ask that we should have some means of receiving information about the progress of the industry.

What do the Government have to fear? If their assessment is correct, and if they have nothing to hide, they have nothing to fear. They should welcome the chance to emphasise the correctness of their predictions. If, on the other hand, those predictions were wrong, Parliament would have a timely opportunity to demand that the film industry should be saved before it is scuppered.

Mr. Ashdown: I shall not rehearse all the arguments that the Minister will have heard in Committee and which have been referred to again by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst). In our view, the Government's current proposal of a loan of £1·5 million over three years is wholly inadequate to meet the needs of the industry as they have been clearly expressed not only by the industry but by other outside bodies. By itself, that sum of money might fund perhaps one medium-budget film. A flourishing industry such as exists at present and such as we should be aiming to retain should make perhaps 12 features and six shorts a year. Of course the Government should not provide all the money, or even the substantial part of it. However, they should provide enough money to ensure stability in the industry. It is our view that, unless such a sum is dedicated to providing a stable base, there is a real danger that the industry will collapse or that, in its present form, will vanish.

A sum of the order of £10 million would be, as the hon. Member for Dagenham said, fairly modest in comparison with what are believed to be the real needs of the industry, but it would provide an element of predictability on which success could be built.

The Government have nothing to lose. Their predictions may be proved to be right. If they are proved to be wrong, we shall have the chance to put things right before it is too late. If there is a vote, therefore, we shall vote in favour of the amendment.

Bearing in mind the comments of the hon. Member for Hendon, North, I wonder why the Minister has decided not to go ahead. The weight of evidence shows that all other countries do much more to foster their film industries than the hon. Gentleman proposes that we should do. Why does the hon. Gentleman believe that he is right when the body of experience suggests otherwise? I hope that he will address himself to that question.

Mr. Chris Smith: I do not want to repeat the arguments that have been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and others, but I fully endorse their views about the inadequacy of the funding arrangements that the Government are making through the new company that is to replace the NFFC. I should like to concentrate on an issue that is marginal to the amendment but which concerns the Government's financial arrangements for the future of the industry—the future funding of the National Film and Television School.

I hope that the Minister can give us some assurances about the funding of the school. He will recall that, in Committee, I asked several questions about the funding arrangements of the school. The matter was followed up by the director of the school in a long and detailed letter to the Minister of 11 January 1985. In that letter, the director concentrated on one crucial issue. In the arrangements that the Minister envisages, there is a gap between the £600,000 from the cinemas and the two television companies and what is presently provided by the television companies.

8.30 pm

The director has asked whether the £200,000 which the BBC and ITV give the school is a replacement for their existing contribution or whether it is additional money. If it is only a replacement, the school will be about £250,000 short on what it needs to run its existing educational work when the Government's proposed financial arrangements come into effect. That is an extremely important issue for the school, which everyone agrees does valuable work. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some comfort on that count. If he cannot, we must take a dim view of the Government's financial proposals.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I do not believe that the House wants me to go over all of the arguments that we have had at great length about the funding of the film industry. The money that we are making available for the new consortium will be twice that which was available to the NFFC. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) to say that that is not enough, but it is twice what was previously available.

I remind the hon. Member for Yeovil, as he was not a member of the Committee, that the Government are providing £1·5 million for five years and an additional £500,000 for five years for project development work. Another £600,000 will come through the portfolio of rights and interests in about 800 films, and the private sector is putting up about £1·1 million annually for three years. The hon. Member for Yeovil says that the money will partly finance only a limited number of films, but the consortium will have twice the resources of the NFFC and it will operate as the NFFC did.

Mr. Ashdown: Is it not temporary, though?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman has asked one question and been given an answer. It is no use his altering the question just because he does not like the answer to the first question.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lamont: I am very good at giving way, but the hon. Gentleman ought to listen. The Government are supporting the film industry in other ways, such as by giving £7·5 million annually to the British Film Institute and other money to the British Film Year.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) mentioned the National Film and Television School. I agree with him about the excellence of that school and its reputation for producing highly skilled film and television programme makers. He will know that it is supported principally by my noble Friend Lord Gowrie, through the Office of Arts and Libraries. The school's budget of about £1·5 million a year is funded only partly by the Eady levy. In the levy year 1983-84, Eady provided only £500,000 and it will provide £600,000 in the current levy year. I hope that the hon. Member for Yeovil is noting this. The balance came from the Office of Arts and Libraries, which provided £850,000 in 1983-84 and £990,000 in 1984-85—a rise of 13 per cent. this year. The grant will be £1·12 million in 1985-86. That is evidence of the Government's commitment to provide as much support to the school as is possible within the constraints of public expenditure.

The arrangements with the BBC, the independent television association and the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association of Great Britain are only in respect of a replacement for the funding that will be lost on the abolition of the Eady levy. However, the arrangements that have been worked out are more than adequate, as they provide sure funding of £600,000 a year for five years. That gives the school greater advance information about its income than was ever possible when it had to go cap in hand seeking funds from the rapidly declining Eady levy. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury asked whether the ICTA and BBC contribution would be additional to their existing one of £100,000 a year. The answer is "Yes". I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be assured by that.

The British Screen Finance Consortium, as the successor body to the NFFC, is not the whole story of what is happening in the British film industry. There is also the private market. The hon. Member for Dagenham professes to have grown weary of my reminding him of the £36 million that Goldcrest raised for film making. I need not bore him with that information this time, because I noticed in the newspapers recently that Thorn-EMI is talking of a financial vehicle of some £100 million for film making. It is possible within the tax regime to raise money for film making. I believe that the markets are becoming more responsive and interested in film making. There is also greater awareness in the City. Companies that have a spread of risk and a portfolio of films are finding it possible to raise money.

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister mentioned Goldcrest. We all know that one third of the money that it raised to make "Chariots of Fire" came from tax allowances, which the Government have now abolished. In 1983, the Government also abolished the exhibitors' quota. We are not considering the £10 million in isolation. What the Government are proposing is in line with their abolition of tax allowances and the exhibitors' quota. As to the question that the Minister pretended that he answered earlier, he is now substituting a temporary system for a permanent one.

Mr. Lamont: I have met the managing director of Goldcrest. It would be improper for me to say what happened in our discussions, but I do not believe that the change in the capital allowances regime will make life very difficult for companies such as Goldcrest and Thorn-EMI which are raising larger amounts of money and spreading their risk over a series of films. The evidence shows that they will still be able to raise the money. In privacy many people have said to me that the changes in capital allowances will not have the much-vaunted damage that some people believe. I accept that there is a legitimate concern by independent producers who may have benefited from other people's capital allowances, but these large companies will still be able to thrive and the extra money that we are making available to the son of NFFC will do a lot to encourage British film makers.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Minister answer "Yes" or "No" to the question whether a third of the money that Goldcrest put into "Chariots of Fire" came from tax allowances which are now abolished?

Mr. Lamont: It is not for me to answer for the internal financial arrangements of Goldcrest. I have told the hon. Gentleman what I believe to be its view about the current regime in which it will operate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North tabled amendment No. 22, and I appreciate and understand what led him to do so. However, I cannot accept it in its present form because I am advised that it would require the Secretary of State to lay annual reports before Parliament, which listed all payments made to the British Screen Finance Consortium and also every application received for assistance towards the development of film projects. Because I recognise that there is a case for a statement to Parliament—it would probably be the general wish of the House that information should be made available about the sums advanced by the Government to the consortium, and the operation of the project development scheme—I am prepared to agree that there should be a brief report of these each year. I would certainly arrange for that.

For the reasons that I have given, I should not like to accept the wording of my hon. Friend's amendment.

Mr. Gorst: Will my hon. Friend explain whether he means by that that he will insert some suitable wording into the Bill when it goes to another place, or is it merely

[Mr. Gorst]

a gentleman's undertaking that year by year or at suitable intervals he and his successors will spill the beans to Parliament?

Mr. Lamont: It is just my undertaking to the House that we would give a report each year on the operation of the consortium and the development fund.

Mr. Gould: I am disappointed, though not surprised, that the Minister has not moved on this point. He has heard the arguments on many previous occasions, and has been equally difficult. Since I see little chance of persuading either the Minister or his absent colleagues to accept what I believe is an overwhelming case, I have little option but to accept the small crumbs of comfort offered regarding amendment No. 22 and, to a limited degree, to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) in respect of the National Film and Television School. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 6

REPEALS, ETC.

Mr. Trippier: I beg to move amendment No. 23, in page 6, line 1, before 'is' insert 'a film which'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 24.

8.45 pm

Mr. Trippier: The purpose of these amendments is technical. It is to meet the concern expressed by some hon. Members that this part of the Bill is ambiguous and may not achieve the desired result. The use of the past tense might be interpreted as meaning that all new films made after the Bill came into force would not have a 50-year copyright. The effect of the amendments is that all films which are published after the Bill will fall under section 13(3)*(b)* of the Copyright Act 1956 which provides that in the case of films not registered under part II of the Films Act 1960 copyright shall run for 50 years from the end of the calendar year in which the film was first published.

That brings United Kingdom legislation into line with the Berne convention, which by article 7(2) provides a minimum term of copyright of 50 years from first public showing. The change complies with the recommendation made by the Whitford report on the law of copyright and design 1977 at paragraph 50*(iii)(a)*. These amendments improve and clarify the current drafting in the Bill, and I invite hon. Members to support them.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 24, in page 6, line 2, leave out 'was not so registered' and insert 'any other film'.

Mr. Trippier: I beg to move amendment No. 25, in page 6, line 23, leave out from 'would,' to end of line 24 and insert

'but for the repeal by this Act of the Films Act 1960 and the Films Act 1970, be—'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 26.

Mr. Trippier: The purpose of these amendments is to meet an assurance given during the discussion of the Bill in Committee. I explained that the Government were concerned that film makers who were already making films should not be disadvantaged by the changes to the law proposed by the Bill. One problem which we identified, and which the amendments seek to resolve, concerns films completed after enactment of the Bill but exhibited in a cinema before the Eady levy is abolished by an order made under clause 2(4). On enactment the provisions concerning registration in the Films Acts 1960 to 1980 will be repealed. Thus no film may be registered as a British film after that date. Such a film—there may be many—would thus be deprived of the opportunity to receive any moneys from the final Eady distribution, although it may be shown during the final levy period and achieve a large box office success.

Clause 6(4) as presently drafted provides for films eligible for payment from the Eady fund to be entitled to such payment after the enactment of the Bill. We wish to go further and to extend the provision to include all films which, but for the repeal of the registration provisions in the Films Acts of 1960 to 1980, would have qualified for registration and thus have been entitled to a share of the distribution of the Eady fund. All hon. Members will share our view that this step will give benefit to film makers. I invite the House to support these amendments.

Mr. Gould: Opposition Members are grateful to the Minister for carrying out his undertaking in this way.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 26, in page 6, line 31, leave out from 'repeal' to end of line 32 and insert

'of the said Acts of 1960 and 1970.'.

Mr. Trippier: I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 6, line 40 at end insert—

'(5A) Where—

(a) a contract for the production or acquisition of a master negative, master tape or master disc of a film has been entered into before the commencement of section 5 of this Act; and

(b) any person, having incurred expenditure in pursuance of the contract (before or after that commencement) on the production or acquisition of the negative, tape or disc, makes an application under paragraph 2 of Schedule 1 to this Act with respect to it,

that person may by notice in writing require that the question whether the negative, tape or disc ought to be certified as a qualifying film, tape or disc for the purposes of section 72 of the Finance Act 1982 shall be determined by the Secretary of State in accordance with the law in force immediately before the commencement of section 5 in like manner as if his application had been a request for certification made under section 72(8).

Any expression used in this subsection has the same meaning as it has in paragraph 2(1) of Schedule 1 to this Act.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 28 and 29.

Mr. Trippier: The purpose of these amendments is to fulfil an assurance given during our discussions in Committee to introduce a transitional provision to cover films completed after the enactment of the Bill but where the contract for the making of the film was entered into before the Bill came fully into force.

We are concerned to avoid any disadvantage or hardship that might be caused by the timing of the Bill. The amendment is therefore drafted to cover the circumstances of a film that would have been entitled to certification and so to tax relief under section 72 of the Finance Act 1982 if it had been completed before the Bill became law but is in fact completed after the Bill is enacted and cannot meet the criteria in schedule 1 and so is not eligible for certification.

There will be few cases, if any, where that may happen, because the criteria in schedule 1 are generally similar to those under the existing law. However, an instance could arise in relation to paragraph 5(1)*(c)* of the schedule, which provides that a film should be excluded from entitlement to certification if more than 20 per cent. of the photographs taken or sound recordings made were made outside the United Kingdom. Under existing law such films are eligible as British films to reduced payments from the Eady fund, but under paragraph 5(1)*(c)* of schedule 1 they will no longer be regarded as British films and will not be entitled to the benefit of United Kingdom tax allowances.

The amendment is needed to cater for such rare but possible circumstances. It provides that, where a contract for the production or acquisition of a film is entered into before the Bill is in force in its entirety, the maker or acquirer of the film may opt for certification for tax relief to be based either on the old law or on schedule 1 to the Bill. The amendment makes clause 6(7) unnecessary and, as indicated in Committee, it can be removed. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish to ensure that, in the circumstances I have outlined, film makers do not suffer financial disadvantages as a result of the enactment of the Bill, and I therefore invite them to support the amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 28, in page 7, line 1, leave out subsection (7).—*[Mr. Trippier.]*

Clause 7

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendment made: No. 29, in page 7, line 13, at end insert 'and (5A)'.—*[Mr. Trippier.]*

Schedule 1

CERTIFICATION FOR PURPOSES OF SECTION 72 OF FINANCE ACT 1982 IN CASE OF BRITISH FILMS

Mr. Trippier: I beg to move amendment No. 30, in page 8, line 24, at end insert—

'"sound recording" means a sound recording which is either an original recording or a re-recording;'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 31.

Mr. Trippier: The amendments are designed to allay anxieties expressed in Committee that the omission of the word "re-recording" from schedule 1 could leave a loophole in deciding the eligibility of films as British. As some hon. Members will be aware, in film production many scenes are shot in film studios. In smaller studios it is usual for the sound for each scene to be recorded at the same time as the photographs are taken, such studios being designed and equipped specifically to allow that, but on large studio sets—for example, those used in James Bond films—it is impossible to take high quality sound recordings synchronously with the photography. A recording is made, but only as a guide for later use.

Once a film has been edited into near-final form, it is taken to a specialist sound studio where a new sound recording is constructed, using the original actors speaking while watching their lips move on a monitor screen, and with special effects engineers adding background noises —these are visions of scenes to come when the House of Commons is televised — such as storms, gunfire and footsteps. That process is known in the industry as re-recording, and is distinct from recordings taken when photography is done.

There have been some problems of definition in this area, in that although makers of British films have had to comply with the rules on labour and studio use, re-recording sound was not mentioned in the rules, and therefore a film producer could undertake re-recording in a foreign sound studio with foreign labour and with no adverse effect on the film's eligibility as British.

In Committee the view was expressed that the word "re-recording" should be included in the Bill to make it clear that that loophole would be plugged. I said then that the reference in the schedule to recording sound covered re-recording, but that I was content for it to be made clear, and the Bill was amended accordingly. However, the location of that amendment is defective, because it relates only to a specific part of the schedule—paragraph 1(2) —not to the entire schedule. Therefore, we have tabled an amendment which we believe not only meets the concern expressed by hon. Members in Committee, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton), but further improves schedule 1. I invite hon. Members to accept the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 31, in page 8, line 32, leave out '(which shall be deemed to include re-recordings)'.—*[Mr. Trippier.]*

8.52 pm

Mr. Norman Lamont: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is a sad reflection that in the brief period of six months since the White Paper was published at least 18 cinemas, with a total of 36 screens, will have closed. An important part of the Bill's provisions was to end the Eady levy as soon as possible, because the health of the cinema industry is vital to the health of the film production industry.

The Bill will lift from the distribution and exhibition sectors a raft of controls and regulations which are now out of date. It is unlikely that any steps open to the Government could reverse the trend overnight and bring back the enormous cinema audiences of the 1950s, but in abolishing registration, licensing and the quota the Bill will at least remove an unwanted and useless financial and administrative burden.

More positively, the Government support the film industry's initiative in the forthcoming British Film Year. This year is intended not as an exercise in nostalgia but as a celebration of the modern British film industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) reminded us that, as part of British Film Year, several companies will modernise and invest some of their cinemas. Such steps are vital if we are to get people back to the cinema.

Another measure that is extremely important in relation to the cinema industry, and thus to the film industry, has not featured in our debate today, but I believe that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) recognises as important the Government's plans to carry out an experiment to investigate the effects of relaxing the barring arrangements which many independent cinemas claim deprive them of fair access to profitable films. As I said

[Mr. Norman Lamont]

earlier, the hon. Gentleman might ask, why have we not gone further and made an order covering the entire country? We must take into account the precarious position of the cinema industry, and I hope he agrees that an experiment is the sensible way forward. I agree entirely with the point that he made in Committee that competition in the cinema is important. Had there been greater competition 15 or 20 years ago, the industry might not have so many problems today. I shall watch the outcome of the experiment with great interest.

The Eady mechanism used to make a substantial contribution to film production, but those days are long gone. The amounts going to British film makers fell from £4·6 million to £2·7 million in 1982-83, and were almost certainly less in 1983-84. In short, as a general production support, the Eady levy has shrunk into minor significance. That does not mean that the pool of available funds for production in Britain has shrunk in the same way. New names have appeared. Channel 4, with its programme of financing films intended for cinema and television showings, now invests £8 million a year in film production. The video sector, which for much of its history was the beneficiary of decades of film making, is beginning to face the need to invest in new products.

In 1984, 53

"theatrical features were produced in the United Kingdom or made by British crews . . . This is 11 films more than in 1983 and relects the continuing buoyant state of the United Kingdom film industry."

Those are not my words; they come from "Screen International", one of the leading trade journals. The article, which appeared just before Christmas, continues:

"This film making activity represents production investments of over £200 million compared to the £180 million in 1983."

To those who say that those achievements were due to capital allowances or to the effect of the dollar exchange rate, I would pray in aid some of the recent attempts to raise finance for production by Goldcrest and Thorn-EMI. It has been demonstrated clearly that money can be raised in the market for British films. Nevertheless, during today's debate there have been calls for injections of further financial aid to the film industry, either of taxpayers' money or by way of a levy, which is simply a tax by another name. Of course, we recognise that there is an area of film making which is as unlikely to be self-supporting as are ballet, opera, or any of the activities that contribute to the cultural life of Britain. That is why my noble Friend the Minister for the Arts supports film production through the British Film Institute.

It is against that background—the support that we are giving to the commercial sector and the neo-commercial sector through the new consortium that we are supporting and the support that is given by my noble Friend the Minister for Arts — that on the one hand we have rejected the demands of those who advocate general support for the production industry and on the other have considered the needs of those activities which have until now been funded by the Eady levy. The first of these was the British Film Institute production board. Here the Government have enforced the recommendation of the Cinematograph Films Council, but in this final year of the levy the BFI should receive out of the levy a discretionary payment equivalent to three times its expectation based on the recent past. This will give a breathing space to the BFI to find an alternative source to make up for the former Eady contribution. Its main funding will, of course, continue to come from my noble Friend.

The second activity for which discretionary payments from the Eady levy have been made is the National Film and Television School, to which the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) referred earlier. I gave him an assurance on the specific question that he put to me. I know, of course, that the school has reservations about the adequacy of its future funding. I am considering its position in the light of a meeting that I had the other day with the school's director. As I explained in reply to the earlier amendment, I believe that the £600,000 that has been made available will give it a degree of security.

Thirdly, and most important, the Government have heeded the arguments of those who pressed the case of the National Film Finance Corporation. Here, it is said, we are talking about the risky end of the commercial sector, the young and untried talent making the low and modest budget feature films. It is a measure of the Government's recognition of the NFFC's unique importance that we have been extremely careful to find a way of securing its functions when its means of support vanish with the demise of the Eady levy. I believe that the arrangements that we are making with its successor, the British Screen Finance Consortium, offer an excellent prospect of carrying on the traditions of the NFFC. That is what the Government tried to enshrine in the heads of agreement that we placed before the Committee. We tried to build in safeguards to ensure that Government funding will be used in conjunction with the private sector to support new talent, and to encourage the development of young producers in the country. I believe that all the partners in the new consortium are dedicated to that same purpose.

The Bill does not, of course, solve all the problems that confront the film industry, but sweeping away the controls and enabling the cinemas to be realeased from the Eady levy is, I think everybody will agree, urgently needed. At the same time, the transition to the new consortium will provide a means of concentrating Government assistance to the commercial film industry where it is needed. I believe that that new body, based on the memorandum that we have examined today, will carry on those traditions and contribute to the unique film industry that we have in this country and which we very much want to maintain.

9.2 pm

Mr. Gould: We stand on the threshold of British Film Year, as the Minister said. British Film Year is meant to be a celebration of British film, but I believe that the Bill means that those celebrations must be muted and that the prospects for the industry are worse than they need have been.

The Bill is a missed opportunity. I am afraid that its deficiencies have been exacerbated by the decision taken earlier to remove the levy on television companies. The abolition of the Eady levy, as the Minister rightly says, was the agreed starting point for the Bill. I think that nobody disputes that the Eady levy has had its day. We are sad, however, because the abolition of the levy could have been used as an opportunity to put the industry on a new long-term and sound footing.

I believe that instead the Government have used that point as a pretext for dismantling, largely on ideological grounds, the structures of financial and institutional

support which have so far kept the British film industry alive and kicking. The difficulty is that the risks which now stand in the way as a result of the Bill may well prove to be fatal. I trust that that will not be so. If the industry survives those risks and we still have a British film industry, it may be for a returning Labour Government to remove the risks and create the climate in which the industry can survive and prosper.

9.5 pm

Mr. Gorst: I have asked myself what sort of Bill we have been spawning, and I am sorry to have to say that I believe that it is now devoid of any meaningful financial provision for films, having suffered a debilitating hysterectomy earlier this afternoon. It leaves the future of the industry to a mixture of optimistic and pious predictions by my hon. Friend the Minister.

The original parents of the measure have long since divorced themselves from the responsibility of the upbringing of their progeny, and the new foster parents —in the shape of my hon. Friend—have proved well-meaning and most courteous in replying to all our inquiries. However, in the purely political sense, I have to say that I believe that they have shown themselves to be impotent to make adequate provision for their recently acquired charge, the British film industry.

Therefore, I cannot welcome the Bill, now in its, so to speak, polished form, with anything more enthusiastic than a whimper and expressions of regret and doubt. I believe that the Government should ponder upon the implications of their attitude. The film industry in this country is not a weakling art form appealing to an impecunious elite; it has cultural aspects that justify national support, partly because it enhances the understanding of our way of life overseas and partly because it communicates in a manner and with a force that can be not only breathtaking and entertaining but economically profitable.

Throughout the centuries, various geniuses of music, painting, opera and ballet have come to expect—and the nation that has housed them has accepted the responsibility —the nation to act as a patron of those arts. There is no substitute in the commercial world for the patronage of the state in those areas. The film industry blends commerce, communication and culture and is, in my view, entitled to expect similar treatment.

It seems that with the Bill the Government are abandoning the industry to the vagaries and uncertainties of an artificially fettered market. Indeed, they are also denying it fair access to the sustenance of multi-million audiences. That is what the Government seem to be doing through their policies enshrined in the Bill.

However, I conclude by hoping profoundly that every negative word that I have uttered, every critical thought that I have spoken, and every doubtful prediction that I have postulated will be disproved by events and will be totally untrue. I hope that I shall be wrong and that the optimistic Ministers who people the Government Front Bench will be resoundingly vindicated by the great benefit that their actions will have bestowed upon a valuable and talented British film industry.

9.9 pm

Mr. Ashdown: To use the words used by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), this is another in the catalogue of the Government's lost opportunities. The Government are capable of correctly assessing and analysing some of the ills at the heart of Britain, but then come up with an answer that is so ideologically dominated that it is inappropriate. The Minister may shake his head, but he has heard the same message as effectively from Conservative Benches as he has from Opposition Benches. Even if he takes no account of what we say, perhaps he will take account of his hon. Friends, who have been saying the same thing consistently.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The only thing at which I was shaking my head, which I have done consistently and I hope for the last time, was the latter point. We may have got this right or wrong, but we have not been motivated by ideology. We had to deal with the Eady levy, and when the Eady levy ended we had to reconstruct the NFFC. Our motive is dominated by responding to this situation.

Mr. Ashdown: I hear what the Minister says, and, having debated with him before, I will take it at face value. However, that is the only logical conclusion that some of us, and perhaps some Conservative Members, can come to when we regard the opportunities open to the Government and the extraordinarily illogical way that they have gone about them. As I have not found any logic in the Government's system, I can only come to the conclusion that there must be other driving forces. Perhaps the Minister will forgive me for such a mean thought, which persists in my breast.

The Minister is right to assess that the support structure for the industry is in need of reform, and he is right to say that the Eady levy needs to be replaced by a new mechanism. However, the Government's chosen mechanism will not lay down the basis for a new, long-term support structure within which the industry can grow, but will do something different. The Government have made funding of the industry the prey of a market place in which there are only two buyers—the television companies. In the end, whatever they may be doing now, they are bound to operate, whether formally or informally, in a way that will diminish the fair price that they pay for the goods that the film industry has to offer.

The Minister accepted that this is an imperfect market place and that the job of the market place is to determine demand and so allow things to develop in accordance with demand. However, he has turned down a mechanism that would have compensated, and would have provided a levy to the film industry based on the demands of the public. I thought that that was what the Government were all about.

Unhappily, the Bill cannot even be taken in isolation. It is the third in a series of body blows administered to the industry. In 1983 came the abolition of exhibitors' quotas, then last year the end of tax allowances, and now a Bill that takes away an albeit inadequate system of support and replaces it with nothing effective.

It is a supreme irony, as other hon. Members have said, that in British Film Year the Government have laid down the basis for a bleak and uncertain future for the industry. The industry depends on investment and on people taking risks, and people putting money on uncertain things. The kind of climate generated by these three measures will diminish the industry and weaken it, if not destroy certain sections of it.

This is a bad Bill and my party will be voting against it tonight.

9.12 pm

Mr. Brinton: The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) was not with us in Committee, and I was reflecting as he spoke that one of the good things about the discussions on the Bill was the constructive and friendly approach of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench, who have listened to the arguments, albeit while disagreeing.

I have my reservations about how far the Bill has gone. I have spent a great deal of the time that I have been contributing in a small way to these debates trying to make it plain that there is a basic difference between film made for the cinema and film made for television. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) referred somewhat hesitantly to a Bill that might be polished—I suggest that it has room for considerably more polishing in the other place. One of the big problems faced by the Bill and the Government is that over the years there has been a slow getting together of the cinema film and the television film, but the two have not yet married up. Therefore, in a sense, the Bill is reflecting something that is changing all the time and will not remain constant for long enough to be of value.

There is no doubt in my mind that the most useful thing that we could get is what we have not so far had from my hon. Friend. The Government have had to introduce certain reforms because the Eady levy was out of date and not doing its job. They have chosen the path set for them by the television lobby and have not supported the feature film. That is a different animal. One of our small achievements during the course of the Bill has been to get the whole of the film industry united around one statement: that the polishing will continue elsewhere.

9.15 pm

Mr. Gale: There will be three rousing cheers tonight in the Carlton cinema, Westgate-on-Sea, and in many small cinemas around the country about the abolition of the Eady levy. The industry needed that little shot in the arm. On their behalf, I thank the Government for it and I welcome it.

I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton) that the Ministers have listened patiently to the arguments and have put a great deal of hard work into the Bill. As a result, it leaves this House a better Bill. Earlier this afternoon we may have lost a skirmish. However, there will be an opportunity in another place to look again at the Bill. I know that my hon. Friends will listen to the arguments and will look again at the Bill. The Government have reaffirmed their support for a British film industry making good British films that will be shown in British cinemas and on British television. Therefore, warts and all, I welcome the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Shipbuilding Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 1

COMMENCEMENT

'This Act shall not come into force until an order made by the Secretary of State has been approved by a Resolution of the Commons House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Geoffrey Robinson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.17 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

What we at first thought was an innocuous Bill has during the course of Second Reading and Committee emerged quite clearly as a Bill that needs our close attention. Therefore we have put down for consideration this evening a new clause upon which we intend to vote. Far be it from me to delay the proceedings of the House at this hour, but the purpose of the new clause is to bring home to the Government the need for a new clause to establish both the new British Shipbuilders redundancy payment scheme and a scheme for those yards that are to be privatised before December 1986 when the existing shipbuilding redundancy payment scheme comes to an end once and for all.

We have made it clear that we shall not vote against the Bill on Third Reading. We have equally made it clear that we do not agree with the truncating of the scheme to an extension of only 18 months. But we do not agree that this should be done before the successor scheme has been established by British Shipbuilders. We do not agree that the Government should, with such commercial irresponsibility, write off all the financial liabilities of those yards that are to be privatised while at the same time not requiring them to meet conditions relating to maintenance of employment and conditions for its termination at least equal to those prevailing under the present scheme. Least of all do we agree, because of the uncertainties still surrounding the industry, that this is the right time to terminate this legislation which by the Government's own reckoning has worked so well. As the Minister of State said on Second Reading:

"No one would dispute that the scheme has contributed significantly over the years both to the alleviation of the problems of redundancy in a contracting industry and to progress in relation to the problems of contraction itself. It has provided a valuable tool in the management of change within shipbuilding and has helped in an extremely difficult period".—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1985; Vol. 70, c. 790.]

The time remains extremely difficult, and this is no time to end the scheme with the final and unchangeable deadline announced by the Government, a scheme that has helped to mitigate the hardship of thousands of shipworkers whose livelihood has been wrecked by the Government.

The truncated period might also lead to a haemorrhage of skills, leading to an unbalanced labour force. When the scheme was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) in 1978, the Minister of State, then a junior Opposition spokesman, said:

"The result of many redundancy schemes has been that some firms have been left with a labour force which is unbalanced".

If the Bill goes through tonight with the deadline of December 1986, we shall, in all probability, see precisely that adverse effect achieved.

The House will realise that the tightness of the money resolution has prevented us from putting the many amendments that we would have liked to modify the Bill. Nor have we attempted, for the reasons that I gave, to wreck it. But in moving and voting on the new clause tonight we wish to expose the irresponsibility and hypocrisy of the Government, and the Minister of State in particular.

Again in Opposition in 1978, the Minister of State said that he wished to extend the scheme that we were introducing for the nationalised sector of the industry to what was then going to be a small sector of ship repair yards only. He said that the same scheme should apply to them because it was Government financed. He said:

"I make this point because there is some concern in the small private sector . . . that the terms of the Bill will have an adverse effect on them . . . If that is the case, is it not worth considering whether the scheme proposed in the Bill should not have been an industry-wide scheme rather than confined to British Shipbuilders?"—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1978; Vol. 942, c. 181-85.]

Indeed, so firmly did the Minister become convinced of that concept of parity between public and private sectors that he took the point to another place. He succeeded there in having amendments agreed to, the effect of which would have been that the private sector repair yards would have been included within the state scheme. That would have been impossible, as he then well knew, because our deliberations in the House are governed by a money resolution, as they are not in another place. That tactic, Mr. Speaker, pursued with a speciousness and irresponsibility that did not become him, was correctly ruled out of order by your illustrious predecessor, Mr. Speaker Thomas, on 27 April 1978.

For that reason and others, we have not seen fit to try to take the matter to another place, although it is worth noting in passing that the Government have been defeated there no fewer than 79 times. However, that would be a futile exercise and a waste of the time of this House since on return to the House you, no doubt, Mr. Speaker, as did your predecessor, would have ruled any such amendents out of order.

But we must still put to the Minister and the Government those arguments that strongly make the case that the Government should first see that a new and equally good scheme, as promised by the Minister of State, is established before the Act comes into force. On Second Reading he said:

"However, at this stage there is no need to worry that the work forces may end up worse off."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1985; Vol. 70, c. 793.]

I take that to be the work forces in what will remain the public sector and in the private sector.

That, for us, is a commitment, and we would have wished that commitment to have been clearly evidenced to the House by way of a new scheme presented to it, or even presented outside the House, but nevertheless for such a scheme to have been negotiated between BS and its employees, and, indeed, between those yards that are privatised or that are being privatised and their work forces.

True to his word, the Minister should have seen to it that such a scheme was forthcoming. It was just as important that that should have been negotiated for the private sector as for the public sector, which, we have his commitment, will be no worse off.

Regarding safeguards for the private sector, which the Minister of State was so anxious to obtain back in 1978, there is no question of these being given by the Government now. Although the scale of the problem in the private sector if and when these yards are denationalised is going to be much greater, it was already pre-empted on Second Reading, by the Minister of State who had done a U-turn in the most classic fashion, when he said, contrary to what he was urging us to do in 1978:

"I am quite clear that an extension to the private sector would be the wrong solution." [*Official Report*, 9 January 1985; Vol. 70, c. 793.]

That would be an extension to the private sector of whatever scheme British Shipbuilders are able to agree with their work force.

We are now without any undertaking of a specific and clear nature with regard either to British Shipbuilders or to the yards that are so irresponsibly to be flogged off. We are talking of the great names in the industry, such as Barrow, with some 12,000 unemployed, Yarrow, Swan Hunter and Vosper, totalling perhaps as many as 30,000 employees of whom the Government have washed their hands.

In refusing, then, to accept new clause 1 tonight, if that is the case—and we shall listen with great interest to the Minister's reply, although I fear that it will almost certainly be no — the Government will make it unmistakably clear to the employees of British Shipbuilders and those in the military yards to be privatised that they have abandoned a vitally important aspect of their commitment to them. The result could well be a haemorrhage of redundancies while the present scheme still lasts in those very skills we need to sustain a shipbuilding capability at all in this country. It will also mean, of course, a further acceleration in the economic decline of those regions of our country that have historically suffered so tragically from economic decline and social impoverishment.

We believe that that could be avoided. We urge the Government to agree to this new clause, which would entail the need to bring an order before this House making the position quite clear. That is all we are asking of the Government and I ask them to consider it very carefully. The purpose of the new clause is to enable the Government, before the Act comes into operation, before December 1986, to put before the House precisely what, with their guidance and under their instructions—for they have already written to the chairman of British Shipbuilders—has been negotiated by way of a new redundancy scheme between British Shipbuilders and its employees.

We should also like to know, and the House is entitled to know, what has been negotiated, if the privatisation measures go through, between the new owners and their employees. We believe that the uncertainty and despair that this legislation is likely to cause could be avoided. For these reasons, we urge the Government to accept new clause 1 to reassure the industry, public and prospectively private, that it has a future. If they do not, we and the shipbuilders can only fear the worst—fake assurances from a fake Department that cares nothing for the welfare of the working people and a nationally and regionally important industry.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I support what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson). The Minister, the Parliamentary Secretary and the Minister of State have said on a number of occasions that the shipyard workers have nothing to fear, that the new scheme will be as good as if not better than the present one. If that is so, they should accept the new clause.

I, too, would like to quote the Minister of State, who was then the Opposition spokesman on shipbuilding. When we were discussing the original Shipbuilding (Redundancy Payments) Bill he said:

"The other point that I would make, particularly following what the Minister said when he talked about a once-and-for-all situation, is that achieving competitive levels of manning is something that we have to go on doing all the time. We tend to look at Japanese steelworks or German shipbuilding firms and think about making an adjustment to get down to their level of manning, but this is a process that ought to go on all the time." That is precisely why we say that the shipbuilding redundancy scheme should continue.

9.30 pm

The Minister says that by December 1986 the shipbuilding industry will have negotiated a scheme that is as good as, if not better than, the present scheme. The Minister of State, then Opposition spokesman, said in the debate on 16 January 1978:

"One reason for this, and this brings me back to an earlier point about what happens in one industry affecting what happens in another, is that workers in British Shipbuilders and the unions there must have read the newspaper stories about the sorts of sums being paid to buy out redundant jobs in the British Steel Corporation".—[*Official Report* 16 January 1978; Vol. 942, c. 179-182.]

In Committee we spoke of concern about the fact that shipbuilding workers receive less by way of redundancy payments than the steelworkers or the sums paid by the British National Dock Labour Board, and they get less redundancy than the mineworkers.

It is clear that what happens in one industry affects what happens in another, and that should be heeded by the workers in other nationalised industries. They should realise that the way in which the Government are ending the shipbuilding redundancy scheme could happen to the schemes applying to the steelworkers, dockers and mineworkers in the not too distant future, when the Government feel that the time is right.

In Committee the Minister said that there was no need to fear that after 1986 workers in the private or public sectors would be any worse off. If he believes that, he should accept the new clause. On Second Reading, the Minister said that compensation was a subject for negotiation, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West pointed out, shipbuilding workers should not lose out.

Somebody once remarked that there was no need to look in the crystal ball if one could read the book. It is clear that shipbuilding workers who have negotiated outside the shipbuilding scheme have not achieved the equivalent of shipbuilding redundancy scheme payments, and one needs only to look at Tyne Shiprepairers for proof of that. That company was privatised and the men were bought out under the scheme applicable then for half their entitlement under the shipbuilding redundancy scheme. Scott Lithgow workers will not get their full entitlement. In other words, the remarks that Ministers are making are, to say the least, slightly misleading because workers who have already negotiated redundancy payments have not been able to achieve the same terms as were negotiated by the Labour Government in 1978. That is why the new clause is necessary.

If the Minister is so certain of what will happen when the scheme comes to an end in 1986 and renegotiations take place, there is no reason why he should not accept the new clause. It will ensure that when the new scheme is negotiated it will be brought before the House for debate. Then, if hon. Members are satisfied, the Government will have the full backing of the House for their actions.

At present, workers in the shipbuilding industry know what is likely to happen. Come December 1986, they are sure that they will be finished with the shipbuilding redundancy scheme and that the negotiations which they will have with the companies will not produce terms as fair to them as the terms that were introduced by the Labour Government.

In Tyne and Wear there are 72,000 men out of work, more than 35,000 of them having been unemployed for over 12 months. When 2,100 voluntary redundancies were asked for, more than 2,400 volunteered. They volunteered only because they were convinced that the Government would be bringing the shipbuilding redundancy scheme to an end in 1986.

If the Minister is genuinely concerned for the shipbuilding industry, he will accept what we propose. After all, the management does not want the scheme to end. They are aware of the problems that will arise, and it is nonsense for the Minister to say that all will be well under a voluntary redundancy scheme. It is not a voluntary redundancy scheme, because management determines who is made redundant. If all the platers in a yard asked for redundancy, the management would not give it to them. The same would apply if all the joiners opted for redundancy. The management picks out individuals, so it is nonsensical for the Minister to say that it is a voluntary redundancy scheme.

If the cut-off date for the redundancy scheme is December 1986, the platers could finish the steel work on a ship and be given redundancy payments under the scheme, while joiners, electricians and other finishing trades working on the ship at a later stage could lose the advantages to be gained under the scheme because the work continued beyond December 1986. The new clause is designed to restore some confidence, but perhaps "confidence" is the wrong word, because shipyard workers do not want a redundancy scheme, let alone to have confidence in it. Instead, they want confidence in the industry.

On Second Reading the Minister talked about 35,000 workers in British Shipbuilders having benefited from the redundancy scheme. That means that 35,000 men have benefited by being thrown on the human scrapheap. That is an example of the nonsense that is spoken by Ministers. These men have been made redundant in areas where there is no chance of getting a job if they are over 35 or 40 years of age. As I said in Committee, to say that men have benefited by being made redundant is rather like Pierrepoint saying that everyone he hanged benefited because the trap door always opened.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the major implications of the Bill is that those in the shipbuilding industry will be taken back to the bad old days and will face the sack when a ship is finished? Does

he agree that it is likely that once a worker's part of the contract is finished he will be out? Is that not one of the implications of the Bill?

Mr. Dixon: That is perfectly true. Shipyard workers will work themselves out of a job. In the bad old days, as my hon. Friend has said, they used to lay the keel of a ship, get the ship launched and completed by the finishing date. The ship would leave the yard and the workers would be paid off. They would find themselves on the street. That is what happened in the industry before it was nationalised. There was a 50 per cent. turnover of workers in the shipbuilding industry.

When I worked in the industry I used to receive my Christmas box a week before Christmas. I would then be paid off — this happened to everyone — so that the employer did not have to pay two days of holiday pay. That was the sort of thing that happened before the industry ceased to be in private hands. We shall have one or two things to say about life in the industry in the days of private ownership when we come to Third Reading.

On Second Reading the Minister said:

"By the end of 1986 the state will own less than one third of the United Kingdom industry."—[An hon. Member: "Hear, hear".]

—I do not know who said "Hear, hear" It was probably the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg), who appears to be asleep.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): I only wish that I were asleep.

Mr. Dixon: The hon. Gentleman will have ample opportunity to sleep when the Minister replies to the debate. The Minister did not tell us what the size of the industry would be by the end of 1986. That is rather like the advertisements that we see on television. For example, we are told during one advertisement that a certain light bulb has 30 per cent. more life, but we are not told the life of the product with which it is being compared. In another advertisement we are told that a tyre has 50 per cent. more grip, and the obvious question is, "More grip than what?"

The Minister tells us that

"By the end of 1986 the state will own less than one third of the United Kingdom industry."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1985; Vol. 70, c. 793.]

We do not know whether the industry will be building ships by the end of the century because of the way in which the Government are treating it.

I hope that the Minister will accept the new clause. It will give the men in the industry some satisfaction to know that their redundancy scheme—in fact, the scheme is inferior to the scheme enjoyed by the mineworkers, which the Prime Minister boasts about every week, or the schemes for the steelworkers or dockers—will continue to have effect until a new scheme is negotiated.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I ask the Under-Secretary of State to accept this modest new clause, because it gives the Secretary of State and the House the flexibility to manage the British shipbuilding industry much more effectively. As my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) and for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) have said, the Bill brings a guillotine into the management of British Shipbuilders. Because redundancy payments have almost become a way of life in shipbuilding areas, they very much affect industrial relations in the industry.

We are trying to give the Government flexibility. How can we tell what the position will be in 18 months time? It could be transformed in one way or another. There could, for example, be another Falklands crisis and the Government could cry out for ships. If the Bill is passed in its present form, the Government will have to go through the paraphernalia of introducing a new Bill.

I emphasise that we are not talking about over-generous payments. The payments to shipyard workers, compared with workers in the other heavy industries of coal and steel, are less. We cannot emphasise that fact enough. Those hon. Members from the north-east of England, where there are appalling unemployment levels and the four travel-to-work areas which are highest on a list of travel-to-work areas along the coastal belt of Tyne and Wear from Newcastle to Middlesbrough, are aware of the problem. It may be difficult for the Government to appreciate the fact that when British Shipbuilders asks for volunteers for redundancy the lists are over-subscribed. That over-subscription is based on fear and a lack of morale. The workers are afraid of losing the pittance of £2,000 or £3,000. That genuine fear can be seen in the pubs and clubs—everywhere in the shipbuilding area.

The replacement scheme to which the Minister referred on Second Reading will not be anywhere as good as this inadequate scheme. If the Under-Secretary of State accepts new clause 1, he will get himself off the hook and will make the management of British Shipbuilders much easier. I suggest that the Under-Secretary of State should join the Opposition, because we want British Shipbuilders, and the rest of British industry, to operate in management terms as effectively as possible.

The Government are imposing a deadline of December 1986. We all know that the redundancy schemes will be cut off because we have seen what happened with Tyne Shiprepairers in my constituency and other shiprepair yards that have been privatised. By placing in the legislation this albatross of the deadline of 31 December 1986, the Minister is making life much more difficult for himself and for British Shipbuilders. He will force men out of an industry when we cannot afford to do so. I urge the Under-Secretary of State to accept the new clause.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): I suspect that some hon. Members are anxious for us to make progress but that other hon. Members, some of whom have spoken on the new clause, are anxious that we should continue to treat seriously the issues raised in the new clause.

I fully appreciate the reasons why the Opposition have persisted with the line of argument which, in effect, asks for reassurances that those who work in the shipbuilding industry and who will remain employees of British Shipbuilders after the privatisation programme has taken place do not feel dragooned, enticed or pushed into redundancy programmes through a fear that any successor redundancy scheme will be less generous than the existing statutory scheme. I hope to deal with that point as clearly as I can.

9.45 pm

On a quasi-administrative point, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) said that the new clause merely requires a statutory order before the Act comes into force in December 1986, but he will appreciate that the Act needs to be in force in June 1985 because we

[Mr. John Butcher]

wish the further eighteen months from that date to cover British Shipbuilders employees while the new schemes are being negotiated and put into place.

Since we last discussed this subject on the Floor of the House, a number of things have happened. I remember vividly two or three hon. Members expressing their fears about the order position in British Shipbuilders' merchant yards. I remember the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) speaking out for his constituents and voicing his fears about the warship building programme and the need for orders at Cammell Laird.

Let us acknowledge for once that since then there has been a significant improvement in the order position, some of which is already known to the House. There are two or three items that I should like to lay before the House as giving grounds for optimism. The size of the order book will determine whether the provisions that we are discussing will be needed.

The House knows that Cammell Laird has an order for a type 22 frigate and that Swan Hunter also has a type 22 on order and that, subject to some detailed contractual obligations, has an option on a type 23. The position has improved dramatically at Austin and Pickersgill with two SD 14s. That order was obtained after great effort, and I pay tribute to the trade unions and to the management of Austin and Pickersgill for putting together a package which shows that they are determined to come out fighting, to make the best of their current order book and to see themselves through what has been a nasty few weeks to a position where I hope that they can compete and obtain more orders in the future.

I am delighted to report to the House that next week an order for a fisheries research vessel from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be going to Ferguson-Ailsa. Without wishing to steal any of the thunder that I hope Graham Day will receive when he returns to the country in the near future, I can predict with some certainty that he will announce a major order for a merchant yard.

Dr. Godman: I also have some knowledge of the announcement that Mr. Day or his representatives are likely to make when he returns. The Minister gave good news about Ferguson-Ailsa. Can he expand on it?

Mr. Butcher: Only to say that the final details will be known next week, but having checked with my officials I am confident in having gone as far as I have tonight. I thought that while we were discussing the SRPS would be an appropriate occasion for those observations to be made.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): My hon. Friend has not mentioned Vosper Thornycroft. When the House last considered this matter, there were high hopes in Southampton that Vosper Thornycroft would receive extra orders. Can my hon. Friend tell us anything about the prospects for Vosper Thornycroft and for Vosper Shiprepairers which is a Southampton yard which is short of orders? Those yards face the spectre of privatisation, and people are enthusiastic—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps I should express that slightly differently. There is anxiety in Southampton that it is losing orders because of the indecision about privatisation. I should be grateful to hear what my hon. Friend has to say.

Mr. Butcher: First, I am sure that a spectre could also be defined as a grand vision.

Secondly, it is certainly not my intention to be less helpful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) than I have been to some Opposition Members. I advise my hon. Friend to fall into conversation in the Lobby with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I have had such a conversation myself. My right hon. Friend is fighting very hard for a major order that he hopes may go some way towards assuaging my hon. Friend's fears. My right hon. Friend's efforts in that direction are deadly serious.

The main purpose of the Bill is to extend the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme from June this year to December 1986. On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Minister of State clearly explained the need for such an extension. He noted that British Shipbuilders still has a long way to go to achieve real stability and a firm future. It would be foolish to ignore the risk that the market might force further rationalisation on the corporation. In such circumstances, the scheme could be of real value to both management and workforce. However, it is likely that by the end of 1986 British Shipbuilders and Harland and Wolff together are likely to employ less than a third of those working in the industry. The need for an inflexible statutory scheme, Acts of Parliament and statutory orders will have passed. The industry will then be better served by a non-statutory scheme agreed between unions and management.

Opposition Members have pressed the Government to describe or table the successor scheme. However, it is far too soon to predict the sort of scheme that will suit the industry in 1987. Opposition Members would be the first to complain if the Government were to prescribe the terms of a non-statutory scheme and to declare that those terms were non-negotiable. They would rightly say that the Government should allow industry to determine such details of the scheme as the balance between lump sums and weekly support payments, and that the industry itself should determine how those payments should be related to pay, age, length of service and so on. I am not prepared to predict the shape of the successor scheme. It is not for me or the Government to give an assurance that the scheme would be as generous as, or more generous than, the present arrangement.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: If that is so, why did the Minister of State specifically undertake on Second Reading that there was no reason to suppose that those employees still with British Shipbuilders would be any worse off under the successor scheme than under the present one?

Mr. Butcher: If the hon. Gentleman had contained himself for 30 seconds, he would have heard me emphasise the fact that it is no part of the Government's intention to require British Shipbuilders to implement a scheme that is, overall, less generous than the present one.

We have stated the Government's position clearly on three occasions, but we are not going to lay down a successor scheme in statute form.

Mr. Robinson: We hear, in the Minister's tortuous terminology, that the Government are not going to require British Shipbuilders to implement a scheme that is less generous than the present one. We want to hear again the commitment given by the Minister of State on Second

Reading that people will be as well off as they are under the present scheme. Cannot the Minister give that commitment?

Mr. Butcher: The hon. Gentleman will have to re-read what I have just said and what my hon. Friend the Minister of State said. My hon. Friend was as clear as he could possibly be. There are times when the House indulges in tortuous terminology, but neither my hon. Friend nor I could have been clearer about what we hope for from the successor scheme in comparison with current arrangements. That is why my hon. Friend said, and why I repeat, that there is no need to fear that the work force may be worse off.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I find the Minister's comment helpful. He has made it clear that workers will not be at a disadvantage under the new scheme as compared with the present scheme. If that is so, why does the Minister not simply extend the present scheme?

Mr. Butcher: We are extending the scheme for 18 months to give employees of British Shipbuilders, until December 1986, the reassurance that they will not be affected deleteriously. We are saying that, after 1986, there should be parity between the private sector and the public sector in regard to not having to put a statutory scheme on either of them. We also said in Committee—I hope that this will go some considerable way to reassure the hon. Gentleman—that when British Shipbuilders has negotiated its scheme with representatives of the work force the provisions of that scheme will be covered, as they are now, by Government funding. The Government have been asked whether the scheme will be financially neutral. There will be no cost to British Shipbuilders.

We have made our intention clear. We have signalled that we will supply the wherewithal, but we are not saying that the scheme will be statutory. Nor are we saying that we are prepared to impose such a scheme on British Shipbuilders when neither the private sector nor the warship building yards that are to be privatised will be subject to the same requirement.

Mr. Field : I am now puzzled by the Minister's use of the word "impose". If I heard him correctly, he is saying that he expects that, after 1986, British Shipbuilders will run a scheme as generous as, if not more generous than, the present one and that on no account will the scheme be worse than the present one for those who remain in the state sector.

Mr. Butcher: The hon. Gentleman is right to home in on the word "impose". We are not prepared to legislate for the continuation of the scheme as it is. We want the scheme to end in December 1986 and have given commitments to that effect. We want parity in the requirements put on employers between the private and public sector through this methodology.

New clause 1 would require the Government to introduce a statutory order before the Act came into force, and the order would be subject to affirmative resolution. That procedure would cause delay and uncertainty for those who work in the shipbuilding industry — those whom Opposition Members claim to represent. The procedure would also waste the time of the House—there has been plenty of that tonight—by permitting yet another debate on the need for the Bill. We could not even proceed with the writing-off of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders Limited debt until the order had been approved. I see no merit in that.

Dr. David Clark: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to accuse hon. Members of wasting the time of the House?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister is responsible for what he says, but I do not think that he really meant that.

Mr. Butcher: I certainly did not mean that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) had wasted the time of the House. This is an important Bill and I suspect that some Opposition Members, like me, wonder why we did not start this debate until about half an hour ago. I hope that that clarifies what I meant to say.

The procedure provided by new clause 1 would be similar to that which was undergone when the scheme was previously extended in 1981 and 1982. On both occasions there was primary legislation, followed by an order which extended the life of the scheme. That procedure was perhaps cumbersome, but statutory orders had to be tabled anyway to improve benefits, increase the upper-earnings limit, consolidate the regulations or to make other changes. However, we are making no changes this time. The upper-earnings limit increases automatically every year, so there is no need for an order.

Almost all those who have spoken have said that they welcome the main purpose of the Bill and the further extension of the shipbuilding schemes. There is, therefore, no sense in delaying its implementation, which is all that new clause 1 would do. I therefore urge the House to reject the new clause.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Minister's answer is extremely evasive. He has tried to sidetrack us with some judiciously placed orders and by telling us that 11,000 ship workers, who will remain in the public sector, are of little concern to him. Moreover, he has said that we are trying to waste the time of the House.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary has refused to give what my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) sought, that is, a requirement on British Shipbuilders that the scheme should be equal to the present one. If that were the case we would not need the present legislation. The Minister failed to give that undertaking, we must fear the worst and, therefore, we must push the new clause to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:

The House divided: *Ayes 104, Noes 193.*

Division No. 91] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Clay, Robert
Ashdown, Paddy	Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Ashton, Joe	Cohen, Harry
Bagier, Gordon A. T.	Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Corbyn, Jeremy
Barron, Kevin	Cowans, Harry
Beith, A. J.	Craigen, J. M.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*	Dalyell, Tam
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*	Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*	Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Buchan, Norman	Deakins, Eric
Caborn, Richard	Dewar, Donald
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*	Dixon, Donald
Campbell-Savours, Dale	Dobson, Frank
Canavan, Dennis	Dormand, Jack
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	Douglas, Dick
Clarke, Thomas	Dubs, Alfred

Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Garrett, W. E.
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kennedy, Charles
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Redmond, M.
Richardson, Ms Jo
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Skinner, Dennis
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Marcus
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gorst, John
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Kay, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Shipbuilding Bill, the Milk (Cessation of Production) Bill, and the Town and Country Planning (Compensation) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Mr. Speaker's letter of 30 January 1985 (matters sub judice)

Mr. Speaker has authorised the publication of the following letter to Mr. Tam Dalyell, pursuant to the procedure laid down in Mr. Speaker's statement on 5 November 1981—[Official Report, c. 113].

"I undertook to write to you about the point of order you raised on Monday in which you drew attention to the comments reported in *The Times* of that day by Lord Hill-Norton on two cases of current litigation.

The first of these was the Ponting case. I ruled last week that this case, currently being tried at the Old Bailey, is *sub judice*. That ruling included the issues of jury vetting and in camera hearings. As I said then, for the House to discuss any facet of the security aspects of this case could be prejudicial to the conduct of the trial.

The *sub judice* rule remains in force until the verdict and sentence have been announced. If an appeal is lodged, the rule comes into force again until the appeal has been decided.

In the other case to which your referred on Monday, Thornycroft Giles v. British Shipbuilders, I am informed that there have been preliminary proceedings involving disputes before a court over the discovery of documents in which the Government have been involved. These proceedings are to be resumed at a later date so that they too must fall under the *sub judice* rule.

Of course it remains open to any hon. Member to pursue general points about jury vetting and in camera hearings in any parliamentary way open to him, provided that no reference is made to a case which is *sub judice*. I understand you and other Members are already using the available procedures in this sense.

I have of course no responsibility for anything that Lord Hill-Norton says, and no Point of Order for me can arise out of his alleged statements. But I do have a responsibility to uphold the rules which the House of Commons has itself agreed. One of the most important of these rules is that we should say nothing in this place which might prejudice a fair trial of persons before the courts, or give the appearance that Parliament is seeking to influence the administration of justice."

Shipbuilding Bill

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

10.11 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I do not wish to review the strategic arguments that affect the industry's future, because we have recently had an opportunity to do precisely that, although of course in Opposition time. However, there have been a number of recent developments in the fortunes of the industry which have given me serious cause for concern and directly affect the Bill now under discussion.

I and my hon. Friends are not opposed to the further extension of the British Shipbuilders redundancy scheme. What worries us is that we are voting to extend the Bill for the last time and that what happens after that, in spite of the assurances that the Minister tried to give earlier, is by no means determined.

The industry is being forced through a period of contraction by market forces, by the present ordering programme of the Ministry of Defence and, most significantly of all, as a direct result of Government policy. It is not possible to foresee where the industry will be at the end of 1986.

The Government have committed themselves to selling off those yards that they have designated as warship yards to the private sector by March 1986. If the Minister wishes to correct me on that figure, I will willingly give way to him. I understand that it is the Government's intention that all the yards designated as warship yards shall be in private hands by March 1986, or closed. The main customer for these yards, as we all understand is the Ministry of Defence. It is a pretty safe bet that any prospective private purchaser will be looking at the Ministry of Defence ordering programme and the potential competition before making any commitment.

The brutal fact of the matter is that there is at present more warship building capacity in British shipbuilders than there is demand in the Ministry of Defence. It may well be that private investors in the pirit of free enterprise will sustain more capacity than demand in the hope of putting their rivals under. In my view, a far more likely scenario than that form of investors' Russian roulette is that the private sector will be willing to invest only in sufficient capacity to meet foreseeable demand, and who can blame it? I would not expect Conservative Members to blame the private sector for that.

Let us consider the position of a warship yard that has not been privatised possibly because nobody will buy it and whose last ship is to be completed after the end of 1986. In those circumstances, is it fair to the workers that they should stare redundancy and long-term unemployment in the face without the British Shipbuilders scheme or any properly spelt out successor, and risk leaving the industry on terms that are less favourable than those on which people left the industry when the redundancies were first announced, selling their jobs at the first opportunity? That cannot be just. We have a duty to the remaining work force in the industry, not just to those who have already left and who the Government hope will leave before 1986.

There is bound to be a suspicion that the recently announced orders in certain merchant and warship yards are only a reprieve, and that it is the Government's intention to buy some time and buy off extra trouble while the sterling crisis and the miners' strike are under way. The fear is that later that reprieve will be clawed back, and the on-cost of providing those orders will also be clawed back from savings on the British Shipbuilders redundancy scheme. At the very least, the Government have a duty to spell out what terms and conditions will prevail in the industry for redundancy payments after 1986, particularly what terms and conditions will prevail in a warship yard which, presumably, will have a peculiar limbo status if it has not been privatised and is not intended to remain in British Shipbuilders. The status of such a yard is not clear, and the terms and conditions under which the men can expect redundancy are not clear either. For example, what will happen to their accumulated rights in employment, not under the state scheme, but under the British Shipbuilders redundancy scheme? Can the Minister give the House an assurance at least on that?

Another factor affecting the defence aspect is the cost of Trident. Potential investors in warship yards must work out how much of the conventional naval programme is likely to be delayed or cancelled through the escalating cost of Trident, unless the individual is a potential investor in Barrow-in-Furness. He would have to work out whether the British economy could sustain the Trident programme and what effect cancellation would have on the Ministry of Defence's demand for Trident-bearing submarines. That is all a matter of speculation. No hon. Member can predict accurately how events will unfold. In those circumstances, it is wrong for the House to acquiesce to the redundancy provisions of the Bill as if all were settled and planned.

I remind the House that we are not talking about generous redundancy terms. Time has eroded the effect and value of the original scheme. The average redundancy payment to a British Shipbuilders employee is £5,000. The age range of those leaving the industry contains some considerable surprises. Up to the year end of 1984, over the preceding two years some 45 per cent. of those seeking voluntary redundancy were over 50, which is expected, but what is not expected is that 37 per cent. of them were under 40. They should have the prospect of a working life, yet in my constituency half the unemployed men in the four shipbuilding local Government yards are skilled, time-served men with shipbuilding and heavy engineering skills. I am told that the average age of the present round of volunteers for redundancy at Swan Hunter is 33.

The reason behind those figures, which show that younger people are leaving the industry, is not hard to find. Since 1979 the real wages of shipyard workers have steadily declined. The Chancellor of the Exchequer tells us that when real wages decline, more jobs are created. His highly dubious theory does not work out in the shipbuilding industry, where the decline in the total labour force has been paralleled by the rapid decline in the real wages of the remaining labour force. Almost all the young ancillary workers with families in my constituency and many skilled men are now in receipt of family income supplement, rate relief or housing benefit. They are caught in the poverty trap, and the on-cost of working is making many men think carefully about their commitment to the industry.

Shipbuilding has become a low-paid industry. Let no Conservative Member say that the work force has made no sacrifices to save it because the evidence shows that it has.

All the basic decency and willingness to work that typifies shipbuilding communities is played on by the Government when they say, "Be competitive and there will be work at the expense of your fellow worker elsewhere in the country." Swan Hunter has made an effort to be competitive. Recently it submitted a competitive tender for two type 22s, hoping to win both on competitive grounds. The Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said, when we discussed the Bill on Wednesday, 9 January, about the decision on the type 22s:

"The decision will be based on the judgment of the Secretary of State for Defence of the ability of the yards to complete those ships on spec, on time and within the contract price. In other words, it will be a competitive decision on merit, and on commercial grounds, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to call it that."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1985; Vol. 70, c. 837.]

By "the hon. Gentleman" he meant me.

When the Secretary of State for Defence came to announce the orders for the two type 22s he made it clear that Swan Hunter had won the competitive tender, but one ship was going to Merseyside because of social factors, and in particular the hardship that would be caused by redundancies. I applaud the Government's willingness to consider social factors, particularly in areas of high unemployment, not least because similar arguments apply to my constituency. However, if Swan Hunter is forced to announce a further round of redundancies because it did not get the order for the second type 22, or because the promised type 23 is delayed for as long as the type 22 was delayed, the Ministry of Defence need not bother to urge competitiveness on the industry, and the people of Tyneside will know what worth to give to the words of the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): My hon. Friend will realise that I do not want to go into too much detail at this point, but when he is talking about competitive tendering, is he aware that, whereas Swan Hunter was allowed to compete for both frigates, Cammell Laird was allowed to compete for only one? The only coherent reason put forward for that was that if Cammell Laird had won both frigates it would have been taking on workers when Swan Hunter would have been making redundancies. My hon. Friend is right to focus attention on the competitive side, and is wise not to quote the answer given to a parliamentary question that he asked, which gave a rather different interpretation as to how the orders would be placed. However, is he aware that the basis for competitive tendering was not allowed to all the competing yards?

Mr. Brown: I understand my hon. Friend's point, which is a valid one. There is no issue between myself and my hon. Friend. The issue is between the Labour party, which has urged the Government to take account of social needs and factors such as high unemployment, and the Conservative party. The Minister said that the orders would be based on commercial factors, but the Secretary of State for Defence then made it clear that social and compassionate considerations such as unemployment played a part in placing the order. The Government have not said that before now.

This new theory raises an issue. How will the Ministry of Defence now get competitiveness from the warship yards when they are privatised? We all know that the Secretary of State for Defence now has a more wide-ranging decision-making process. Who will put money into a private business with only one major customer, an eccentric who is likely to say to a yard, "Yours was the most competitive bid, but I am placing the order elsewhere"?

The Government have now conceded that there is no free market in merchant shipbuilding, and even claim that that was always their view. They should now concede that there is also no free market in domestic warship building, even when they are the major customer. What a ludicrous state of affairs that is. The Government should think again about how they intend to approach the industry.

I do not mean to make a controversial suggestion, but perhaps the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence could agree a common approach. Until they have done that, the House would be unwise to set a final date to the British Shipbuilders redundancy scheme.

Mr. Dixon: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry accused us of wasting the time of the House. We are talking about redundancy pay, albeit——

Mr. Butcher: I made it very clear that I was concerned about the fact that this debate was so late in starting. Perhaps I should not have implied that the previous debate took longer than had been expected, but I thought I made it absolutely clear that this debate was not wasting time but was dealing with very serious issues.

Mr. Dixon: The hon. Gentleman has made that clear now, but he did not make it clear before. We believe that it is important to talk about redundancy pay. It is very important to those workers in the shipbuilding industry in Tyne and Wear who are to be made redundant. Already 72,558 men are out of work in that area. Of those, 35,998 —or 49·6 per cent.—have been out of work for more than 12 months. They are the long-term unemployed. Those who are to be made redundant in the shipbuilding industry will join the dole queue in that area. They will have no chance of ever getting another job. The Prime Minister refers each Tuesday and Thursday to the miners having lost £8,000 in wages in 11 months, that gives some idea of what the redundancy payments amount to. They do not amount to even 12 months' wages.

During the Second Reading debate and the Committee stage not once did we hear either the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State or the Minister of State refer to the social consequences of redundancies in the shipbuilding industry. The shipbuilding industry, like the mining industry, is a closely knit community. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) knows how closely knit the shipbuilding industry is in his area. Almost 62 per cent. of the people who work at Swan Hunter live in Wallsend or in adjacent towns. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) knows about the effect of Austin and Pickersgill upon that community. Most of the men live within five miles of the shipyard. That is the kind of social consequence to which we refer when we talk about shipbuilding communities.

In the 1930s, unemployment in the Tyne and Wear area was 30 per cent. above the national average. It is now 40 per cent. above the national average. Instead of deriding shipbuilding workers the Government should praise them every now and again. It was alleged that there was late delivery of the "Atlantic Conveyor". In fact, the "Atlantic Conveyor" was delivered within days of the original contract date. It is a pity that Ministers did not refer to the

[Mr. Dixon]

French shipyard workers. They had a contract for a sister ship of exactly the same design six months before Swan Hunter got theirs for the "Atlantic Conveyor" but they have not finished it yet. However, we hear nothing about the French shipyard workers. We hear only about the British shipyard workers whom the Minister and the Government seem to deride.

On Second Reading the Government referred to massive investment in the shipbuilding industry. The Minister referred to investment amounting to £1,000 million. In a previous debate the Prime Minister referred to £1,000 million of taxpayers' money having been invested in British Shipbuilders since 1979. It is time that this was put into perspective. May I quote what was said by the former chairman of British Shipbuilders. He was the last decent chairman. The present chairman is a waste of time. He is doing more damage to the shipbuilding industry than MacGregor is doing to the coal mining industry. I am referring to Graham Day. In the *Sunderland Echo* on 23 July 1984 Sir Robert Atkinson said:

"much has been made of the £800 million Government aid to shipbuilding from nationalisation to the time I left the B.S. chair. But this was a 'half-truth' because the industry was so under-capitalised, one half of that £800 million was in fact used as working capital and in capital expenditure, not in direct subsidies."

That is what the former chairman of British Shipbuilders said about the so-called taxpayers' handout to the British shipbuilding industry.

Clause 2 talks about writing off the debt that the Clyde shipyards incurred under the shipbuilding industry board set up under the Geddes report in 1966. The British shipbuilding industry has been undercapitalised for many years. In 1962 we had the Paton report. In 1966 we had the Geddes report which set up the shipbuilding industry board which lent the industry money because people were not investing at that time. In 1973 we had the Booz Allen report. Each of those reports since the war talks of lack of investment in the shipbuilding industry.

How on earth can British shipyard workers compete with those in Sweden, on the continent or the far east when the industry was starved of investment when it was in private hands up to 1977?

In a survey carried out in the 1970s it was found that the assets in the British shipbuilding industry were £825 per worker, compared with more than £1,000 in Germany, more than £1,200 in Italy, more than £1,800 in Sweden and more than £2,800 in Japan. In 1982 British Shipbuilders invested £100 million. In 1982 the Japanese shipbuilding industry invested £620 million in their seven biggest yards. Korea has been investing £400 million a year. Yet the Minister comes along and tells us that the Government have been over-financing the shipbuilding industry.

The Government have had to invest money because while the shipbuilding industry was in in private hands up to 1977 not a halfpenny was invested in the yards. I can recall working in the shipyards in the 1960s when we used to push shell plates round in wooden barrows. Yet at that time the Japanese and Swedish shipyards had computers. No one would invest in the British shipbuilding industry. The workers could not even have gloves to hold lugs. I recall many nights going home with septic burns on my hands because the management would not give the acetylene welders gloves. Those are the sort of conditions in which we used to work in the shipyards.

Clause 2 talks about when the shipbuilding industry was in private hands and that is what I am talking about. I recall a launch in Swan Hunter when the management stopped the workers' launch allowance of 37½p a day, yet it stripped the joiners' shop to put a champagne party on for guests at the launch. That is what happened when the shipyards were in private hands. Let me tell the Government that the shipyard workers will not go back to those days.

On Second Reading my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) talked about victimisation. It was easy then because of what were called the markets. For the benefit of those hon. Members who do not know what they were I can tell them that they were named after cattle markets. We used to go each morning at 7.30 in the hail, rain or snow and stand outside the foreman's office. He would come out and point to those he wanted to work that day. Those who were not picked out used to go home soaking wet and not get a penny piece. That is what the industry was like when it was in private hands. We need no lectures from the Government telling us that the industry will be better in private hands. The industry failed in private hands, and that is why it was nationalised in 1977.

When the ship building redundancy scheme was introduced, my predecessor, the then hon. Member for Jarrow, Ernest Fernyhough, said:

"Sitting here, I wondered . . . whether the story of Jarrow would not have been different if we could have had something as such as this in the 1930s."—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1978; Vol. 942, c. 186.]

In the 1930s, in Jarrow men got nothing when they finished work. They were paid off with no notice at all.

After the war the only people who got notice were tradesmen. I got two hour's notice when I was sacked and that was to grind my tools. Anyone who did not have tools —who was not a shipbuilder, joiner, carpenter but an ancillary worker—got no notice at all. They were told by the foreman or manager that they should go to the time office and draw their books and money and stand on their own time to get their books and money. That is what it was like when the industry was in private hands. That is what shipyard workers had to experience.

We are talking about an area such as mine in south Tyneside where 60,000 people rely on state benefits. Most of the men who are paid off will join those who have to depend upon housing benefit. That is the position which prevails in areas where shipbuilding is relied upon for male employment.

Some hon. Members talk about a different scheme. Some say that the public and private schemes should be similar. The private sector has no redundancy schemes. Smith's docks on the river has no redundancy scheme because it remains in the private sector. Many private shipyards have no redundancy schemes.

The Minister says that no redundancy scheme other than the state scheme should operate. That is the truth. It is no good the Minister saying that shipyards are able to negotiate a scheme. He does not know what scheme can be negotiated. It is up to the unions and the management.

On Second Reading the Minister referred to compensation and said that it was the subject of negotiation. That was misleading. Directors from Tyne

shiprepairers met me and my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and told us what the buy-out was to the yards and asked us to have a word with the shipyard workers and to get them to accept the scheme. I told them that I would not advise them to accept anything less than they had at the moment. We were told that there was no room for negotiation. That is the truth of the matter.

We want the Minister to give us something constructive. We do not want to argue about shipbuilding redundancies. We want stability in the industry. Workers want a job, not a buy-off which will give them less than a year's wages.

The Government should have a maritime policy and tell the workers in the industry—those who go to sea in ships—that we have a Minister responsible for shipping. Possibly we are the only maritime nation in the world without a maritime policy. When one wants to talk about maritime policies or shipbuilding, one goes to the Department of Trade. When one talks about shipping one goes to the Transport Department and when one wants to talk about warships one goes to the Ministry of Defence. We want some political and financial support for the shipbuilding industry during the recession.

Mr. Frank Field: Does my hon. Friend agree that, while we have been in the House, there has not been a debate on a corporate plan for the industry and the amount of money that would be needed to finance such a plan?

Mr. Dixon: My hon. Friend is right. Indeed, the last corporate plan was put forward by Mr. Graham Day after he had been ordered to appear before the Select Committee that was looking into the shipbuilding industry. He was not keen on giving details of that plan to the Select Committee because the Secretary of State had instructed him not to provide that Committee with the evidence that he had given to the Department. The trade unions were not even involved in the process; he did not even discuss the matter with them.

We need a positive and co-ordinated Government policy. We should not have to stand here arguing about shipbuilding redundancy terms. The workers want to work and to build ships. The Government keep saying that we make a profit on warships and lose on merchant ships. One would think that one set of workers worked harder than another. The loss on merchant ships is easily explained. Every nation, including Japan and Germany, is having to subsidise merchant shipbuilding.

The British Government keep relying on a free market economy. That will not work, as we saw recently when the Chancellor had to intervene to stop the pound sinking further. We cannot allow our shipbuilding industry to sink. Let us have some positive plans from the Government.

10.42 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): I have spoken in virtually every debate on shipbuilding since I was elected in 1964. Each debate is more gloomy than the last, and this one, as we debate the ending of redundancy payments for shipbuilding workers, will not lift the gloom.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) made a Freudian slip when he said that he was worried about the spectre of privatisation. The word "spectre" was taken up by the Minister, who said that it could relate to something in the distant future. The word was also used by Karl Marx. Many hon. Members will have read the ending of the Communist manifesto, but few will have read the beginning. It begins by saying that a spectre is haunting Europe. That was written in February 1848. If, however, we change the word "Communism" for "unemployment," we can say that the spectre of unemployment is haunting Europe, no more so than in the United Kingdom, and in particular in our shipbuilding industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) recalled the 1930s and the iniquitous system of employment under private ownership. Those who are still employed in the British shipbuilding industry have a deep-seated fear about the future. The only way to give them confidence is to have a degree of job security, despite the uncertain world markets. It must be possible to say that a regular work force, a minimum number, will be required for the industry.

There is a need to address ourselves again—I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) referred to it—to a corporate plan. Redundancy is uppermost in the minds of all those who are fortunate enough to have a job, but in a negative sense. They are concerned about getting their money and getting out. The Bill, which will be given its Third Reading tonight, will end any speculation. When the current extension expires, that will be the end of the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme. The negotiations that will take place with prospective private employers, assuming that there are some, will be rather different from past negotiations. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow that the prospects are not marvellous when one becomes aware of the extent of the under-capitalisation and the shortage of the necessary equipment to bring the yards up to a modern state to enable them to compete in world markets. Irrespective of the complexion of the Government, the first task must be to improve the morale of the work force. Secondly, we must try to ensure some continuity in spite of the volatility of the world shipbuilding market.

I wish to correct my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow on one detail. The "Atlantic Conveyor" would have been built to time if it had not been for the Ministry of Defence input. The MOD insisted on certain modifications and they were implemented by the shipbuilders. It was a nightmare job. However, the ship sailed on time. If anyone gets the chance to tour the ship, he or she will be pleased to see that it is a dual-purpose vessel which could be the harbinger of vessels which could be used in the event of another maritime conflict.

I ask the Minister to recognise that there has been an improvement in orders since we were considering the Bill in Committee. I do not seek to belittle the efforts that he and and his civil servants have made, in co-operation with British Shipbuilders, to obtain the orders, and I hope that more orders will be gained. We, as Members must realise that there is a hell of a problem before us in dealing with the industry —, "industry" includes the men, the management and everyone who is engaged in it—and we must resolve not to let it die, whatever the cost.

10.48 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I shall make only a brief contribution. One of my reasons for making a short speech is that I was not a member of the Committee which considered the Bill. I was a member of another Committee and felt that I could not be a member of two major Committees.

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

My reaction to the Minister's remarks can best be described as mixed. I regret his rejection of the new clause, no matter how gracefully it was expressed. On the other hand, I am pleased by the announcement of the order won by Ferguson-Ailsa for the research vessel for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The vessel will be built not in my constituency but at the sister yard in Troon. It is right that the order has been won by Ferguson-Ailsa, as it is the finest yard in mainland Britain for the building of small, specialist vessels. The order is to be welcomed by the management, the work force and the communities of Port Glasgow and Troon.

After a long, difficult and distressing period, things are looking up for Clark-Kincaid, which is the last marine builder on the Clyde. I am greedy for more orders to be placed. Ferguson-Ailsa and Clark-Kincaid are fine establishments, and I speak with some experience, having worked as a shipwright. Ferguson-Ailsa has just won an order for two supply vessels for the Canadian offshore oil industry. Those Arctic 2 vessels will work in the Beaufort sea. British Shipbuilders, and particularly John Peach and his sales team, has done well in winning such a marvellous export order for the Clyde.

We have to remember that the shipbuilding industry is important not only to the maritime communities in which a shipyard is situated but to the many firms in the marine equipment industry. There are far-reaching ripples from this type of order won by shipyards on the Clyde and elsewhere. Clark-Kincaid and Ferguson-Ailsa have fine work forces and good management teams. They have a first-class record in industrial relations and can build with the best not only in Europe but worldwide.

I suppose that I should get around to considering the Third Reading. On Second Reading the Minister of State said:

"My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I propose to ask both organisations"—

the Minister was referring to Harland and Wolff, which is another fine yard, and British Shipbuilders—

"in consultation with their unions to establish appropriate successor schemes by the early autumn of 1986. It is too early to predict the details of such schemes. They will be negotiated between the management and work force, just as in the private sector. However, at this stage there is no need to worry that the work forces may end up worse off."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1985; Vol. 70, c. 793.]

I sincerely hope that that wish is realised by the outcome of the negotiations between the unions and management.

These events take place against a deeply depressing backcloth of a declining western European shipbuilding industry. On many occasions we have heard—I have not heard any hon. Member challenge the statement—that it is impossible for the western European shipbuilding industries to compete successfully with the South Korean and, to a lesser extent, Japanese shipyards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) mentioned that during his 20 years as a Member the discussions on the British shipbuilding industry had become gloomier in each succeeding debate. During the next decade we shall face even more formidable problems from China and perhaps Brazil.

I sincerely hope that if the Government intervene in any way in these negotiations about a successor scheme to the British Shipbuilders redundancy scheme they will make a positive intervention and that the scheme that is initiated will be the equal of the one that the Government have decided to put asunder.

10.54 pm

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): On Second Reading, in Committee and tonight the Opposition have been and are trying to find out what the Bill tells us about the future of shipbuilding. We have to go a long way in a short time to satisfy those inquiries. We must have a far more satisfactory explanation that we have so far received as to why the Government wish to end the statutory scheme from the end of 1986.

What is so significant about that date? If there is nothing significant about it, why not review the scheme, as Opposition amendments have suggested? The Minister might then take another view. He could come back to the House. The scheme could be extended again or we could have further details of a subsequent scheme.

The Minister has hedged around the point a great deal, and various formulations have been used, but all that we have been told is that overall no one will be worse off. I can envisage all kinds of interpretations of those words in 18 months' time. I can think of many other circumstances in which Ministers have used such phrases. Later when we have found out what they mean, Ministers have said that matters were covered by their original words.

Can the Minister give us an assurance about the subsequent scheme? Will the scheme be a national one for whatever is left of British Shipbuilders—if anything is left—or will it be a port-by-port scheme? If the amount of money available for the scheme is the same—that is questionable—as it is now, plus inflation, will it be piled up for one age group if the management at that time is keen to get rid of that age group? Those are some of the questions that have not been answered.

I do not understand how the Minister can give any assurances, because the scheme is subject to negotiation between British Shipbuilders and the work force. How can the Minister be so sure about the outcome of the negotiations and that the scheme will be no worse than the present one?

Where will the money come from? We understood in Committee that the Government would be providing some money. It would be helpful if the Minister could give an assurance, before we give the Bill a Third Reading, that the Government will give a sum of money which will provide a scheme equivalent to the present one. We have not yet had that assurance.

The more we consider the matter and the more we question the Minister, the less satisfactory the answers become, and the more we have to stick to our original conclusion that something odd is going on, that there is some intention behind this, or that the Government are considering some options which we do not believe are in the best interests of the industry.

I do not wish to be parochial, but we all wish to make points about the industry in our area. I shall deal with Austin and Pickersgill, but I shall not run up any flags for it. Sunderland Shipbuilders' Deptford yard is on its last ship. We are waiting for a decision on the Morecambe bay exploration, which could guarantee an order for that yard. It is indirectly within the Government's gift to secure that order. Nothing has happened. That yard is beginning to go through the agonies that Austin and Pickersgill have been

through in the past weeks and months. It would be useful if some decisions could be made about future orders for Sunderland Shipbuilders' Deptford yard.

On Report, the Minister referred to the order secured by Austin and Pickersgill. He said that he would like to congratulate the management and the work force. We are all pleased about the order, of course, but the Minister might have mentioned the fact that 420 redundancies had been announced at that yard. That is how cavalier the attitude is now. If one order can be announced, 420 redundancies do not matter. Furthermore, as I understand it, even with the Oblendorff order there are probably more redundancies still to come.

I congratulate the local management, though somewhat halfheartedly, on what it has achieved. I certainly congratulate the shop stewards and the work force. However, I do not congratulate the Minister's Department, the chairman, the finance directors, or the senior management of British Shipbuilders. It is a disgrace that when that order was available—not for the first time—last September, it was lost because of a price gap of £2 million while the Government sat on their backside and did nothing. The order then suddenly seemed to reappear out of nowhere, and last Wednesday the shop stewards were told that if they did not agree to various conditions and sign them by Friday the yard would not get the order—it would have had it.

That was the situation that faced the workers last Wednesday. I congratulate them on not giving in to such disgraceful blackmail. In a nationalised industry, with national wage agreements, the shop stewards in one shipyard were presented with an ultimatum and told to sign for a two-year wage freeze, taking themselves out of national pay bargaining, within 48 hours. They were told that if they did not do so the yard would probably close. Is that the stage that we have reached? If it is, we need not wonder any more about what will happen after December 1986.

What will happen after the Ohlendorff order is completed? It is a sorry state of affairs. A yard originally designed to turn out 14 SD 14s a year has an order for two ships. There is a huge gap in the work programme beforehand, and nothing else on the order book. Yet that order is seen as manna from heaven—as salvation. Unless there are more orders, the order will merely give a few months' breathing space between crises.

What are the Government doing about the Ethiopian order? We have not forgotten about it because of Ohlendorff, although I suspect that the high-up management of British Shipbuilders has the worst intentions. It was not the local management that laid down the condition about the two-year wage freeze, and it was certainly not Ohlendorff. A German shipowner would have no cause to lay down such a condition. He is interested only in such matters as price and delivery.

When the question of price became crucial, the Government should have closed the gap. Instead, there was an attempt to make the work force do it by signing an agreement within 48 hours. I hope that such disgraceful tactics will not be tried again on workers in this or any other industry. I hope that the Government and Mr. Day will have learnt their lesson from the fact that the workers refused to give in to blackmail, that a reasonable agreement was eventually reached and that the order was still secured.

I hope that the Government will intensify their efforts to secure the Ethiopian order for Austin and Pickersgill, because the Ohlendorff order will provide only a brief respite for the industry on the River Wear. Sunderland Shipbuilders will soon, like Austin and Pickersgill, be in a state of crisis. The area is already soaked with redundancies, not only in shipbuilding but in many other industries, or what is left of them.

I do not like playing around with statistics, but I should like to give some that bring the scale of the problem home to me. At one school in my constituency, 80 per cent. of the children are on free school meals; at a second, 75 per cent.; at a third, 72 per cent.; and at a fourth 70 per cent. Sunderland has 26 per cent. adult male unemployment, one third of whom have been unemployed for more than two years. The rest have been unemployed for one year. Skilled workers are being made redundant from the shipyards and there are no apprenticeships. There is no other skilled work left in the town. The waves of redundancies pile up on that level of unemployment and the percentage of the long-term unemployed also increases. Literally thousands have been out of work for years. The effect on the community is terrifying. The yards are fevered with fears of redundancy and talk of redundancy and the Bill has made that ten times worse.

Nothing that the Government have said has reassured people. The Government's announcement that the scheme is to be ended in December 1986 is a message to people in my area to get out now. The message is that nothing will be certain and that the Government will do nothing to make people feel that they have a secure future. If they get out now, they argue, at least they will get what is going under the present scheme.

The events at Austin and Pickersgill confirm another worry. I should like the Minister to deny categorically that such merchant yards are being prepared for privatisation. The fear is that all of the yards on the River Wear are being slimmed down and having bits and pieces sub-contracted out as part of the push to get the work force to accept the conditions that will come with privatisation. It is clear that those who are playing around and, in some cases, holding orders off and are trying to get things out of the work force before allowing them an order are the very people who intend to buy the yards. Such has been the process with the warship yards.

People in communities around the yards expect either closure or privatisation. If that is what the Government intend, they should come clean and let us know what we are up against. I assure the Government that we know how to deal with that. If the Government intend to let the industry continue to sink by not securing orders and keeping the order books unfilled, and to stave off crises with an order from time to time so that the management can regroup and get the next lot of redundancies through, they should not assume that there will not be resistance such as has been put up and is being put up by the National Union of Mineworkers. Shipyard workers have learnt much from the NUM about defending their jobs and communities. They will not allow the Government to leave the industry to die or to hand it over to the private owners about whom my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) spoke so eloquently.

11.10 pm

Mr. Frank Field: I wish to make two brief points. First, in a sense this debate, and many others, represents

[Mr. Frank Field]

a paradox. The Government could make a case for the amount of support that they have given British shipbuilders. Since 1979, £1 billion of taxpayers' money has been put into the industry, yet it is in a crisis. Some people would argue that that is because that sum is not adequate for the size of the problem, but it is also because of the way in which the Government have brought forward the plans for that spending.

Since 1979, the industry has staggered from crisis to crisis, and the Government have responded by changing the borrowing requirement. We have never been able to have a debate about the long-term structure of the industry and the funds needed to support it. Therefore, my first charge against the Government is that they have displayed the politics of caprice and, almost, of madness. They have put considerable sums forward, but never in such a way that we could rationally debate how best to preserve British shipbuilding.

Secondly, I wish to relate what has been happening at Cammell Laird to this measure. Many hon. Friends and hon. Members will know that in the summer there was a dispute at Cammell Laird, although the majority of workers had three mass meetings to reject industrial action. The workers decided privately and collectively to accept the tap on the shoulder to be told that they did not have a job, providing their sacrifice would be matched by the survival of the yard. There were two reasons for that decision. First, there was a redundancy payment scheme and therefore some compensation for making the sacrifice. With this measure, that compensation will no longer be available. Secondly, they hoped that others in the yard, and possibly their children and grandchildren, would have a job in the yard. My second charge against the Government is not that this is a scrappy, nasty, little measure — it is that — nor that they have not spent considerable sums supporting the industry but the courage and sacrifice of the workers at Cammell Laird and other yards in willingly taking redundancy so that the industry can survive, has not been matched by Government vision about the industry's future.

The debate is not merely about the winding up of the redundancy payments scheme, nor about the fact that the Government have not put forward considerable sums of taxpayers' money. It is about a charge against the Government that since 1979 we have never had a proper debate about the needs and future development of the British shipbuilding industry, and the resource that will be necessary to safeguard its future.

Throughout the years we have had endless debates, but always in crises, always trying to patch up differences and always knowing that after a few weeks we would be back with another crisis and a demand for more money. When the Minister replies, I hope that for the first time since 1979 he will give us some idea of when we shall debate a corporate plan for the industry.

11.14 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I wish to be brief, but nevertheless I wish to endorse the comments made by Opposition Members. I have a direct personal interest, especially in the comments of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I was born within a mile of Cammell Laird and my grandfather worked in the shipyards at Hebburns. There is genuine distress that these yards are under threat at present.

I ask the Minister to address two matters that arise from the measures contained in the Bill. In Committee, the Minister said that the Government would be prepared to introduce a topping-up scheme to follow the present one. Opposition Members would prefer the present scheme not to be terminated, but the Minister said that he recognises that any scheme that follows will need a topping-up element. How much will the Government provide in that scheme? Unless we have some guidance on that, many workers will opt for the present scheme because they will be unclear about what may follow. The Minister has an obligation to explain to the House what sort of topping-up the Government will endorse.

I have many constituents who work at the Hall Russell yard, which is favoured for privatisation. Let us leave aside for the moment whether we believe privatisation to be desirable. I said in Committee that the yard was successful when it was in private ownership, and may be so again, but it has not been helped by being kicked in and out of the private sector for the past few years. The preferred option—expressed both privately and publicly —is that it should be privatised, together with Yarrows. However, during the past week, it has become clear that that is unlikely to happen. The Yarrows management pulled out of the deal because the workers at that yard were not committed to it.

Dr. Godman: Is it not the case that a certain Mr. Iain Sproat has expressed an interest in acquiring that yard?

Mr. Bruce: That is true, but I am not sure whether it is his money. I suspect that he is acting on behalf of people who have money. Nevertheless, the consortium of which Mr. Sproat is a spokesman has expressed interest in the yard. My concern is only that the yard should continue to be as successful as it has been. I am not convinced that privatisation is helpful, and what has happened during the past two or three weeks has produced an uncertainty that the yard could do without. The yard was successful in the private sector, but it was also successful in the public sector. How can it be in the best interests of the community and the work force to have such uncertainty, with offers being made and then withdrawn, and new offers coming forward?

More specifically, will the Minister now recognise that he will not obtain a quick and easy settlement of his privatisation deal, and that the period will have to be extended to ensure that all offers are considered? The most likely offer has been withdrawn, and the one still on the table has not been considered properly. He has an obligation to tell the House what will happen.

On Second Reading and in Committee the Minister said that the Government would introduce a topping-up scheme, but he has not said how much money will be involved. The uncertainties in the industry——

Mr. Dixon: Does the hon. Gentleman remember that the Minister said that the public sector schemes would be exactly the same as the private sector ones? How can he top up the public sector schemes if they are supposed to be the same as the private ones? Will he also prop up the private sector schemes?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) knows that I share his scepticism about the scheme. In

Committee, we persuaded the Minister to agree to top up the scheme, but he has not yet said that he will top it up to the same level. Unless the Minister assures the House tonight that he will do so, there is likely to be a mass exodus from the industry because the workers will lack confidence in what he has said. Unless he is prepared to say to the House that the Government recognise the need to ensure that any follow-on scheme will be topped up to the same level as the present scheme, the shipbuilding industry will be faced with a continuing crisis. He has said nothing on Second Reading or in Committee to reassure hon. Members who represent areas in which shipbuilding is important that the industry will be supported by the Government for the foreseeable future.

11.19 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The remarks of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on wasting time while he has tried to duck out of the debate will have done nothing to improve his hapless reputation for putting his foot in it. Not only was he not present for any of the preceding debate, for the best part of which I was present, but I think that it is very wrong of him to imply that the preceding debate in any way was wasting time any more than this important debate on the shipbuilding industry in any sense has been a waste of time. I hope that he will reflect on those remarks and try to stop putting his foot in it in future.

We have heard contributions from nearly all the major shipbuilding regions in the country, particularly those represented by Opposition Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), in a powerful and logical indictment of the Government's proposals, referred to Swan Hunter. He and others of my hon. Friends were at a meeting earlier this evening with the managing director and industrial relations director of that company. In the course of the meeting, they made it clear to us that they were indeed ambivalent, if not worried, about privatisation and specifically about the provisions of the Bill for the termination of the scheme in December next year. They could not see the reason for this, and they will be making separate representations to the Government such as we will expect from other yards remaining within the public sector and those being privatised.

We heard also some powerful, emotional and emotive contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), for Sunderland, North (Mr Clay) and most particularly for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon).

In the regional communities we would put it to the Government again that, as with the mining area communities, unemployment is already very often as high as 50 per cent. The unemployment is often made up of the long-term unemployed, those who have been unemployed for over one year. When my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow referred to the practices of management in that industry, it reminded me of the practices of management in the motor cycle industry that brought that industry to its knees. No investment was being made in plant and machinery—the very fact which was so accurately and relevantly given by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow. This happened in the motor cycle industry in which we dominated the world market, just as we did in shipbuilding. We had 70 per cent. of the world market, not one penny was going into the industry, but the wife of the chairman was driving round Monte Carlo in a gold-plated Daimler, the late Lady Docker. That sort of attitude on the part of management has led to the crisis situations that we face in many of our traditional industries.

As to the spectre of privatisation, that was odd coming from the former leader of Wandsworth borough council, who pioneered so much of it with such enthusiasm. I refer to the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope). I am pleased to note that he has remained present at least to hear these remarks. I hope that the spectre will come to haunt him as he now represents Southampton, Itchen. The Opposition would agree wholeheartedly with those sentiments, although they are not ones with which we would readily associate the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Chope: It is clear from what I said that I was expressing concern about delay in the privatisation in Southampton.

Mr. Robinson: I am sure that I need add nothing further to that. I will leave it to the constituents of the hon. Gentleman to interpret the obvious lack of concern that he has for them and the evident concern that he has for his own prospects on the Government Benches. There were further contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who accurately spoke of the crisis that we face.

However, of course, this could be an industry of the future. After all, shipbuilding is not a dying industry. It is an industry in which there are applications for the new technologies. If we do not have those, where will the new technologies be used? Where will the new materials be used? Where will the robotics be used? Shipbuilding is there for control technology, for computer-aided design and manufacture. Without those applications in industries such as shipbuilding, those new technologies have nowhere to go for their application. That is why we are doing so badly in them, as the Parliamentary Under-Secretary knows only too well. In that situation, as many of my hon. Friends have said, all that the Government can do is talk about redundancies and make it clear to the House that they want as quickly as they can to wash their hands of any responsibilities in that respect, be it to the private sector or the small part of the public sector that they intend to retain.

We need a maritime plan that would involve the shipbuilding industry, both military and commercial, and the engine-building capability, both military—where we are totally dependent on foreign licences — and commercial. We need a policy that would link Government purchasing power to shipowners based in the United Kingdom. We need a rolling and committed programme from the Ministry of Defence. To none of those things has the Parliamentary Under-Secretary given us anything more than an evasive reply. We have had his tortuous, tortured remarks and self-contradiction of, "Now we all understand that it will all be levelled down." In other words, we shall have parity—not the parity of the existing national statutory scheme, but the parity of some punitive scheme that will apply equally to the public and private sectors.

Tonight the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has lost the argument, and he knows it. He has lost it because he never had an argument. The Government's approach is negative and pathetically inadequate. We can look forward to the future only with grave doubts and many fears for the industry, which the debate has done nothing to alleviate.

11.26 pm

Mr. Butcher: I thank the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) for doing his impression of a Front Bench peroration, some parts of which we have heard before, some parts of which were unnecessary, and some parts of which were thoroughly and comprehensively inaccurate. If the hon. Gentleman had done his research, he would have found that the proposals that he put forward on new clause 1 were irrelevant. They would have taken twice as long as would be required under our proposal to give effect to virtually the same measure. Purely as a side issue, they would have made it very difficult for us to write off the national loans fund liability, for which we need legislation. That would have been the import of the hon. Gentleman's proposal.

I should like to clear up some of the general observations that were made. I do not know why we got involved in a post-mortem, but the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) seemed to imply that there was a difference between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Department on the placing of the type 22 orders. I know that the hon. Gentleman had a problem in the previous debate in checking records and establishing hard data. If he looks at the debate on 9 January, he will find that I said:

"We equally recognise the concern in each"—

that is, all three yards—

"at the time it has taken to reach that decision, but it is essential that in reaching it we take fully into account all the factors, including the requirements of the Navy, the cost to the taxpayer, the performance of the yards and their need for work."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1985; Vol. 70, c. 837.]

After that other factors are mentioned.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Minister is right in what he has read out, but then I rose, as I am rising now, to pin down the hon. Gentleman on whether competitive factors alone were to be taken into account, or whether wider social questions were to be taken into account. The Minister of State, who was sitting next to him, grinned because he realised the point. It was then that the Minister gave the answer that I read earlier, which was a precise pinning down to competitive factors alone. Then the Secretary of State went on to announce something quite different.

Mr. Butcher: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the biggest social factor in any constituency is the need for work—the rate of unemployment? Does he agree that the need for work is at the heart of any constituency's difficulties, in its social, welfare and other programmes? Is not the best way to ease demands on welfare programmes to increase the level of employment in a constituency?

Mr. Nicholas Brown *rose*——

Mr. Butcher: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman again on this point. He is either deliberately misunderstanding it or he has difficulty in deciphering the clear language of *Hansard*.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said that we do not debate the corporate plan, and that we need opportunities for bigger and broader debates to show where we are going and what the future of the industry is to be. I understand his concern, and that was a legitimate point. He will know that on 25 July my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement to the House on the 1984 British Shipbuilders' plan. The usual short debate that followed was dominated by doctrinaire arguments about privatisation, despite the fact that the plan had been made available to the House. Since then we have had several debates on various aspects of shipbuilding. On no occasion have the Opposition used the opportunity to challenge or debate the plan. Have Labour Members taken the trouble to go to the Library and to look at it? As usual, it is available there.

While we are on the subject, I hope that some Labour Members will join me in the hope—it is not too forlorn a hope, and may even be a distinct possibility—that the 200,000 compensated gross registered tonnes target in the corporate plan will be met in orders taken in this financial year.

I found the intervention of the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) disgraceful. He should at least celebrate those two orders with us. He should recognise that the improvements for which the corporate management is asking in working practices and unit labour costs at that site are necessary. He will be aware that the unit wage costs at that site are higher than they are in some of the neighbouring sites. That is a legitimate target for the corporate management to try to bring in, in the light of the new order.

Mr. Clay: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that the nearest that British Shipbuilders has ever been to breaking even came during the 1982 financial report—when it got to within £19 million of breaking even, within the £25 million limit set by the Government—when it had a throughput of 400,000 tonnes? That corporate plan was suggested by the previous chairman, and it is only since the present chairman took over that there has been talk of the 200,000 tonne limit. That is one of the problems of British Shipbuilders.

Mr. Butcher: In his speech, the hon. Gentleman made comments about the previous and present chairmen. Time will tell, but at the moment the present chairman is out there fighting for orders. Some of the recent observations of the previous chairman do not seem to hold up under close examination. It would be far better if he spent a little less time justifying some of his past decisions, and a little more time in looking at the future of the industry. I am prepared, as the House should be, to give Graham Day the credit for fighting for the industry. He is out there now getting orders, and he will come back tomorrow, we hope, with an announcement on further orders. He is motivated to look after the interests of the industry, and I resent the comments made by the hon. Member for Sunderland, North and the way that he has sought to ascribe motives to the current chairman that are not of the best possible kind.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, North talked about the Scargill factor. It is regrettable that that was introduced into the debate. There will be another debate on another occasion, when no doubt that will be examined. I recall that my last visit to the north coincided with the day when the hon. Gentleman, who I understand is proud of being a member of the hard Left or is on the borderline between hard and soft Left, was having a contretemps on the picket lines. I recall that the hon. Member got the kind of publicity which no doubt he welcomes. When he talks about the Scargill factor, I would advise him, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not to seek to link it to the

shipbuilding industry, because one day people will discover that the Scargill factor caused great sadness and great bitterness.

Mr. Clay: The record will clearly demonstrate that I never used the name "Scargill" in any of my contributions. This indicates the hysteria on the Government Benches about the mining dispute. Conservative Members can talk about nothing but that particular name. I talked about massively high rates of long-term unemployment. Unemployment is a factor in both the mining and shipbuilding industries. In my constituency there are both mining and shipbuilding communities. That is why people are sick and tired of the Government's attitude. For the Minister to get up and talk about the Scargill factor when we are trying to talk about the fear of long-term unemployment in both mining and shipbuilding communities which are suffering from the same problem shows the Government's total lack of understanding and care.

Mr. Butcher: Members of the hard Left, both inside and sometimes outside the House, come dangerously close to celebrating human misery. They may view that as a driving force for their political ends, but the hon. Gentleman did not find it possible in his contribution to celebrate what could be a future for the yard about which he made representations both to the Department of Trade and Industry and in Committee upstairs.

When Opposition Members, in the context of shipbuilding, talk about the Government's social responsibility, they correctly say that there are other aspects of Government policy which should be of help in these hard-pressed regions and constituencies. Therefore, I remind the House once again that, in terms of regional aid alone, not even including Department of the Environment aid, since this Government came to power aid to Wearside has amounted to £31 million. In Teesside it amounts to £181 million, in North Tyne to £57·8 million and in South Tyne to £50·3 million. In Scotland — across the four travel-to-work areas where shipbuilding is still a major source of employment — we are talking about £137·6 million of aid. In Birkenhead the aid amounts to £174 million. That is not the behaviour of a Government who do not recognise that there are other ways of tackling the problems which Opposition Members have——

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Butcher: No. I gave way to the hon. Gentleman on two occasions in the last debate. Once was certainly enough tonight.

The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) made an obviously heartfelt contribution. I have already said that I cannot go along with the assertions that he made about the current chairman of British Shipbuilders.

The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) linked his comment with a comment made by the hon. Member for Birkenhead and asked whether the industry has a future. That depends upon a number of factors. It has never been within the gift of an Industry Minister, of any political complexion, to say that there shall be a shipbuilding industry with a merchant sector of a certain tonnage for a certain period of years. The market that affects that question has always been out there somewhere. What we have said in the House ad nauseam is that this Administration — like the previous Administration — recognise that, given that there is not a free market in international shipbuilding and that subsidies are paid by all of our international competitors, we have legitimately to do something to stay in the race. Would that we did not. It is absolutely right that my hon. Friends should fight for fairer competition so that we can escape from the subsidy spiral.

It is our duty to keep our industry in the race and not to throw public money at problems such as unit wage costs, new procedures and new investment, which may therefore be more difficult to solve. Through the intervention fund and other measures, we should find room to manoeuvre for our domestic shipyards.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) understood the Bill's basic point. An employee cannot opt to be made redundant. He must be asked if he wishes to be made redundant by the employer, who must first declare the redundancy programme. I cannot remember the hon. Gentleman's exact words, but whole droves cannot say that they wish to take advantage of the scheme in spite of the fact that a shipyard may not want a particular redundancy programme. Workers cannot exit in large numbers.

I was asked whether the deadline of 15 February can be extended for the bidders of a yard about to be privatised. Yes, the deadline will be extended if existing bidders have difficulties and——

Mr. Gerald Malone (Aberdeen, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that the management of Hall Russell shipbuilders advised me yesterday that an extension of the deadline was not necessary and that our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had been advised of that? Indeed, the management of Hall Russell no longer wishes the deadline to be extended, it having reconsidered its position over the weekend.

Mr. Butcher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall confirm that in the aftermath of the debate.

I commend these words to Labour Members:

"The Bill was not introduced in any way as part of a plan for redundancies. We do not have such a plan. It is designed to cope with the redundancies which will inevitably occur. I agree that it is not a happy Bill. We should have preferred not to introduce it, but we believe that it is right to do so and we ask the House to pass it."—*[Official Report,* 7 February 1978; Vol. 943, c. 1416.]

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Butcher: No, I shall not give way.

Hon. Members should know that those are the words of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). He said then what we have to say now. We wish that the Bill was not necessary——

Mr. Bruce: I asked specifically what kind of topping-up scheme the Government would contemplate to succeed the present scheme, and the Minister has not answered that. I should be grateful if he would tell the House.

Mr. Butcher: That question was answered in Committee. The Government have said that they are prepared to cover the costs of the successor voluntary scheme within BS. The hon. Gentleman will recall that he asked the question in a slightly different way. He asked whether it was self-funding. The answer was that the transaction is neutral.

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): The Minister has referred only to BS. Will he explain the position in relation to the biggest shipyard in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Butcher: The right hon. Gentleman should be aware that the scheme is identical for Harland and Wolff. That yard too will be covered by a December 1986 deadline and will be given exactly the same detailed payments at exactly the same rate as will pertain on the mainland of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Taylor: I accept that the present arrangements are identical throughout the United Kingdom, but when the present scheme lapses will the future arrangements for Harland and Wolff be identical to those for BS?

Mr. Butcher: It is up to the managements of BS and Harland and Wolff to negotiate their voluntary arrangements, given the guidance of my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

I ask hon. Members to accept this innocuous Bill, which deserves the support of both sides of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

MILK (CESSATION OF PRODUCTION) [MONEY] (NO. 2)

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purpose of any Act resulting from the Milk (Cessation of Production) Bill ("the Act"), it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any payments made under the Act by a Minister of the Crown for the purpose of compensating persons, who are or have been registered in the direct sales register or a wholesale register maintained under the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1984, for reducing milk production.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

Milk (Cessation of Production) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

PAYMENTS TO PERSONS CEASING MILK PRODUCTION

11.48 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 11, at end insert—

'(1A) for the purpose of compensating persons who are or have been registered milk producers for reducing milk production, the Minister may make payments to such persons who have undertaken—

(a) to reduce their production of milk for sale or for the manufacture of any milk product for sale; and

(b) to surrender part of their milk quotas to the reserve.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 2 and 10.

Mr. MacGregor: The amendments honour a commitment that I gave in Committee in response to amendments tabled by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) and for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells). Their amendments would have made it possible for compensation to be paid to producers who reduce production as well as those who give it up altogether. I accepted that it would be sensible to amend the Bill in this way and undertook to propose amendments on Report.

The purpose of tonight's amendments is to provide authority for payments to be made to producers who cut production and surrender a portion of their quota as well as producers who surrender all their quota.

It may be helpful for the House to know the background to the amendments. They do not apply to the present outgoers' scheme, which is non-statutory. I stress that current Community legislation does not permit payments to be made to producers in return for partial surrender of quota. Under article 4 of Council regulation 857/84, which permits the national outgoers' scheme, producers must discontinue production definitively—that is, entirely.

We have no intention of altering the existing non-statutory scheme. We do not intend to introduce a new scheme to allow partial surrender even if Community legislation allowed it.

We are introducing legislation in the Bill to give the cover of primary legislation for any future schemes of whatever type for the convenience, I hope, of the House now and in the future.

We do not have any future schemes in mind, but it makes sense to give appropriate flexibility to any future schemes. Partial surrender of quota would introduce further flexibility into the quota system. It is, therefore, sensible to provide the necessary enabling legislation. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): We are grateful to the Minister for meeting the serious points made in Committee and for recognising a serious omission from the Bill. The partial surrender of quotas could make available milk which could help the dairy industry in its critical state.

The Minister is right that the provision will have no present benefit, but I hope that he will not dismiss out of hand the need for a scheme and will seek approval in the EEC for some partial surrender policy.

The amendment, welcome though it is, shows how ill-considered and rushed the original scheme from Brussels was. Nevertheless, a needless restriction has been removed and for that we thank the Minister.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): The Minister promised in Committee to table an amendment, and I am grateful to him for keeping his word. I hope that what he has done will benefit dairy producers in the years to come.

It is a shame that part of the quotas could not have been given up before. More than 240 small farmers in Wales have gone out of dairy production. As I said in Committee, the Government have had their priorities wrong. They should have gone for the big dairy farmers first, leaving the small dairy producers as family units. Because of the policy that they have pursued, we have lost too many small dairy farmers.

Mr. James Nicholson (Newry and Armagh): I welcome the concession that the Government are making because it will help large dairy farmers to contract and have an easier time running their farms. They will be able to sell their extra quota; or they may wish to lease it, although the Minister wants them to sell it.

I am concerned about the lack of uptake in Northern Ireland of the buyers scheme. The amendment will be of no help in that respect because the scheme has been a total disaster. Indeed, I described the Bill as a disaster in the House on 10 January, and as the amendment will be of no help to Northern Ireland, I can only continue to regard the measure as a disaster.

An effort was made to buy out 66 million litres of milk in Northern Ireland under the buyers scheme. I understand that only a little in excess of 10 million litres has been bought, or one sixth of what had been hoped for. Apparently the buyers scheme is to be renewed and producers will be informed of its continued operation. For how long will it be open? While I do not wish to seem a pessimist, I fear that the renewed scheme will be no more successful than the earlier one. However, I wish the Minister luck with it.

How much milk will be awarded to expanders in Northern Ireland? The Department said that the expanders would receive 46 per cent. of what had been awarded, as against 57 per cent. in Scotland, and the percentages for England and Wales have yet to be decided. Again, therefore, Northern Ireland has lost out. Not only did we lose the 65,000 tonnes—I will not go into detail on that tonight; the Minister is aware of the point I am making —but we are also losing out in percentage terms.

Only 25·7 million litres are available to meet the expanders in Northern Ireland, and that is not enough milk to go round. The scheme has been a total flop and something must be done to bolster the scheme in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the Minister will answer some of the suggestions I made when we last debated the subject.

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West): I support the amendment as it is right that the provisions within it should be on the stocks and ready for use in future. It is obvious that we need more milk producers to surrender part or the whole of their production so that their quota can be reallocated towards other dairy farmers to make them viable.

The problems that the quotas have produced are so serious that the Community should consider the amendment carefully and that which the Government are seeking generally to do so that a part or the whole of the surrendered production can be reallocated to other dairy farmers. This problem overrides all others in farming and I should like to see further financial funds found from the Community, or possibly from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, so that it can be overcome. I believe that farmers are prepared to give up some of the grants and other benefits that they are obtaining from the Ministry and the Community so that the problem can be tackled.

We have taken a small step forward, and I hope that the Minister will press strongly at Brussels to enable the surrender of part of the production of milk to become a reality. I hope also that the Community will find more money so that farmers can get out of the milk production and make other units viable. Something will have to be done, and I trust that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will take what I have said extremely seriously.

Mr. David Penhaligon (Truro): I welcome this sensible and rational amendment, and I am pleased that it is to be incorporated in the Bill. The Government must have been ill prepared when they accepted the original proposal that lies behind the Bill in the absence of the amendment. It is inconceivable that the Commission would not have agreed with the contents of the amendment at the time when the regulations were proposed. It is interested only in reducing milk production, and it seems that it is not really interested how that is achieved.

When the deal of £650 over five years was offered to farmers, I did not think much of it. I have been surprised, to some extent, by the interest that dairy farmers within my constituency have shown in it. Enormous interest was shown initially by many dairy farmers throughout the country, but the number putting a signature on the dotted line at the bottom of the page has not been overwhelming. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Nicholson) has told us of the serious position in the area which he represents.

I shall be interested to know whether the Minister believes that the outgoers scheme will adequately buy, as it were, the quota system. That is crucial and I should like to know whether the buy-out scheme is on target. It will be interesting to know the size of the farm that is now covered by the scheme as it is gradually extended. Some of those running small farms rejected it when they had had time to analyse it. We should have that information before we make judgements on the following amendments.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I intervene briefly to support the amendment. It is welcome, albeit to the extent that it is jam tomorrow.

I have received some allegations from dairy farmers in my constituency about which I have written to my hon. Friend the Minister of State. It seems that under the outgoers scheme the funds available will account for only about a third of the applications that are received. Unless further funding is made available, possibly at the expense of the capital grant scheme elsewhere, for the outgoers scheme, there will not be sufficient money to pay the applicants. If that is the case, a great many dissatisfied

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

customers will be queueing at the door of the outgoers scheme. If that happens, there will presumably be even greater pressure for the type of scheme proposed by my hon. Friend the Minister from those who apply but are rejected because funds are not available from the outgoers scheme. Even though that scheme will not be implemented immediately, I suspect that there will be an increased demand for this measure — I presume that my hon. Friend will press for it in the Community — because there will not be sufficient funds under the outgoers scheme, which, as my hon. Friend said, is a separate scheme.

12 midnight

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will fight his corner and go in battling to press for funding for such a scheme and for it to be sanctioned by the Community. I have written to my hon. Friend about one priority that should come first—interchangeability. Although that is separate to the proposed amendment, it is important. To a large extent, it should be afforded a relatively nil cost to the Community in that there is an offset between the increased quotas for production for direct sales and the decreased quotas for production for wholesales. As I understand it, this cannot be permitted under Community rules, although the Government are sympathetic to the idea. They propose that this measure should be allowed by the Community.

I hope that interchangeability will be given immediate priority, because I believe that it will immediately end injustice to those who had the foresight years ago to shift out of wholesales and into direct sales. Those people are prejudicially affected compared with farmers on the next form producing similar amounts with the same type of dairy herd. This problem needs to be tackled first, and I hope that, in pressing the Community for funds for the scheme, my hon. Friend the Minister will not forget the need to press for interchangeability.

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): The Minister is well aware that milk production in Northern Ireland makes a greater contribution to that region than milk production does in many other parts of the United Kingdom. The Minister, therefore, understands that the controversy during the past 12 months about milk quotas has had a greater political impact in Northern Ireland than it perhaps has had elsewhere in the United Kingdom. As the Minister is aware, Northern Ireland is the one part of the United Kingdom that is liable to milk quotas and superlevies.

We shall need greater assurances from the Government if my right hon. and hon. Friends are to find it possible to support the Government on this measure. Can the Minister assure us that quotas within the United Kingdom will be transferable on a regional basis? Will the hon. Gentleman assure us that next year Northern Ireland will receive the 65,000 tonnes which seemed to disappear last year?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that it is right to remind the House that this is a comparatively narrow amendment and does not relate at all to the existing scheme. Nearly all the points have been about the existing scheme. For the sake of good order, it would be more appropriate for me to reply on Third Reading to a number of the points that were made about the existing scheme. I believe that that would be the correct way in which to tackle this matter, because I have no doubt that other general points will be made. This approach will enable me to deal with them all at once.

If I had not listened to the debate in Committee, the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) would have accused me of having had a closed mind and not being open to reasoned argument. As I did listen to the debate, he has accused me of not having thought of the point before and of not having brought forward the Bill in a form so complete that there would be no point in discussing the Bill in Committee. I cannot win with the hon. Gentleman. I hope that on this occasion he will be graceful and allow that the way I did it was right, and support the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 1, line 13, leave out 'such payments may be made' and insert

'payments under subsections (1) and (1A) above may be made; and such a scheme may make provision as to payments under one or both of those subsections'.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 16, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 4, in page 1, line 17, leave out 'or instalments'.

Mr. Home Robertson: This is about the scheme which is operating at present. I do not want to encourage people to have a wide-ranging debate, but it would be relevant on this group of amendments.

The first purpose of these amendments is to make it obligatory for cash payments to be made under the scheme. The second purpose is to provide for the payments to be made as a lump sum instead of by instalments. It is envisaged by the scheme and the legislation that cash payments by the Government will be mandatory and therefore I shall not dwell on that point. Our main objective is to require the Government to pay the outgoers' payments in a lump sum instead of in dribs and drabs as is happening at present.

Throughout our proceedings, the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have made much of the horrors of negotiating with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We sympathise. It must be distasteful to have to be within spitting distance of him, but it is one of the hazards of being a member of the Tory party.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food went along to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and he made great play of the fact that he obtained £50 million for the scheme. There is considerable doubt about whether that £50 million is worth £50 million, for reasons that I shall develop later. There is a difference between £50 million cash down and £10 million a year for five years. To be precise, in real terms there is a difference of approximately £10 million if we allow for interest at 10 per cent. on those deferred payments. The difference might be substantially more if we allow for higher interest rates such as those we are experiencing at the moment, and continuing inflation.

The value to the outgoers of the final £10 million instalment could be wiped out as a result of inflation and interest rates. The Opposition have already said that the funding for the scheme is pathetic and far from adequate. There is widespread support for that view from all parts of the House and throughout farming. The national

farmers unions in England, Scotland, Wales and practically everywhere else agree that the scheme does not go as far as it should if we are to release the amount of quota required for a number of essential purposes.

The Minister said that he had £50 million for the outgoers' scheme, but, as I have sought to argue, the real value to farmers will be closer to £40 million.

A small dairy farmer with 40 cows who takes part in the outgoers' scheme and who received the full payment all at once would have a lump sum of £26,000. It is a substantial sum of money and it would probably be sufficient to enable him to invest in building a different type of livestock enterprise or to buy machinery to change his system from grass to arable cropping. He would also be eligible for capital relief for tax purposes on the money, if he used it in that way.

However, as the Government are at present operating the scheme, that will not be possible. The hypothetical farmer with 40 cows will be given £5,200 a year for five years. Because of the nature of those payments, they are likely to be taxed as income. With £5,200, at current prices, one could pay for about half a tractor. If, in order to restructure his farm, the farmer borrowed enough money to realise, say, £26,000 — which is what the gross figure would be if he received the full value of the compensation—the effect of interest and inflation, with the five yearly payments, would reduce the value to the farmer of the total compensation by at least £5,200 in real terms. By the time the fifth payment was made, it would already have been swallowed up in bank interest alone.

In earlier debates we have emphasised the need for adequate funds to create new enterprises in place of the dairy units being shut down under the quota scheme. We have also said that we doubt the wisdom of winding up only the smaller dairy farms, as is happening under the scheme. The phased scheme is of very limited value as an incentive to restructure farms. Indeed, a farmer will only be able to invest in alternative enterprises if he borrows money and adds the risks attached to substantial borrowings to the trauma caused by breaking with his traditional livelihood in the dairy industry.

A single lump sum payment could be much more effective. Such an approach to the scheme would make it possible for people to restructure their farms, remain in some kind of production and continue to provide employment. Its virtues are self-evident. I invite the Minister of State to accept the amendment. I invite him to ask the Chancellor to honour in real terms his undertaking to pay £50 million for the outgoers' scheme. It would be in the Chancellor's interests to do so. He is reaping the benefit of the reduction in the cost of intervention and of the rest of the CAP so far as it involves the dairy industry.

Like myself, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, is a farmer. I am sure that when the right hon. Gentleman sells a tonne of grain after the harvest, he does not offer the merchant extended credit terms. He expects money on the nail. Perhaps the Chancellor of the Exchequer should not be allowed to get away with extended credit terms. There is ample justification for making capital payments to enable people to restructure their farms and for providing full capital compensation at the start rather than paying out the money in dribs and drabs.

Sir Peter Mills: I cannot agree with the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson). To give a capital lump sum in compensation would be most unwise. It would create enormous practical problems. I do not wish to be rude to the Opposition, but the suggestion simply shows their lack of experience of what happens in a market when a large sum of money suddenly descends on it. There would be an enormous distortion in the prices of store sheep and store cattle, as every farmer taking advantage of the scheme suddenly tried to buy store cattle, beef cattle or sheep.

There would also be a serious effect on other agricultural production. My experience as a practical farmer is that other sections of production are worried about a sudden and large influx of money. Opposition Members have obviously not thought of that. If 10 or 15 farmers near a market town had a large lump sum with which to buy store cattle or sheep, prices would rise dramatically. That would not benefit the buyer or, in the longer term, the seller. My hon. Friend the Minister is right to phase the payments so that the money is fed in gradually.

I am not a tax expert, but I believe that, over a five-year period, there will probably not be any tax deductions on the compensation. I am happy to be corrected on that. The money should be phased in, or there will be terrible distortion for everyone.

12.15 am

Mr. Penhaligon: I always give the most careful consideration to arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills). I wonder, however, whether farmers in his area all agree with what he said about a sudden injection of money. I have not addressed a meeting of farmers who, given the choice between money today and money tomorrow, think that they will be better off if they get the money tomorrow. Substantial sums of money will be released anyway because many cattle will be sold. In either case, I suspect that a good proportion of the money will go to the bank.

The best solution is to enable farmers to choose. Many farmers in my area are interested in the scheme, not because they want to restructure their holdings but because they are under some pressure from bank managers as the dairy industry is suffering cash flow problems, not least because of interest rates.

My experience of farmers is that they are sensible people who make rational decisions. The flexibility for which I am arguing would therefore be advantageous. I am sure that the Minister would not have much difficulty in persuading another place that such provision should be made.

The best solution is a choice, the second best is a lump sum and the third best is instalments. The lump sum would be better, not least because, despite what the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon West (Sir P. Mills) says, a considerable amount of the money will not go straight back into the market to buy sheep or whatever, but to the local bank manager to keep him quiet. The hon. Gentleman represents an agricultural seat and will know that a great deal of pressure is being placed on many farmers about their present cash flow position.

Sir Peter Mills: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. However, if that is the attitude of local bank managers, the matter is serious, because farmers who are leaving milk production will not be able to start production in another area. I hope that bank managers, or at least their

[Sir Peter Mills]

agricultural advisers at the main banks who read *Hansard*, will assist farmers to change their production and not to follow the road suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Penhaligon: The implication of the hon. Gentleman's remarks surprises me. He is suggesting that he is not aware of the current pressure from banks on farmers. I know of it because my farmers tell me about it when I meet them. It is an extremely serious matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) is looking for an opportunity to draw some cases to the attention of the House.

My point is that such schemes work best with the maximum flexibility possible. Flexibility on this point would be advantageous to the dairy community, even if there was a fiscal adjustment in the capital sum to prevent taking it as a lump sum from being an obvious financial gain. Flexibility would assist some farmers who find themselves in difficulties when making sensible and rational decisions relative to their positions.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) tabled the amendments on two false bases, as I understood his opening remarks. First, he said that they would apply to the existing and future schemes. I must disabuse him of that notion. As the amendments are drafted, they could apply only to future schemes, as the existing scheme is non-statutory. Secondly, if I heard him correctly—I am not sure that this is what he meant—he said that he sought to give the possibility of a lump sum, presumably for future schemes, although obviously he was talking about the existing one. His amendments would provide exactly the opposite. They would remove the possibility of flexibility, which already exists in the clause. He seeks to remove "may" and to insert "shall". Therefore, he would do the opposite of what the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) advocates, that is, to keep flexibility for future schemes, if there ever are any. The Bill as drafted does precisely that. It gives the possibility of either a lump sum payment scheme or instalments.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): My hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) said that flexibility should be in the hands not of the Minister but of the farmer. If the Minister admires and would like to encourage flexibility in the scheme, will he assure the House that that flexibility will be in the hands of the farmer, who can choose between the two when the scheme is in operation?

Mr. MacGregor: The existing non-statutory scheme is already in operation, and we have debated it on many occasions. The Bill gives further statutory authorisation for future payments under the existing scheme. At present we are using the appropriation procedure, but the sums are so large that it is not appropriate for all the payments under the existing scheme. If there is a scheme in future, the Bill as drafted will not pre-empt choice in the way that the hon. Gentleman's amendment would do.

The amendment is unwise for three reasons. First, it would tie the hands of any future Government to an unreasonable extent, because such a Government would have to be able—I repeat "would have to be able"—to find the money for the scheme in one financial year. In practice, that would mean either that the total amount available might be less than it would otherwise be—the hon. Gentleman said that it would have to be paid in one financial year rather than over a period—or it might act as a great disincentive to a future Government to introduce a similar scheme. If we accepted the amendment, we should be binding the hands of a future Government to one method that may be inappropriate in the financial year in question. The clause as drafted gives a future Government the option to introduce a lump sum scheme, or a scheme spread over a period, as with the present scheme. It is right to retain that flexibility. After all, that is what the hon. Gentleman sought to achieve with his amendment that I accepted in Committee.

Secondly, the amendment would mean that when a producer was assessed for tax the full payment in the first year would be treated either as income for the whole of the first year or, if we follow the present tax arrangements, as capital gains tax. That would lock many producers into a much less favourable choice than they have under the existing scheme, where, if they choose the income tax option, they can spread their income assessments, and hence their tax bills, over five years. The hon. Gentleman's proposal could lead to an increased income tax liability compared with the present arrangement. That would prevent the use of the flexible and favourable tax arrangements in the present scheme.

The hon. Member for East Lothian commented on the income position of producers who take up the scheme. He ignored the considerable cash sum that can come from the sale of the herd and the consequent tax advantages. The Finance Act 1984 extends the possibility of choosing that option. If farmers choose that option, the proceeds of the sale are tax-free.

Thirdly, the amendment is unwise because of the effect on the markets to which my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) referred. It is significant to note that the schemes which are often quoted in debates about outgoers — the French and German schemes—also phase out the payments. I am sure that those Governments had in mind the point that the Government and my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West make.

For all those reasons, I cannot commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Home Robertson: I take the Minister's point about the drafting of the amendment. We made the rash assumption that the Government intended to introduce a scheme under the statutory provision which they are bringing forward. In tabling the amendment, we intended to provide that lump sums only should be made available. If the purpose of the scheme is to provide sufficient funds to farmers to enable them to restructure their businesses, they would need lump sums to cover the capital costs of new stock and machinery — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) can shake his head and say that farmers can sell their cows, but he knows as well as I do that, in many cases, the dairy units about which we are talking are mortgaged up to the hilt. Therefore, the sale of the cows will go to pay off existing debts and will leave little, if anything, to pay for new stock or machinery.

The Minister made great play of the fact that he did not wish to tie the hands of an incoming Government. I can say only that the present Chancellor of the Exchequer will

not be Chancellor for ever; indeed, the way he is going, he might not be the Chancellor of the Exchequer for much longer. There is nothing to demonstrate that we will be hampered for ever with the kind of prejudices with which we are stuck at present.

12.30 am

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West said. He gave an interesting insight into the conduct of agricultural marketing in the west country. He seemed to be admitting that profiteering was likely to take place on a massive scale. I do not know about farmers in Devon. I can tell him from my own experience of observing people in the farming industry buy and sell stock that in my part of the world it is difficult to profiteer when dealing with hard-nosed farmers. I did not find his argument very convincing.

The Minister and the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West have let the cat out of the bag. These funds are not intended to provide sufficient capital sums to allow units to redevelop and recreate new employment to replace the jobs lost in the rural areas. This is a glorified agricultural supplementary benefit scheme. A relatively mean pension is being offered in an attempt to pay these people. Frankly, I am not impressed by the arguments that have been advanced from the Government Benches.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. John: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 1, line 17, at end insert—

'(4) A scheme under this section shall make provision for the surrender of a tenant farmer's milk quota without the necessity for the consent of his landlord to be obtained.'.

I suspect that the Minister will take the point that he took on the previous amendment, namely, that it refers to a future scheme. My response is that it is the only mechanism by which we can secure discussion of the arguments and problems which will have arisen under the present scheme and which will arise under any future scheme causing a considerable amount of hardship and vexation. This hardship will occur because of the crucial decision to attach the quotas to land rather than to a person.

This central decision has led to the necessity for a landlord to express his consent and, according to the farming press, to a number of disagreeable occurrences. At such a time the tenant is faced with a maximum period of pressure. After all, he will have decided to get out of an industry to which he may have devoted his life. In such a situation, the landlord sometimes — and this has happened regrettably in a minority of cases—seeks to attach conditions, one of which is that there should be an increase in rent. In the farming press one case was reported in which a condition was made not only that the rent shall be increased but that the period for which the rent obtained should be shorter then the legal minimum of three years. That takes advantage of a situation created, to put it neutrally, through no fault of the tenant farmer, and attempts to turn matters to the advantage of the landlord. In a third case described in the farming press, the landlord had invested very little in the original dairy undertaking. These cases evidence what has happened.

Need this happen? In Scotland there is no such condition for a landlord to give his consent. I cannot understand why the tenant in Scotland is so much more trustworthy or why the tenant in England and Wales is so much less trustworthy. The Scots system—although I would not want my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) to take this as a precedent —is far superior to the system currently obtaining in England and Wales.

There is an argument for saying that the types of tenure should be treated separately, attaching conditions to the land in the case of an owner-occupier or to the person in the case of a tenant.

The amendment makes it obligatory on the Secretary of State to make provision for such surrender but does not specify the manner in which to leave the maximum flexibility. One way in which this could be done is for the tenant to be asked to notify the landlord of any application to take advantage of the outgoers scheme and to give the landlord the opportunity to make representations to the Ministry when it was considering whether the tenant's tenant should be allowed to take advantage of the outgoers scheme. That makes the opportunity for pressure to be applied directly by landlord on tenant far less. It is a more indirect process. Therefore, the leverage is less hard on the tenant.

We have heard of hard cases under the present scheme. We do not want them to be repeated. We hope that the Minister will take account of the representations and try to devise a scheme, by accepting the amendment, in which the landlord is not compelled to give his consent, but some other safeguard for his just and natural interest is devised.

Mr. MacGregor: I recognise what the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) is trying to do. We have had long debates in the House about the position of tenants in relation to the outgoers scheme. I recognise that some tenants have not been able to obtain their landlord's consent to their becoming outgoers.

As the House knows, when drawing up the existing non-statutory scheme — the non-statutory element is important—we tried hard to get both sides, landlord and tenant, to agree on procedures giving tenants more freedom of action. However, that agreement was not forthcoming in England and Wales. As a result, we felt that we had no choice but to require the landlord's consent in all cases.

It might be helpful if I explained the significance of my remark about the scheme being non-statutory. Since the agreement was not forthcoming, there would have been legal risks if we had not insisted on landlord's consent, as well as some problems of equity. Obviously, the problems of equity relate to cases where the landlord has made a considerable investment. However, there were also legal problems which we had to face. If a tenant joined the outgoers scheme and surrendered his quota without the landlord's consent, it might be possible, depending on the terms of his lease, for his landlord to sue him for breach of contract. Moreover, the landlord might be able to claim that the Minister had incited the tenant to break his contract because the scheme is based on a contract between the Minister and the producer, and is therefore based on contract law and not on statute.

One of the reasons why we introduced a non-statutory scheme, and one of the advantages of doing it in this way, was that it enabled us to get the scheme off the ground more quickly, and we are a long way down the road of completing the outgoers scheme this year. This will enable us to reallocate the quota much earlier. I am sure the House will agree that that is an advantage. Considerable legal and other problems were involved, and in the end we could not do as the hon. Member for Pontypridd urged us to do.

[Mr. MacGregor]

In many respects it was unfortunate that we could not get the agreement, but in practice tenants account for a significant proportion of outgoers. I pay tribute to the president of the Country Landowners Association, who has genuinely urged his members to listen carefully to every tenant who wishes to take advantage of the outgoers scheme and be as forthcoming as possible. We are seeing the evidence of that in practice.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) referred to Scotland, where the legal system is different.

Mr. Home Robertson: Thank God for that.

Mr. MacGregor: Not always. Also, the procedures that allow some tenants to become outgoers without necessarily obtaining their landlord's consent are fairly limited there. They are limited to situations in which there is no reference to dairying in the lease, and also to situations in which the landlord provides no facilities. There are one or two other details, but those are the two crucial ones. Although the scheme has operated in a slightly different way in Scotland, it is not carte blanche. It is fairly limited. The results are interesting to compare. Some 36 per cent. of payments made in Scotland so far have been to tenants, and about 30 per cent. of those who received payment as outgoers by 25 January in England and Wales were tenants. Therefore, there is not a great deal of difference. That demonstrates both that the urgings made by the president of the CLA have had an effect and that many landlords are trying to meet their tenants' wishes. Although we tried hard to get an agreement along the Scottish lines, in practice many tenants can take advantage of the outgoers scheme.

In England and Wales, of the 40 per cent. who initially expressed an interest in the outgoers scheme, 30 per cent. are getting payments. We know from the way that the outgoers scheme has operated that it is not just the fact that they cannot get the landlord's consent that has prevented some of the others from taking advantage of the scheme. It is also that, in many cases, as with owner-occupiers, when they are faced with a firm offer, they decide not to take it up. It is difficult to be exact, but a considerable number of tenants are taking advantage of the scheme.

Mr. Geraint Howells: I am interested in what the Minister has said, but I cannot understand why so many landlords in this country are willing for the tenants to go for the outgoers scheme. I am sure the Minister will agree that the property is worth much less once the quota has been taken away.

Mr. MacGregor: Obviously, it will vary. In each case people will be making voluntary choices, and they will look at their situation and make their decisions. The evidence is that so far 30 per cent. of the payments have gone to tenants.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I have been listening carefully to the figures which the Minister has quoted. They are interesting, but they do not substantiate his argument. The fact that 36 per cent. of farm tenants in Scotland and 30 per cent. in England and Wales have gone into the scheme must be related to the proportion of Scottish holdings which have tenants, in relation to the number in England and Wales. Even more important, we do not know what proportion of the tenants in England and Wales may have wanted to go into the scheme but have not made an approach because they knew the attitude of the landlord. That is the critical thing, and, given what the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) said a moment ago, the experience is that large numbers would like to go into the scheme but cannot do so for the reasons that I have set out.

Mr. MacGregor: We can go on endlessly debating this matter, but we do not have the precise market research that will give us the answer. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that 39 per cent. of the applicants for the outgoers scheme in Scotland were tenants, and 40 per cent. in England and Wales. The figures are not far different. Despite the fact that we have not been able to get an agreement, it is still the case that a considerable number of tenants have been able to take advantage of the outgoers scheme. Beyond that we are speculating, because we do not have the information to come to conclusions.

Mr. Penhaligon: The Minister has twice said that he tried to get agreement on the Scottish lines and failed. Who has the veto on this agreement?

Mr. MacGregor: If we were to get this through a non-statutory scheme—I have already referred to the legal difficulties—it was necessary to get an agreement to which both sides, the landlords and the tenants, were able to agree. We ran into difficulties and it was not possible to reach agreement because of the many legal complications that might arise. Nevertheless, it is worth re-emphasising that the president of the Country Landowners Association urged landlords to be as sympathetic as possible to tenants requests. That must have had some impact.

Having dealt with the position to date, I should now deal with the amendment. In moving the amendment, the hon. Member for Pontypridd spoke about the problem that the quotas are attached to the land. This connects with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). At the moment the quotas are, in effect, attached to the land, and that is in the Community regulations. That was done for a variety of reasons, in particular because the Commission felt that that was the best way to make a scheme which was not open to anomilies and abuses in the various member states, and about which there would be more certainty of application.

12.45 am

In due course we shall be seeking to put more flexibility on this aspect into the quota system, but the first priority was to get the quota system applied, and to get on with the outgoers scheme and the allocation of quotas. The second priority was to get changes in mixed business. The third priority was to start discussing ideas of greater flexibility. I refer both hon. Gentlemen and my hon. Friend to the paper produced by my Department on the mobility of quotas, where all of these matters are discussed. It is will worth studying. In case there is an opportunity to discuss these matters in the Council of Ministers, we asked the industry to respond by the end of last month, and this it has done. We are assessing all the reactions that we have received to the ideas we put forward for introducing greater flexibility and greater transferability into the quota system. Some producers detach the quotas from the land.

Once we have made up our minds about what we wish to obtain, agreement has to be reached in Brussels. We

have to ensure that the Commission is interested in our proposals, and the Council of Ministers then has to agree them. A number of member states are still wedded to the idea of the quotas being attached to land. Therefore, I do not underestimate the difficulty of obtaining greater flexibility. However, it is clear from our paper that we should like there to be greater flexibility.

I referred earlier to the legal difficulties surrounding the existing scheme. I should make it clear to the House that the amendment would not remove the risk that, in certain circumstances, a landlord whose tenant surrendered the quota without consent might be able to take action against the tenant for breach of contract. The obligation of a tenant to a landlord is contractual. If a tenant surrendered the quota without the landlord's consent, he might be in breach of contract, though not necessarily. It depends upon the terms of the contract. The secondary legislation which could be involved if the Bill were used on a later occasion could not change contractual rights unless the enabling primary legislation says that it can. That is the problem about the amendment. I do not want to make too much of that point because I recognise the difficulties surrounding the drafting of amendments. However, I have to make the point that the risk could still be there.

The more important point in relation to the amendment is that it is worded in such a way that it would apply only to future statutory schemes, not to the existing scheme. If at anytime we were to introduce a new scheme — I repeat that we have no such plans — I hope that we should be able to make more satisfactory arrangements for tenants. The statutory nature of the scheme would make that easier, but the amendment is not necessary to enable us to do this. Even without the amendment, we should be able, if we were able to overcome the problems, to operate a statutory scheme which did not insist upon the landlord's consent. Therefore, I believe that the amendment is unnecessary and unsatisfactory for the reasons that I have given and I am afraid I cannot commend it to the House.

Mr. John: The Minister has unduly relied upon technicalities which I had already conceded. These amendments are vehicles for debating important subjects. The Minister has not dealt, except in the most general way, with the position as between landlord and tenant. The point I raised was that, having attached the quota to the land, the landlord's consent was necessary, although he has played no real part in building up the dairy industry upon that land. Therefore, I urged the Minister to ensure that a system would be adopted under which at best the landlord's legitimate concerns can be expressed only indirectly.

The fact that the legal advice, which the Minister has received has been fairly weightily placed in his brief will not, I hope, prevent him from looking at the very real problems that exist in a minority of cases under the present scheme. I hope he will make sure that they do not happen again, by ensuring that the part the landord has to play is more indirect than it is at the moment. The present system is far too direct.

In view of what the Minister has said about the inapposite nature of the amendment I shall not press it, but I hope that he will not forget its underlying sentiment. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Home Robertson: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 1, line 17, at end insert:

'(4) A scheme under this section shall fix the amount of surrendered quota to be accepted at such level as will enable milk producers making development claims to produce in full such secondary wholesale quotas as have been allocated to them'.

The purpose of the amendment is to extend the objective of the outgoers scheme in order to take account of the acknowledged needs of producers who have good reason to expand their production above their primary quota. That may not be only in the interests of the individual producers, but many feel that such expansion is in many instances in the interests of the dairy industry.

At present the Minister has said that his objective is relatively limited. He is seeking to buy in sufficient quota through the outgoers scheme in order to redistribute that quota to those smaller producers who want to try to stay in business in order to allow them to come back up to their 1983 production level. The Minister has said that he needs 289 million litres for that objective in England and Wales.

In reply to his hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller), on 28 January the Minister said that he could possibly obtain up to 400 million litres if he accepted all the applications under the outgoers scheme. We appreciate that by no means all of those options could be realised. It is likely that that some of those who expressed an interest might not want to go through with it. Nevertheless, that sort of figure could give the Minister sufficient quota to top up all the small producers and to release an additional 100 million litres of quota for producers with special needs.

That is on the basis of current offers under the present scheme which some hon. Members have described as cheap and nasty in the past, and I stick to that description. We are inviting the Minister to recognise the need to make more quota available for redistribution and to increase the scale and scope of the outgoers scheme accordingly, especially in line with the possibility which has now been opened up under the amendments moved by the Minister earlier for partial cessation of production under some future scheme.

It is worth looking briefly at the background to the situation. The Ministry has set up an empire of tribunals and committees to assess the special needs cases, including those who want to extend production. Those tribunals have reached their conclusion in Scotland and will soon publish their recommendation for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We know that the recommendations made by the tribunals in Scotland will have to be cut back by 42·5 per cent. Because there is not enough secondary quota available for redistribution. Those figures have been tallied up in Scotland. We do not yet know the story in England and Wales. The inspired rumours that we see in the farming press seem to show that for England and Wales the cutbacks could be as much as 35 per cent. and for Northern Ireland as much as 55 per cent.

That makes a farce of the rigmarole of trying to work out how much additional quota should be distributed to people with special needs. We have a system of quasi judicial tribunals, assessing need and having to observe extremely harsh criteria in doing so. They are going on to make recommendations of the rock-bottom needs of farmers in those special circumstances and then the Minister will only be able to allocate perhaps two thirds of those recommendations at the end of the day. All that performance and still there is no way of satisfying that proven need.

[Mr. Home Robertson]

We for our part want the scheme to work. We want it to enable those who remain in dairying to thrive. We also want it to provide enough cash to enable those who come out of dairying to set up new enterprises on their farms and to sustain the local rural economy. The scope of the scheme is patently hopelessly inadequate. We urge the House to consider whether the amendment would make the scheme match up to the need.

Mr. Penhaligon: This is the key amendment. Unless the Minister makes a move, the farmers who have produced their accounts and books, have taken days off from the farm and travelled miles to the tribunals will be outraged. These farmers have worked and worried for months to find out whether they will receive extra quota, but after the great day arrives and they are given their quota, they will be told that there is not enough quota to go round.

This amendment would help the Government. I am sure that the Minister wants to help, if only he is given the opportunity. If we approved the amendment, he could go to the Chancellor and explain the enormous pressure and outrage amongst those who know about farming communities. He could then produce the few extra million pounds needed to square the circle. If the matter is not given serious attention, the whole quota scheme will come into disrepute.

Shortfall has been referred to. Scottish farmers give more substance to the case. Government Members representing Scottish constituencies have argued that the matter needs attention. Rumours suggest that there is a 30 per cent. shortfall. If that figure is not correct, we shall cease to worry, but I fear that it is correct.

We have an opportunity tonight to save a great deal of outrage and anger among local and national farmers' unions. Without the amendment, the final lunacy of quotas will arise. Quotas will be given, but they will be snatched away again. Farmers in Devon, Cornwall, East Anglia, mid-Wales and Scotland will not understand the logic of that, no matter how the Minister tries to explain it.

Sir Peter Mills: I was not planning to speak, but I feel that I must after what the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) said. He is not being fair. On each of the quotas a warning was given. That must be said. Only a certain amount of cake—a certain total of quota—is available to be divided as fairly as possible among all the dairy producers. It is a difficult task, and I pay tribute to the panels and tribunals. They have conducted themselves to the best of their ability.

I have always said that a quota scheme can never be fair. It never will be fair. It is the wrong way. I am an end price man—and always have been.

Can we get an extension of the outgoers scheme? I want that, but where does the money come from? I am certain that we shall not get it from the Treasury. It was hard enough to get the £50 million out of the Treasury.

The farming community accepts that there should be more savings within the Minister of Agriculture's budget. This is the major problem in agriculture. It is more important than anything to provide more money for the outgoers' scheme.

Savings of between £7 million and £8 million within the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would be enough to make the position much happier. Alternatively, another method, one which I favour, would be to persuade the Community to pay. It is important for the Minister to fight hard in Brussels to see if money can be obtained from that quarter for an extension of the outgoers scheme.

I agree with the hon. Member for Truro that there will be great disappointment when the final figures come out and farmers see the amount of quota that they will be allowed. Many dairy farms will not be viable, and the only answer is an extension of the outgoers scheme. Finding the money is the problem. I suggest either savings within the Department or more money from the Community.

1 am

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I had not intended to speak, but the remarks of the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) drew me to my feet. The hon. Gentleman has visited my constituency and met members of my local NFU. If he comes again, he will have a chilly reception, following his comments tonight about the fairness of the tribunals.

The former president of the NFU called me to his house last Saturday and told me how he had suffered an outbreak of summer mastitis in 1981 and 1982. He took his case to a tribunal, before which, in 15 minutes, he got what he did not regard as natural justice. He is a member of the magistrates' bench in my constituency and is suffering —*[Interruption.]*

Conservative Members can giggle at that if they wish, but if one has an overdraft of £100,000 and bank managers at the front door, if one is losing quota and if one has no hope of making a living in the coming years, it is a serious matter. That state of affairs faces far too many farmers in my constituency and elsewhere. The system of appeal before tribunals has been grossly unfair and it should never have been allowed in the first place.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) says that there will be disappointment when it is known that the quota to be distributed may be 35 per cent. less than farmers now believe they have. If one speaks to the farmers in my constituency — I am sure that the same applies to farmers generally—one hears that they believe that the quota that they have received is the figure for the secondary quota.

My hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) is right to say that after the performance through which they have been—he described it as a quasi-judicial process, and that is what it is—there will be outrage. They had to produce facts and figures and present their cases in detail.

The Minister said that he had looked for a process that would produce a sense of justice, albeit—because the scheme had to be produced more quickly than he would have wished—a sense of rough justice. Many farmers in my constituency are complaining about the roughness of the justice. There is wide disparity between the decisions of the various tribunals. However, that will be nothing when the farmers realise that the quotas that they thought they had are no longer theirs.

It may be, as the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West said, that we have been forced into a position which produces that unhappy result. Perhaps, as he suggested, the Minister will be able to get some more money from Brussels. He will not get any from the Treasury, that is for certain.

But that is not what we are discussing. The Bill is related not to the current situation but to what we shall be producing in four or five years' time.

Thus, the measure is concerned with a system which, because of the time factor, we should be able to get it right. Surely we do not want to perpetuate the present injustices. Surely we want to construct a scheme in which the quota which is surrendered matches the quota which is dished out. If we cannot provide justice now, we should be constructing a scheme that will provide it in future. I saw the Minister nod. Surely he must want that element of stability and justice. I do not understand why he feels that he must reject a system that is fairer than the one in the Bill.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall explain again to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) what we are talking about. We are discussing the provision of more permanent statutory approval for future payments under the existing scheme. Secondly, we are taking the opportunity to give proper statutory backing, if ever there should be a further scheme, although I have made it clear that we have no intention of introducing a further scheme. The amendment applies to future schemes.

There is a dilemma and a problem over secondary quotas. It is important to start with the understanding that both base year revision claimants and expanders are involved. The provision for their secondary quota comes from the reserve for special cases which we created when we gave a primary quota to everyone of 9 per cent. As the national cut was just over 6·1 per cent., there was a reserve of just over 2·9 per cent. The reserve is being used for base year revision claimants and expanders. I am talking about wholesale producers and not direct sellers. The provision will not come from the quota that we are taking in under the outgoers' scheme because we are using that to help small producers and exceptional hardship cases. It is the special reserve that enables us to meet the special cases.

There are many producers who have expanded considerably since 1981 and they have caused the national cut to be 6·1 per cent. There are also many producers who have heeded the warnings about excess dairy production in the Community for many years and restrained their production. Many measures, which proved ineffective, were taken over the years to try to restrain milk production, and the producers who have shown restraint do not see why their production should be cut even more to make provision for the expanders. It is a difficult balance to strike, but I believe that we have managed to do so. That is the way in which we are dealing with the developement cases this year.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Can the Minister explain why so many dairy producers expanded their production between 1981 and 1983? The answer is Government policies to produce more and more milk.

Mr. MacGregor: Many producers took advantage of the various developments, the main ones being Community schemes, during that period. They did so in the knowledge that we were producing a surplus of milk production in the Community of substantial proportions, the cost of disposing of which was getting greater year by year. I have talked to many producers who have said, "We could see that there would have to be further restraining measures and so we did not increase our production." We had to pay heed to the problems of those producers as well as the others. It is in that way that I think that we struck the right balance.

We have made every effort to enable the panels and the tribunal to implement the process that has been established. I hope that the tribunal will soon—certainly before the end of the month—have finished its work. We shall then be in a position to tell the producers who have had provisional allocations from the tribunals what the final allocation is.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that hon. Members are anxious to proceed. I just want to develop this point. We have made it clear from the outset of the secondary quota process—as a number of my hon. Friends including my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) have said—that, if there were not enough quota available at the end of the day for all the allocations that the panels and tribunals gave, we would have to scale them down. We have never pretended about that and have made it clear from the start that it was probable that the scaling down would be substantial.

Mr. Stewart: I am sorry to intervene. I did not catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye. We have heard about how the panels arrived at their decisions. What profession made up the panels?

Mr. MacGregor: We endeavoured to have on the panels people with a wide range of experience. The panels included a considerable number of people who had been dairy producers, solicitors, land agents and accountants — a range of people who had the expertise and judgment combined between them to make the decisions based on the case made by the applicants. That operation had to be conducted quickly because we were anxious for every producer to know as quickly as possible where he stood. A splendid job was done by my Department in finding the people for the panels. It was not an easy task to increase the number of tribunal members from 12 to 90 over the Christmas period and expect them to work full time. We did as well as could be expected in obtaining that range of experience.

We have never made any secret of the fact that there will be a scaling down. In England and Wales that will depend on the final allocations by the tribunal for secondary quota—they are not all in yet—and on the final figures from the Milk Marketing Board. We are dependent on the board to ascertain what it has allocated for primary quota. It looks as though the scaling down will be at least 35 per cent. We have previously made it clear that that would be the case. We do not yet have the final figures from the Milk Marketing Board or the tribunals to enable us to be absolutely firm. We hope to be firm as quickly as possible.

A number of hon. Members have made the point that they want extra funding for the existing scheme, and that was the theme on Second Reading. I repeat what my right hon. Friend the Minister said to the House on 10 January. Given the Government's desire to reduce Government expenditure and the fact that there is substantial support for the dairy sector in other ways through the common agricultural policy, we can give no promise of an extension of the existing scheme.

[Mr. MacGregor]

Obviously, in a future scheme it will be open to any Government to cover any milk matter in whatever way they wish and with whatever funds they feel that they can make available. Therefore, it will be up to any Government, if they wish to consider a future scheme, to decide the amount of the funds available as well as the methods—a lump sum or payment over a period of years. There probably will not be development claims or secondary quotas in any future scheme, because the secondary quota process will be finished by the end of the month. It is a mistake, therefore, to tie down any future scheme in this way. It inhibits flexibility and is unnecessary. Therefore, again, I cannot commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister does not have a terribly good story to tell, and I think he knows it. There is a serious shortage of quota for redistribution to people with urgent needs. That point has been made abundantly clear by hon. Members from both sides of the House.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) was a lone voice coming to the support of the Minister. He said that the people had had a warning and should have known that scaling down would be necessary. That is not much help to those who are involved and who are trying to keep their businesses alive. They cannot milk warnings, although I suspect that the Minister and his hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West were trying to do that this evening.

1.15 am

The Minister said that the people who were expanding their herds until the last minute should have known that there was trouble on the horizon. He cannot have it both ways. Right up to the eve of the sell-out by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food last March, I think, his Department was paying incentives to people to expand. The Minister is saying that people should have seen the smoke signals. The danger signals were there right enough but within weeks of introducing the quota system the Minister's Department was paying cash grants to people to expand their herds and invest in new equipment.

The story is not a happy one for the Government, and it is disastrous for many dairy farmers. They are faced with a "Catch-22" situation. When the quota system was introduced it was dressed up and it was to be as fair as possible. That is right. The Minister set up the tribunals and all concerned went along to present their cases. The House might have gained the impression from that that it was intended to satisfy proven need. That is not so. We have heard the figures. The scale-down from the proven need as assessed by the tribunals in Scotland is 42·5 per cent. The Minister has now admitted that it will be at least 35 per cent. in England and Wales. We understand that the figure could be substantially higher in Northern Ireland.

There is a way to obtain additional quota to satisfy that need. [HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] Through the outgoers scheme. That is what we are debating. It would be necessary to expand the scheme to buy in sufficient quota from people who are willing to leave or partially reduce their dairy herd, as will be possible through the new scheme under the amendments which the Minister has moved. That is how additional quota could be made available to try to introduce some fairness into the shambles which the Minister has managed to create.

We need an expanded outgoers scheme. If there was an ounce of fairness in the Minister he would accept the spirit of the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:-

The House divided: Ayes 30, Noes 117.

Division No. 92] **[1.17 am**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Boyes, Roland
Bruce, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Fatchett, Derek
Foulkes, George
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Kennedy, Charles
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maginnis, Ken
Maxton, John
Nellist, David
Nicholson, J.
Parry, Robert
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Beith and
Mr. Michael Meadowcroft.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gregory, Conal
Gummer, John Selwyn
Harris, David
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Marland, Paul
Mather, Carol
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Portillo, Michael
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter

Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, David
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ian Lang and
Mr. Archie Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.

Title

Amendment made: No. 10, in line 5, after 'discontinuing', insert 'or reducing'. — *[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

1.27 am

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It is extremely late, and I shall not detain the House for long. I do not normally speak on agricultural matters for the very good reason that my party is full of experts on agriculture. They have made several notable speeches today, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells), who discussed the administration of milk quotas.

The Government should count themselves lucky that such a small proportion of right hon. and hon. Members represent agricultural constituencies and that even fewer members of the public understand what has gone on in the milk quota system. If it had happened in any other suject that was understood by the urban electorate, there would have been a real sense of outrage, considering that in recent years taxpayers' money, not just Government exhortation, was put into schemes to expand milk production, some of which I have seen in my constituency recently. A few years later, we are putting more taxpayers' money into schemes to stop people producing extra milk. That is an Alice-in-Wonderland position. The first moral, which the Minister will acknowledge, is that there must be longer-term planning at European and domestic levels of the production of agricultural commodities.

Secondly, although the Bill is designed to bring relief to the smaller herds, the smallish herds on single-purpose farms will be most hit by the quota scheme. The larger farms with varied production can divert some production and acreage from dairying to other disciplines. That is not the case with farms, such as the one I visited in my constituency, with between 50 and 100 cows, which are a single-purpose unit. It is impossible for them to diversify into another form of production. The hardship of the milk quota system has fallen disproportionately on smaller farmers. The scheme should have been changed so that those with large lush acreages had more taken from them and a greater opportunity to diversify into other forms of agriculture.

Thirdly, the House should be extremely worried about the tribunal or panel system, which has been erected to cope with the difficulties that have arisen. In our political system it is normal that with tribunals, there is either a system of appeal or ministerial override and responsibility in the House. In this case there is neither. Once a tribunal has made a decision, the decision is not open to discussion with the applicant, his Member of Parliament, his accountants or legal advisers, nor is the Minister responsible in the House for it. That cannot be healthy for our democratic system. The Government came into office dedicated to abolishing quangos. Yet they have set up a new system of quangos, which are entirely unanswerable.

The Government have a sorry record. I do not blame the Minister for that, because he is relatively new to the Department. During the past five years the Government's record does not bear close examination. In agricultural constituencies throughout the land there is a genuine sense of outrage at the way in which they have been treated.

1.34 am

Mr. Wigley: I shall speak briefly on Third Reading because of the significant effect of the dairy saga in Wales. In Gwynedd, especially in Dyfed——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will address himself not to that point but to the Bill. This is not Second Reading, but Third Reading.

Mr. Wigley: As I said, I am addressing myself to Third Reading because of the significant effect that the saga has had on Gwynedd and Dyfed, and the fact that the Bill does nothing to alleviate that, as it was intended to do.

Earlier we heard of the great likelihood of an insufficiency of resources to meet the needs and to safeguard the interests of dairy farmers. In Scotland more than 40 per cent. of the expected additional quota is being cut, and in Wales and England a cut of 35 per cent. is likely. There is no provision for financial compensation for that shortfall from what has been shown to be the necessary level of additional quota to make farms viable.

In my area, many farmers have waited for weeks to discover the results of those tribunals. They do not know where they stand, and now there is the additional uncertainty that, even if they receive an additional quota from the tribunal, it may not be granted to them. The farmers in my area want the Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to go to Brussels and insist that additional quota is made available to Wales, because there is no provision in Wales for alternative farming. The land and the climate do not allow it——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. On Third Reading, hon. Members must address themselves to what is in the Bill. This is not a Second Reading debate. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will address himself to what is in the Bill.

Mr. Wigley: The Bill's failing is that it does not make the necessary provision to meet the problems of my constituents. It was put forward on Report as though it were doing so. It is not. That is why the House divided a few moments ago, and that is why there is great consternation, sometimes leading to riots, as we saw in south and west Wales in recent months.

This subject should not be treated lightly, even at this late hour. It is a matter of great concern to hundreds of producers in Wales, and that is why the Opposition are not satisfied with the Government's proposals. We expect further steps to be taken; at the very least, Ministers should return to Brussels to ask for more quota. In those circumstances, we should reject this inadequate Bill.

1.36 am

Mr. Geraint Howells: After visiting dairy farmers in the county of Dyfed in west Wales over the weekend to

[Mr. Geraint Howells]

discuss the outgoers Bill, I was dismayed by the apparent irregularities and anomalies that are being revealed by the quota allocations. I deplore the devastation caused to the dairy industry by the Government's policy of the imposition of milk quotas without thought, consultation or foresight.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have mentioned relevant and important matters during our debates on the Bill. Many farmers who bought their farms in 1983 are in dire trouble, and I am worried that the Bill does not cater for the needs of farmers who bought their farms then. Yesterday, I had the privilege to visit a dairy farmer who had moved from Yorkshire to Pembrokeshire. I am sure that the Minister will not deny a Yorkshireman a living in Wales. He was determined to buy a farm just outside Fishguard, so he came down from Yorkshire and had a word with the local bank manager, who said that he would not allow him—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to make a case for the people for whom I feel sorry. If the Government do not do something in the near future, many of those who bought their farms in 1983 will go bankrupt.

I visited that farm and met the Yorkshireman, who is aged about 30, and is married with two children. They were crying. When I saw the child turning to its mother —*[Interruption.]* If hon. Members do not believe what I am saying, the name of the person concerned is a——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not question what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I hope that what he discussed with his constituent relates to the Third Reading of this Bill.

Mr. Howells: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I am sure that many Conservative Members respect my views—I feel sorry for the young men who will go bankrupt within the next few years through no fault of their own. They were the unfortunate ones who took heed of Government advice to expand and to produce more milk. They moved from one farm to another. The farmer who moved from Yorkshire invested over £300,000 in his farm in Fishguard, and unless he has a substantial quota he will not survive. However, it is more than likely that he will not get it. The net result is that he and his family will have to sell up. The stock that he brought with him from Yorkshire, which is worth about £65,000, will have to go, he will become bankrupt and he will move back north.

There is no point in saying to those two or three farmers who have moved into Wales and to the local people who bought farms in 1983 that there is nothing in the Bill to cover for their needs. If the Minister and other hon. Members do not believe that this serious situation exists in west Wales, I invite the Minister to come and see for himself, with the Secretary of State. He will not need police protection this time, there will be no demonstration, and I assure him that he will be able to talk to these families and discuss the problems that will arise in the future. Next year it will be too late. The farms will have been sold and many of these people will have become bankrupt.

I hope that the Minister at this late hour will do something tonight about these people who are worried about what will happen tomorrow morning. Many dairy farmers have to go to the bank every fortnight to explain how they stand financially. It is a great shame that the Government have introduced such a Bill, because it is causing a great deal of concern to those living in west Wales. I am sure that the day will come when the Minister will regret ever having introduced the quota system in Britain.

1.41 am

Mr. John: An apt summary of the Bill at the end of our consideration of it is that it makes the worst of a bad job. It is not the Bill that has created the undoubted hardship and suffering about which Opposition Members have spoken. It is the agreement of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the quota system on milk which has caused the problem. The hardship would continue even if the Bill were defeated, and might well be exacerbated.

The scheme, which is partly legitimised by the Bill, is regarded now on all sides as a bungled job. Indeed, the Ministry itself recognises this in at least two respects with regard to the future. First, by the amendments that have been moved, the Ministry has recognised that a mistake was made in not including a scheme for partial surrender of milk quotas as well as whole surrender. It has laid down the statutory framework to do this in future. Secondly, by statement the Ministry has resolutely set its face against the repetition of the quota system in the restriction of cereal production. We have it on the authority of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that he will rely on the price mechanism rather than on what is enshrined in the Bill.

The reason why I go further and say that the Bill makes the worst of a bad job, granted that the initial agreement at Brussels was a very bad job, is that the decision is a national one. The scheme enshrined in clause 1(1) is a national decision and not a Community one. The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) conceded that the scheme arose from a national decision. It is this provision of the Bill which has restricted the payment of £50 million over the five years of the scheme. On Second Reading and in the debate tonight, it would have been simpler and more straightforward if the Government had taken the opportunity given by the Bill and by the quota system to realign the dairy industry in accordance with modern requirements as they are now revealed. The Bill fails to do so from the point of view of the outgoers because it gives them no lead or direction on whether the Government want them to remain in or go out of dairying, or, if they want them to remain in farming, what other form of occupation in farming and agriculture they want them to carry on.

Because the Government have not accepted amendment No. 7 on the surrender of quota, many of those who remain in dairying will not have adequate quota to make their holdings viable, whereas the aim of a Government faced with a surplus of dairy products is to ensure that those who remain in dairying have adequate quotas whereby they can carry on viable businesses and purchase sufficient supplies to service those quotas. We have heard about the apeal that led to cutbacks done on the basis of the milk available rather than need.

Those are the reasons why the Bill does not settle either the shape or the form of farming. Many of those who remain in farming will do so not because of the golden future that they see, but because—I believe that this is what the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) was saying—they cannot afford to get out of the system in which they are now trapped.

There are many examples of debts, to which clause 1(1) does not address itself. Mention has been made of Dyfed, and of overdrafts of £250,000 and, indeed, of over £1 million because of expansion. Perhaps the warning signs were there, but they were masked by Government encouragement for expansion. As a result, many people have got into alarming debts. The Bill has little or nothing to say to those people. It has nothing to say about the destruction of their life's work.

The scheme is described as an outgoers scheme. In fact, the Bill does not deal with all those who are going out. We have had this argument before, and I do not propose to rehearse it at length. I hope that the House will remember that people who are employed withing the dairy industry —directly in dairying, in transport, feed production and so on — will be made redundant as a result of the scheme. In particular, the most immediate and direct effect will be on employment in the creameries.

That is why I say that the Bill gives backing to a scheme that is inadequate, and miserably so. It was agreed in haste in Brussels. The Minister went out there saying that he was not prepared to agree to a quota system, and came back trying to sell it to the House. It is a monument to the failure of the Ministry. It talked about farmers not heeding the warning of recent years, but it has not heeded the warning of recent years. It has been a Mr. Magoo style of politics in which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food went on believing that its will would prevail over that of its partners until it bumped into reality at Brussels and had to adopt a system that it freely confessed in its response to the Select Committee it still did not like and want.

Because the anxiety is so keen, as hon. Members have said, in the agricultural areas, because the uncertainties felt by dairy farmers are still so great, many of whom have claims still in the pipeline, and because of the hardship that they have faced and do face, I believe that there is a duty on the House tonight not to add to that uncertainty unless what is before it s totally repugnant. The scheme is certainly inadequate. It is certainly puny, too, but no one can gainsay that the principle of compensating those who are forced to go out of milk production by a Government scheme is correct.

While we have the gravest reservation about the adequacy of the scheme and we believe that another, better scheme will have to be devised when the results of this one become known, we would be wrong to take away from the producers who are still awaiting adjudication of their claims to go out from the dairy industry the protection of clause 1(1). The quotas will remain whether or not the Bill is passed. We would take away the ability of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and food to compensate for that scheme if we voted against the Bill, and it was not passed. Therefore, we shall not divide the House. Nevertheless, I hope that the milk producers will never again be put into such a position by such an ill-considered Bill, and such a helpless, half-thought-out scheme as that to which the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food consented in Brussels.

1.50 am

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I wish to speak in the debate because I am concerned about the fact that the endorsement of the Bill will effectively endorse the considerate waste of public money that has gone into the dairy industry as a result of the Government's incompetence over the past two or three years. That is why the Bill is of concern not just to rural Members of Parliament but to all Members.

Like my hon. Friends, I have been out and about talking to the farmers in my constituency. I have come across a farmer with a large farm. I support the purpose of the bill, which is to protect the small farmer. That large-scale farmer was able to set up a new dairy venture two years ago, for which he received no less than £250,000 of public money to invest in a new milking parlour and for which he now cannot get a quota to produce an economic throughput of milk. If that is not an example of Government incompetence and misuse of public funds, I do not know what is.

The House has every reason to be concerned at the way that this issue has been handled by the Government and the misuse of public funds that has gone into the scheme which the Bill represents in terms of future compensation.

In the circumstances, the House has to realise that the Government are asking us to support a move that will effectively condone the misuse of public money on a huge scale. One farmer getting £250,000 is indefensible. As there is merely barracking from the few Labour Members who are here, the Liberal party is representing the real opposition to the Bill.

1.53 am

Mr. MacGregor: We have had many opportunities to debate milk quotas recently, and I do not think that the House will wish me to go over the whole issue again at this hour of the night. Nor do I think that you, with your sharp eyes for order Mr. Deputy Speaker, would allow me to. I shall confine myself to what the Bill is about, and will not stray much more widely.

Had the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) been present for more of the debates that we have had on milk quotas, he would realise that, as usual, the Liberal party is speaking with two voices. I have been urged to spend more and more money on the outgoers scheme by that party, but he is now complaining about the misuse of public funds through the outgoers scheme. He should be more consistent and listen to the debates.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): Does my hon. Friend agree that the number of Liberals here tonight is the largest that we have seen after midnight since they propped up the Government of the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan)?

Mr. MacGregor: I gave way to my hon. Friend because, unlike some hon. Members who have spoken at the end of the debate, he has been sitting patiently in the Chamber throughout the debate.

On the three points made by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), I say to him with great respect and not in any antagonistic sense that if he had attended rather more of our agricultiure debates he would have understood some of the points that he criticised. First, he said that there had been considerable inconsistency in the Community's general approach to the dairy sector. It is not the sole responsibility of any one member state and it is certainly not the sole responsibility of this Government.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that schemes have been introduced at Community level which have not been thought through and which therefore have hot been

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effective. The previous scheme which was designed to encourage people to get out of the dairy sector was ineffective. That scheme was negotiated at Community level, and we do not always get what we want at Community level. The difficulty about the scheme was that a five year time limit was placed upon it. Therefore, a considerable number of people were able to get out of dairying with the help of public funds and were then able to re-enter it before the quota system was introduced.

I was always very critical about that scheme. I go further. I take the right hon. Gentleman's point that there was inconsistency about the considerable encouragement of dairy expansion schemes while the attempts that were made to cut back on the surpluses were ineffective. Nevertheless, it was entirely right that United Kingdom farmers should have the opportunity to take advantage of these schemes. They enabled farmers to become more efficient and effective and to update their businesses and expand. It was right that they should have this opportunity while this remained the Community's approach. The Government would have been very heavily criticised if they had taken a purist view and said, "We are not going to let our farmers have the benefit of Community subsidies while farmers in all of the other member states enjoy them."

The United Kingdom Government have consistently argued for price restraint in the dairy sector. If their warnings about the need not to have big price increases year by year in the earlier price reviews had been heeded, probably it would not have been necessary to introduce the quota system. But we were unable to carry the other member states with us. When the original Community reform proposals of the Commission relating to milk were made known we made it clear that we should have to consider getting a quota system into a form that would be acceptable to United Kingdom producers.

There were illogicalities and inconsistencies in the previous approach. Although attempts were made to restrain production, they did not work. Because production increased to the level that it did while the consumption of many dairy products was falling, and surpluses were therefore rising and the cost of disposing of those surpluses was going through the roof, something had to be done. The result was the quota system. It is interesting to note that no Opposition speaker has referred to the fact that the costs of disposing of the dairy surpluses with which we were faced when my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and I attended the discussions about reforms in the Council of Ministers were very substantial and indefensible. I hope the right hon. Gentleman recognises that we had to take painful decisions. We did not like having to take them, but we were faced with the real probability that Community money for agriculture would run out altogether if something was not done.

On the right hon. Gentleman's second point, he quite rightly referred to the fact that it is the smallish herds on single purpose farms that are hardest hit, but he has failed to take into account the fact that the Government agree with him about that. The primary objective of the outgoers scheme is to help the small producers who wish to stay in milk production. I believe that it is the most effective way in which we can help them.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) repeated a point that he has made in Committee about which he knows I am convinced is wrong. He says that we were wrong to start giving the offers to the smaller producers to come out. The objective was to help the small producers who want to stay in. But the scheme was oversubscribed and we could not make offers to everyone. Therefore, we took the view that as the smallest producers with no other option may wish to have the opportunity to take up the outgoers scheme —it is entirely voluntary and would depend on their individual circumstances—it was right to give them the choice first to do so. But if none of them had taken it up I would not have blamed them and we should then have gone on to the bigger producers.

Mr. Geraint Howells: I am sure that the Minister is well aware that the Government, as a result of their proposals, have got rid of 241 small dairy producers in my county to try to help another 250 producers. It is a great shame that all the pressure has been put on the small producers.

Mr. MacGregor: I have told the hon. Gentleman many times that there has been no pressure whatever. His figures are slightly too large, but I do not quibble with that. We simply felt, and I think that small producers are grateful, that we should give them the opportunity first and it was up to them to decide. We have constantly emphasised that the real purpose is to help the small producers who wish to remain in dairy farming.

The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the small producers in Wales are being helped by the outgoers scheme because fewer small producers are taking up the option. About 13 per cent. are taking up the option of the outgoers scheme, but Wales will benefit from 25 per cent. of the quota to be reallocated. There is a considerable swing to small producers in Wales as a result of the scheme.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale talked about the tribunal and panel system. The dilemma that we face was brought out by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who urged us to get on with the scheme because all producers with secondary applications want to know where they stand. I agree. We have been eager to get them to a position where they know where they stand as quickly as possible.

Equally, we wanted a fair and objective scheme based on individual circumstances, properly assessed by a group of experienced people, not by ministerial fiat, so that the scheme could be seen to be fair and so that every producer was given a fair hearing.

Of course there are discrepancies in panel judgments, but there is an opportunity to appeal to the tribunal and it is the tribunal which takes a national view and can iron out any of those problems. Given the need to reach decisions as quickly as possible, the large number of producers making secondary applications and the need for a fair system, I think that we got the balance right. I should like to pay a considerable tribute to the members of the panels and tribunal who, in all the circumstances, have done an excellent job.

Mr. Penhaligon: Will the Minister confirm that the reality is that if a constituent came to his Member of Parliament and that Member went to the bother and effort, as we all have done for individual problems, to raise an

individual case on the Floor of the House, and if it were presented so articulately that the Minister was convinced of the justice of the case, the Minister has drawn up the regulations in such a way that when the appeals procedure that is currently going on is completed the Minister could do nothing about it?

Mr. MacGregor: We set up the system bearing in mind the need to reach decisions fairly quickly. If we had followed the route that has been suggested with endless opportunities for appeal, we would be going on into next year and the year after and that would not have suited the producers who want to know where they stand. This was an unusual operation in order to deal with the situation.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Nicholson) described the outgoers scheme as a complete disaster in Northern Ireland. That is putting it much too strongly. As he will know, 161 producers, representing 10·5 million litres in a full year, have already accepted the outgoers scheme. So there is already a considerable acceptance. But I agree that the response to the outgoers scheme has fallen short of our targets and been disappointing. It has not been a complete disaster, but it has been disappointing.

In conjunction with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, as I said on Second Reading, we are continuing to look for ways to deal with the difficulties that arise from that poor response, but we are not yet in a position to reach decisions. We are still waiting to discover the final position on the England and Wales outgoers scheme. In the meantime, the scheme is to be reopened in the Province for two weeks from 11 February to see whether it is possible to bring in a further quota.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) talked about the payment of a superlevy. We have said clearly that until the system has been operated fairly and properly in all member states we shall not pay superlevy, but we are ready and in a position to do so. What happens in Northern Ireland will depend upon the outcome of——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister said that he had taken into account what I said earlier, but now he is discussing Northern Ireland, and the Bill specifically says that it does not extend to Northern Ireland. The Minister must wait until an order for Northern Ireland comes before the House.

Mr. MacGregor: A tiny part of the Bill does affect Northern Ireland.

Mr. John David Taylor: As a result of the Bill, will the free quotas be exchangeable within the United Kingdom and therefore transferable to another region of the United Kingdom-Northern Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: We are straining at the rules of order, but the Bill includes a clause about Northern Ireland. Perhaps I may refer to it, without straining your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Nicholson: Northern Ireland is included in the Bill and we shall be presented with an Order in Council on which we, representing dairy farmers in Northern Ireland, will not be allowed to make one comment. That is ridiculous. I should like to say much more, but I realise the time of night.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Clause 6 states than an Order in Council

"shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House."

That indicates that there will be an opportunity to discuss the Northern Ireland application of the measure.

Mr. MacGregor: I have responded to the argument because I recognise the importance of the outgoers scheme to Northern Ireland. A proposal will be coming before the Council of Ministers to give the possibility—in the first year only—to adjust quotas between regions. If that becomes part of Community regulations between now and the end of March, it will give us the opportunity, if we produce short of quota in England and Wales, of adjusting to Northern Ireland. It might be helpful to Northern Ireland producers.

I was asked by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) to explain the progress of the outgoers scheme. A total of 3,888 producers in England and Wales have been invited to become outgoers—that is, those with up to 387,000 litres. Already 1,252 have accepted, surrendering quota of 154·4 million litres. That is 10 million litres up on the time when we last debated this measure.

First year payments have already been made to 1.046 producers at a total cost of £3 million. A considerable number of producers are in the pipeline—those who are still special case applicants who have been offered the outgoers scheme but who have been told that they do not need to make a decision until they know about their secondary applications, and those in the latest tranches who have still four weeks, or less, to make up their minds.

There ae 832 producers in categories with quotas of 190 million litres. If all accepted, we should obviously be over the top of our target of 289 million litres, but we know hat all will not accept. We are taking a calculate risk.

There is another good reason or moving in tranches in making offers. Many people are worried about the effect on the beef market if everyone took up the outgoers scheme straight away. That is why we have staggered the tranches and why the scheme has gone well and has not had the effect on the beef market that some people were afraid that it would have.

All the signs are that we shall get the 289 million litres and be able to meet all exceptional hardship claims this year. Obviously we shall get less quota this year than next—because many of the outgoers have already used up a considerable amount of their quota—but exceptional hardship claims will be met, and for the small producers we shall be able to meet our pledge next year of getting them back to their 1983 production levels up to 200,000 litres.

This year they will not be paying any superlevy, so it is next year that counts and we will be able to meet our pledge because of the success of the scheme, which suggest that the incentives are sufficient to encourage enough people to take advantage of it.

The outgoers scheme is successful. It is achieving its objectives in a way which is not disrupting the beef market, and in a way which will enable us to help all small producers who wish to stay in, and it has enabled us already to help those who have decided voluntarily to get out.

I agree with the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) that it would be foolish for hon. Members to oppose the Bill tonight because it is giving a beneficial advantage to many producers and is helping us to restructure the dairy

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industry in this difficult situation. It would be a grave mistake, therefore, for hon. Members to try to throw the Bill out because that would prevent us from going ahead with the proper authorisation for the rest of the payments under the scheme and would not enable a future Government, if they so wished, to introduce another scheme. Dairy producers would not understand it if hon. Members attempted to oppose the Bill tonight, and on that basis I commend the measure to the House.

Mr. Ashdown: I apologise to hon. Members for delaying them and I apdlogise to the Minister for having failed to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before he spoke because I should have liked him to have answered some questions.

Despite the Minister's blandishments, my hon. Friends and I will vote against the Third Reading. I have no doubt that the Bill will get through and that a scheme, though massively flawed, may be better than none. But the reality is that the measure is totally inadequate and requires us to lay a marker saying, "We at least regard it as inadequate and disruptive to the industry." If we do nothing else, we shall be laying a marker calling on the Government to produce a better measure.

The Minister claims that dairy farmers will not understand why we are voting against the Bill. That is not my experience. Dairy farmers understand that the Bill is flawed and inadequate. I could give many examples of those flaws, but I will confine myself to three.

First, whatever the Minister may claim, the Bill will result in fewer small family farms than were previously within the British farming infrastructure. The Minister said that many small farmers had agreed voluntarily to take the outgoers scheme. He is right. They had no alternative. The imposition of milk quotas reduced many of them to below viability, and if he comes to my constituency I will take him to a number of farms in precisely that position.

One farmer in my constituency has had to dispense with his own son on the farm. He was training him with a view to taking the farm over in due course—*[Interruption.]* His son was working as a labourer on the farm, learning the business, but he had to go. He had to cause his son to leave the business as he was able no longer to run the farm as a viable unit with the son as a labourer. He had no option but to take the outgoers' scheme. The Minister spoke of choice and of farmers exercising their own free will in taking the outgoers' scheme. The reality is that many of them have been forced to do so.

The Bill is not increasing the number of small farms in Britain. It is not giving asssistance to small family farms, which is part of Liberal farming policy. That is a sector of farming that needs positive encouragement. Whatever the Minister says about the freedom of choice that has been exercised, he cannot deny that the sum total of the effect of the Bill will be fewer family farms and fewer small farms. That cannot be in the best interests of the British farming community.

Our second reason for voting against the Bill stems from the Minister's remarks about the need to have a degree of flexibility between lump sum payments and instalments. That is what he wishes for the future. The Bill provides him with the opportunity to give the farmer the choice of accepting instalments or a lump sum payment and he has refused to allow him to have it. We know why. The Minister wants to have that choice himself. The choice will be dictated by the needs of the Treasury and imposed by the Minister and not by those of the farmer in the light of the business conditions in which he finds himself. The Minister wishes to retain flexibility for himself rather than giving it to the farmer — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) seems to want to intervene from a sedentary position. If he wishes to intervene, I shall gladly give way to allow him to do so.

Lastly, and fundamentally, the Bill will remove certain rights from tenants in a way which will undermine their ability to be able to continue farming. My hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) asked the Minister who it was who had a veto over these provisions and the Minister gave a pleasant but opaque answer. The reality is that landlords will have a veto over the operation of the Bill in so far as it affects tenants.

I have given three fundamental reasons to show why the Bill is inadequate. It does not meet the needs of the farming community and in the end a Bill will have to be introduced that does that more effectively.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives) *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: That is why we shall oppose the Bill.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 113, Noes 14.

Division No. 93] **[2.18 am**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Gale, Roger
Gregory, Conal
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Marland, Paul
Mather, Carol
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Portillo, Michael
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith

Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, David
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Bruce, Malcolm
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Maginnis, Ken
Nicholson, J.
Parry, Robert
Penhaligon, David
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. A. J. Beith and
Mr. Michael Meadowcroft.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Town and Country Planning (Compensation) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.28 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

When planning permission for the development of land is refused, the applicant is not normally entitled to compensation, but there are a few exceptions, and they include the provisions of sections 165 and 169 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 and the equivalent Scottish provisions which are of course of great interest to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram).

This is an arcane byway of planning legislation, which has recently been giving rise to difficulties. The purpose of this Bill is to deal with those problems, and to bring the provisions of sections 165 and 169 more into line with current thinking.

I shall start with section 165. The usual way of obtaining planning permission is by putting a specific development proposal to the local planning authority, but section 24 of the 1971 Act also allows my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to grant planning permission by means of a development order, which may either relate to a specific project or operate more generally.

Thus, the Town and Country Planning General Development Order grants planning permission for no fewer than 23 classes of development ranging from minor house extensions and the erection of gates, fences and walls to extensions to industrial premises — within certain limits—and development carried out by statutory undertakers. A development order is a statutory instrument, and Parliament controls the use of this power through the negative resolution procedure.

Section 165 relates to the situation that arises when a development order is amended. It provides that when planning permission for the development of land has been granted by a development order, when that permission is withdrawn, for example by the revocation or amendment of the order, and an application for planning permission for the same development is then refused, or granted subject to conditions, compensation is payable to the applicant for losses that are directly attributable to the withdrawal of the development order permission.

We are not aware of any compensation claim that has actually been made successfully under section 165. One reason is that permission granted by development orders has very rarely been withdrawn. In 1983, however, we amended the general development order to ensure that any development likely to involve the presence of a notifiable quantity of a hazardous substance would require a specific grant of planning permission from the local planning authority. Authorities have expressed concern that, if they refuse an application for development for which the order previously granted permission—and this includes quite substantial industrial extensions — they may incur a substantial compensation liability.

Again, I am not aware of any case in which that has actually happened, and I would expect an industrialist who was refused planning permission on safety grounds to try

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to redesign his proposal to make it safe rather than to press for compensation after the refusal. Nevertheless, the concern expressed by local planning authorities is understandable and real.

If a landowner has firm proposals for carrying out development permitted by a development order—if he has begun to draw up plans, buy materials, or has even let a contract for the work—it is right that he should be compensated for the abortive expenditure that he will have incurred if the permission is suddenly taken away.

However, under the present terms of section 165, the right to compensation goes much wider than that. In particular, it contains no time limit, so that the refusal of a planning application many years after the revocation or amendment of a development order may create a compensation liability. The landowner may have had no plans for carrying out the development during the time when the permission was available — indeed he may have bought the land after the order had been amended —but he may still be able to argue that he has suffered loss because he is not allowed to carry out the development.

The situation is wholly unsatisfactory. The Bill therefore provides that compensation will only be payable for adverse decisions on applications submitted within 12 months of the revocation or amendment of a development order. If a landowner already has a scheme in hand, this allows him time to put in his planning application. If he does not already have a scheme in hand, we can see no reason why compensation should be payable. A development order is not permanent, and the risk that a planning permission granted by a development order will be taken away before it is exercised is no greater than many other risks that are accepted as an essential part of a landowner's lot, and for which no compensation is payable.

Under section 169, compensation is payable for the refusal or conditional grant of certain classes of development which are specified in Part II of schedule 8 to the Act. This includes the enlargement of buildings which were in existence at the time of the introduction of planning control in 1948 so long as the cubic content of the original building is not increased by more than 10 per cent. Before compensation is payable, there has first to be an appeal to the Secretary of State against the planning authority's decision.

The reasoning behind this provision is that in 1947 the classes of development in schedule 8 were regarded as so minor that they were within the existing use of the land, and the landowner ought not to lose his right to carry them out. It followed that, if permission for such development had to be refused under the new planning system, compensation should be paid.

Most, but not all, of the classes of development specified in the schedule are also included in the general development order, about which I have just been speaking, so that planning permission is granted for them automatically and no question of compensation therefore arises. One of the main exceptions is extensions to blocks of flats. At one time, there were different views about the precise extent of the right to compensation if such applications were refused, but in 1983, in the case of Camden London borough *v.* Peaktop Properties (Hampstead) Limited the Court of Appeal ruled that, in principle, compensation would be payable for the refusal of planning permission for the addition of 17 flats to the top of a block of flats that had been in existence on 1 July 1948. That is the matter about which my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) came to see me. The court rejected the council's interpretation of section 169 that compensation was not payable when the proposal was to create separate flats intended to be in separate occupations from the existing block.

The effect of the court's decision has been dramatic and wholly unacceptable to the Government. According to a well-researched report which a group of residents associations handed to me just before Christmas, in the period 1979-82 the number of such applications was running at between one and four each year. In 1983, there were 12, and in 1984 there were 21. I know from anxious inquiries from planning authorities, particularly in central London, that the trickle of applications has now become a flood. I am told that this is because market factors are now favourable to the economics of such a project. I suspect that the truth is that many of the applications are being submitted in the hope that they will be refused and that a hefty compensation payment will result.

Last February, the Estates Law Digest organised a seminar entitled:

"section 169 Town and Country Planning Act 1971 — A Cascade of Gold for every building owner".

It drew attention to:

"The great possibilities for compensation for the owners of buildings which existed in 1947"

In the light of the Peaktop decision, and examined

"the essential conditions which have to be fulfilled to secure compensation".

Is it surprising that the number of applications has been going up ever since?

Of course, the more unacceptable the proposal is in planning terms—the worse the effect that it has on the environment — the more certain it becomes that the planning authority will be compelled to refuse planning permission and to pay compensation. The local authority must either fail to meet its obligations to safeguard the proper planning of its area, or it must incur financial liabilities which, at a time of financial stringency, it simply cannot afford to meet.

I recognise that section 169 and schedule 8 represent vested property rights, as section 165 does not, and that such rights should not be taken away lightly, even if it can be argued that attitudes to planning control have changed considerably since the time of the 1947 Act, but according to the residents associations' report, there are an estimated 1,230 privately-owned blocks of 10 or more flats built before 1948 in the three central London boroughs alone. We cannot allow the wholly unrestrained extension of these blocks, with all the effects that this will have on visual appearance and on the intensification of parking problems, to say nothing of the psychological effect on residents of the existing flats while the work is going on.

I have come to the reluctant conclusion that, in this type of case, there is clear evidence that the provisions of section 169 are being abused and that we must legislate to restore the position. For the moment at least, we do not regard it as either necessary or right to go beyond the specific abuse relating to penthouse flats, but we might have to examine the matter again if developrs begin to abuse other schedule 8 rights in the same way.

Finally, I should say something about the commencement provisions in clause 3. The amendment to section 165 and its Scottish equivalent will take effect on Royal Assent, so that, if a development order is amended after that date, there will be 12 months for a landowner to put in a planning application before he loses his compensation rights. In the case of amendments that have already been made to the general development order, like the one relating to hazardous development, the 12-month period of grace will run from the date of Royal Assent.

In the case of section 169, however, compensation will not be payable for adverse decisions on penthouse flat applications submitted on or after the date of introduction of the Bill on 24 January. While such a provision is unusual in planning, it is quite common in fiscal legislation. Speculators have already had all too long to put in their applications, while we had what turned out to be fruitless discussions with the representatives of property interests. If they are given a further period of grace, there is no reason why applications should not be made for almost every pre-1948 block before the compensation right is withdrawn, and we should simply be shutting the stable door long after the horse had bolted.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): My hon. Friend is going into great detail about the provisions of the Bill. Will he say something about the amendment to section 169 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, which is mirrored by section 158 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972? It refers to pre-1 July 1948 blocks of flats being enlarged. Does it also refer to applications to redevelop areas where blocks of flats that existed prior to 1 July 1948 are proposed to be demolished and redeveloped to the extent of up to 10 per cent. more than the original area?

Mr. Macfarlane: That is not contained in the proposals. The legislation relates to every block before 1 July 1948 where there is a proposed alteration to an existing block. Demolition does not come into it. We considered the entire range of opportunities and possibilities. Hon. Members may wish to pursue these points a great deal further, and we may have to consider them at a later stage and in another place.

We seriously considered covering applications already in the pipeline. This may help my hon. Friend to some extent. However, we reluctantly concluded that that would represent an unacceptable degree of retrospection, and open us to the charge of confiscatory legislation. We believe that the provisions of clause 3 are a reasonable balance between the conflicting interests.

This is a technical bill. The Government responded to the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Hampstead and Highgate, for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler), for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams), and by many other right hon. and hon. Members. It deals with an important area which has been cynically abused in recent months. I commend the Bill to the House.

2.43 am

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): Without hesitation, the Opposition welcome the Bill. I agree with the Minister that it is necessary and urgent. I hope that he did not mean it when he said that he was reluctant to introduce the Bill, because we are extremely pleased that he has done so. It is an important piece of legislation.

It would be churlish of us not to welcome the Bill, because, as the Minister knows, when we discussed the Town and Country Planning General Development (Amendment) Order 1983 I pressed him strongly on this point. I was worried about the use of hazardous substances and premises. That continues to disturb us, because we hear of more and more worrying examples and reports of hazardous chemicals and substances being manufactured or stored in town and city centres.

On 1 February *The Guardian* reported a case in Norfolk in which 89 people were taken to hospital. The Health and Safety Executive in St. Helens stated that if there was an explosion there people would be endangered within a one-mile radius. Planning authorities have been extremely concerned about legislation to protect people. In 1983 the Government took some necessary steps. The Bill is urgent, which is why we are helping the Government to get it through the House.

At that time we discussed section 165 of the 1971 Act, and I raised the case of Carless Chemicals in Middlesbrough. Middlesbrough corporation was involved to the tune of about £800,000. It had to pay that to a firm not to expand in the centre of Middlesbrough. Local authorities have been worried about their liability to pay compensation when they revoke general development orders. The Bill appears to cover that point.

I shall not say much about clause 1(2), which is about the 10 per cent. extension—the permitted development of pre-1948 dwellings is generally known—except to say that we strongly deplore the racketeering that is going on, especially in London. We deplore the pure speculation of property developers. It is little short of scandalous that, as the Minister said, a seminar was held last year entitled, "A cascade of gold for every business owner". The Government should have the support of every hon. Member in trying to plug that loophole.

Rural areas are also affected, because this is a town and country planning measure. The 1977 general development order is being reviewed by the Government, and the Opposition believe that the time has come for the review to be completed. We do not understand why there is not more control over the planning of the rural environment. I understand that a serious candidate for exemption from general development order status is livestock development in the proximity of residential dwellings. We all know how serious a problem such developments can be. Although we want farmers to comply with general planning, we do not wish them to be penalised financially for schemes which they entered into generally. As the Minister knows, farmers are often encouraged by the agricultural and horticultural development scheme to submit five or even seven-year development plans. The purpose is to assist farmers to bring their incomes up to levels comparable with non-agricultural incomes over a period of five or six years.

Naturally, such plans are conceived in the light of prevailing planning regulations. What worries me is that a farmer may be refused consent for a building that was planned in his rolling seven-year programme. Will the Government consider whether the 12-month limit is too tight in this case? In some cases it might be better to have a 24-month period.

Mr. Macfarlane: I should make it clear to the House that the Government have agonised over this decision for several months. Our discussions and negotiations with

[Mr. Macfarlane]

interested parties lead me to believe that we must consider the time element. That will have to be done at a later stage, or in another place, but I note what the hon. Gentleman says.

Dr. Clark: I am grateful for that assurance, and I take it in the spirit in which it was given.

However, may I develop the point a little further? Although the discussions are mostly about livestock development, I wish to draw to the Minister's attention the fact that not only agricultural development is causing problems with the general development orders. Some farm buildings that are used for other purposes also cause great problems. I take as an example a case in Lancaster. As the House will know, under class 6 of the first schedule to the general development order, a farmer can erect a building of 465 square metres, and 12m high, as long as it is more than 90m from the next building.

I was invited by the chairman of the planning committee of Lancaster council to visit such a building at Quernmore near Lancaster. It was outrageous. The farmer —I should call him a mushroom grower—told Lancaster city council that he wished to build mushroom sheds. I should emphasise that the mushrooms could have been grown in any disused cotton mill on the outskirts of Lancaster, but the farmer wished to erect them on his farm in an area of outstanding natural beauty. They are extremely unsightly polythene sheds which in no way fit the vernacular architecture of the area.

Lancaster city council tried to do something about what had been done. It tried to persuade the farmer that this was not the appropriate way out. I wrote to the Secretary of State about it, as did Lancaster city council. An article 4 directive was given. However, as the House knows, an article 4 directive does not stop development, and the farmer had cut the sod on each of his six sites. I went up last week to view this again, and it is most unsightly.

I urge the Government, when reviewing the general development order to take into account other buildings which may not necessarily be livestock buildings, because they cause a great deal of inconvenience visually and in terms of smells.

In the hope that the Minister will take those points on board we welcome the Bill and will do what we can to speed its passage through the House. I hope that the Minister will take seriously the points that have been raised, especially with regard to the timing, so that it will be possible to put this right in another place.

2.50 am

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): First, I thank my hon. Friend the Minister and our right hon. Friend for introducing the Bill. I have pestered Ministers at Marsham street — which itself is not a building of outstanding natural beauty—heavily in the last year. I know the problems that they have experienced in trying to find a simple form of words to cover a most obnoxious practice.

I also thank the Opposition for their courtesy and help in trying to speed the passage of the Bill, which deals with an issue that is wholly non-political.

If I may say so, for almost the first time in my political life in Parliament, I am doing something that Camden borough council would wish me to do, so there is a complete bipartisanship.

The sort of thing that has been happening was instanced by my hon. Friend in the case of Peaktop, a mushroom —if the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) will allow me to use that word—company created merely for the purpose of getting a crock of gold. No reputable property company has been indulging in this sort of practice, but a host of small property companies have come along and looked particularly at places like central London and Hampstead where there are mansion block blocks of flats. These companies have decided that they will make a planning application to add a storey, irrespective of the dirt, the noise and the aggravation that this would cause to the tenants and, indeed, without heed to whether the building foundations would even bear the extension. If the council has tried to be prudent, it has had to face the possibility of paying heavy compensation. Camden took the decision to refuse the application by Peaktop. The case went to the Lands Tribunal. Camden ratepayers will have to pay £100,000 compensation as a result of the application having been refused. There is at least one legal interpretation which says that this appalling property company could have made a reapplication three months later, could have had it refused again and could have received another £100,000. That is the kind of racket that has been building up. As my hon. Friend rightly said, one needed to take urgent action in that case. I am delighted that the cut-off date was publication of the Bill.

I pay tribute to one of the Camden councillors, Commander Ron King, who has been doing a great deal of devilling on this matter to try to establish the extent of the problem. With me he has seen the Minister and he has been trying to ensure that the actions of the council were taken in such a way as not to show undue haste but to examine the cases carefully in the hope that legislation might come along. Legislation is here and the nuisance has been stopped. On behalf of a large number of residents of Camden, and particularly of Hampstead, in which most of the blocks of which I know exist, I offer a heartfelt vote of thanks to my hon. Friend the Minister which I hope can be extended to the House when the Bill is speeded from here to another place and quickly receives the Royal Assent.

2.54 am

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I shall be brief, it being such a late hour. I simply wish to add my thanks to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and to endorse all that he said, as well as the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg).

In my constituency a serious problem has been developing over property speculation. I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) in his seat. He knows, too, that in the City of Westminster great concern has been exhibited about the issue, and the local authority was anxious to see that proper action was taken. We are grateful that the Government are acting promptly and swiftly, and glad that the House is supporting the measure.

2.55 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I shall also be brief. We, too, welcome the Bill. It is clear that there was a terrible dilemma, particularly for central London boroughs as planning authorities. They were confronted with two undesirable options. Either they had

to grant planning permission for the extension of the mansion blocks about which we have heard, with, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) said, all the inconvenience — in planning terms, they did not want to do that — or they had to refuse planning permission and pay substantial sums of compensation.

I should like to amplify the hon. Gentleman's explanation. The case went to appeal from the Lands Tribunal, and the finding went against Camden borough council. As soon as that happened the door was open, and the local authorities were all on a loser. It was then necessary for the Government to intervene to deal with the loophole that had been exemplified. That was important.

I have only one regret, and I do not say this as a criticism of the Minister. I understand that the problem was first brought formally to the Department's attention in October 1983 and informally in 1982. I appreciate that there have been several attempts to produce legislation — the hon. Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams) introduced a Bill that has been superseded by this Bill. There have been strong Back-Bench representations on behalf of the boroughs, but it may be a valid, but minor, criticism that there could have been earlier action. However, we have got past that stage.

The Bill deals with two elements, as the Under-Secretary said. The second is hazardous waste and so on. I have always held the view that the use classes need regularly to be reviewed, particularly in this area, as science develops and uses change. One of the problems is that, because we have not responded quickly, inevitably there has been exploitation in that planning authorities have not been able to control adequately the developments in their areas. Once we are talking about hazardous waste and so on, we are talking about serious uses of land which, above all, planning authorities need the power to deal with.

We are dealing with a limited Bill that we all wish a speedy passage into law, but I hope that the Minister will accept that there are many pressures, which I hope his Department feels, for other reforms in planning law on issues that are underneath the surface. This is just the tip and the peak of the matter. It is not entirely the Minister's responsibility, although it is his Department's, but there are problems such as the landlord-tenant relationship in private mansion blocks, which I know are being reviewed by the Department of the Environment. There are issues under the surface, and the Bill deals only with the most extreme examples.

Subject to that request and concern that we do not just stop here and move quickly to make sure that the other matters are dealt with as soon and as comprehensively as possible, we welcome the Bill. We hope that the owners and residents, particularly in the mansion blocks and the areas of the four central London boroughs who have been most concerned have their problems alleviated and that the ratepayer and taxpayer do not have to foot the bills, when their money has gone into the pockets of those who have no scruples, and they needed the Government to intervene as they have done tonight.

2.59 am

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I wish to intervene on only a couple of points, and I do not wish to be ungrateful to my hon. Friend the Minister, who introduced in an expert manner what is a very complicated, if not obscure, town and country planning measure. It has serious financial implications, but I am sure that both sides of the House will agree that that should not alter the rights to compensation unless we have carefully considered the implications. My hon. Friend the Minister has done that.

I wish to relate my remarks to the proposed amendment to section 169 of the principal Town and Country Planning Act 1971 — which is mirrored by section 158 of the equivalent 1972 Scottish Act. The anomaly could not have been foreseen, however clever the authors of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 had been, or the authors of the 1971 or 1972 Acts had been. This raises the problem of the balance between giving the rights to an individual who owns property on the one hand, with respect for the wider implications of the Town and Country Planning Act for a community or a neighbour on the other.

It was an immensely sensible compromise that a man should be allowed to extend his property by up to 10 per cent. without going through the rigours of the town and country planning legislation. That is one thing, but it was never suspected that a substantial development could be added by an enlargement of up to 10 per cent. without the need for planning permission, or, if planning permission were denied, the right of compensation. The important point that must be stressed, and what the bill seeks to amend, is that the development is, in many cases, happening in areas of central London that have already been intensely developed to the maximum permitted density. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) pointed this out. To allow those properties to be enlarged by putting a further floor on the top of the building would not only deny rights to light to the surrounding properties, but, with all the consequent problems of intensive development, creating problems of parking on the roads below and so on.

Therefore, my hon. Friend the Minister is right to introduce the legislation. I have only one or two inquiries, which I shall make now, to save further time later. Bearing in mind that the Appeal Court decision that raised this anomaly was made in the spring of 1983, and that this part of the Bill will take effect for applications from 24 January this year, what about the financial obligations that may be faced by many of the councils on the applications that have clearly been put in for spurious motives? There could be a considerable financial obligation on some of the local authorities. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend could touch on that point.

We are talking about denying rights to certain people, whether we think that they are deserving of those rights or not. I have no doubts about the merits of this measure. A local planning authority may try to use this Bill, when it becomes an Act of Parliament, to its advantage, and deny people what they think that their rights are. Under the existing town and country planning legislation, whenever a local planning authority refuses planning permission to an applicant, that applicant has the right of appeal to the Secretary of State. That is a cast-iron assurance that if the Bill is enacted the owner of such a property will not suffer any loss of rights and that the local planning authority will be given no unfair advantage. For that reason, I very much hope that the House will pass this measure.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Kensington): I should like to place on record a very warm welcome for this short but important Bill. It has particular relevance to the

[Sir Brandon Rhys Williams]

borough which I have the honour to represent. I do not need to speak at length, because in introducing the Bill to the House my hon. Friend summarised so well the reasons for its introduction and the urgent need for it. There is an overwhelming case for its introduction by the Department.

Since the decision in the Peaktop properties case in 1983, it has been possible for owners of large structures in multiple occupation to put planning authorities in a position where either they have to approve planning applications which ought not to be approved or they have to incur liability for large sums in compensation which their ratepayers should not be required to pay. I recognise that it was not easy to find the appropriate way to reverse the decision of the Court of Appeal in the Peaktop properties case. In discussions with the Department I raised the possibility that it could be done by restricting its application to conservation areas, or possibly by placing an upper limit on the total amount that a local authority might be obliged to pay in compensation.

In the end, in order to help matters forward, I tabled in this Session a short Bill — the Planning Authorities (Restriction of Liability) Bill—and I am most grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) and for Fulham (Mr. Stevens) for supporting me. We set that Bill down for Second Reading on 25 January. It was not an entire coincidence that in a very welcome move the Government decided to table their own Bill on the day previous to that on which my own Bill would have come up for Second Reading. I am also very pleased that the Department chose the remedy that I finally decided to recommend to the House in my Bill, namely, to allow the compensation to refer only to individual dwellings.

I need say no more in welcoming the Bill other than that I am very glad that tonight it will complete all of its stages in the House. I hope that very shortly the Bill will go through all its stages in the other place and soon become an Act.

3.8 am

Mr. Macfarlane: May I respond briefly to the many points that have been made. I am grateful for the welcome that the Bill has received from hon. Members. We have made a great step forward not only for the people of London but for the people of Scotland, and, perhaps, elsewhere. If I do not answer fully all the points that have been made, I shall write to hon. Members.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) referred to hazardous substances. I believe that the amendment to section 165 goes a long way towards meeting the compensation problem which has been one of the main points of concern. But there are other problems. As soon as the parliamentary timetable permits I intend to introduce a new system under which written consent for the keeping of hazardous substances will have to be obtained, along the lines of the consultation paper which my Department published last July.

As for Carless chemicals, this would involve the removal of an existing factory, and it would continue to attract compensation. It has nothing to do with the permission granted by the general development order. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are reviewing fully all the amendments to the general development order. The points that he made in his spech are well taken and well noted.

I have studied the case in Lancaster. We shall consult widely all of the interested parties. Agricultural intensive livestock units are, of course, an integral part of our consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) talked about the problem of a landlord possibly being able to obtain compensation twice. That has been gone into thoroughly and I have concluded that it is not possible to obtain compensation twice for the same loss in value of land. The second refusal for similar development would therefore not give rise to a claim for compensation under section 169. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend has all the details.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My hon. Friend has given a view based on legal opinion from his Department. The information that I gave was legal information available to Camden council. One will always find two lawyers who take different points of view. I only ask my hon. Friend to make sure that that cannot happen any more.

Mr. Macfarlane: I would not wish at this late hour to cast aspersions on the integrity of the lawyers whom we employ, but I shall make certain that there is some reasonable recognition of the points that my hon. Friend has made.

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) has caused great concern. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) also mentioned the delays of 15 months or so that have occurred. We were prompted to introduce the legislation now because the floodgate was beginning to open.

It is difficult for my Department to provide accurate statistics of the likely number of applications in the pipelines which have occurred as a result of the seminar which was held at the Savoy in 1984. The fact that it was held there was symptomatic of the cascade of gold which it was hoped to develop on that occasion. We have tried to identify and understand the problems and financial obligations of the local authorities. There is no doubt that many of them could well be faced with anything up to an eight figure compensation problem. That is serious and has all sorts of impacts upon the rate support grant, which I shall not go into this evening. The problems facing the local authorities are well known. That figure could be excessive.

I accept that some planning authorities will have rooftop and flat applications before them, but where the landowner has done his part by submitting the application it would be wrong to take away his right to compensation retrospectively. Moreover, that could mean that authorities which had delayed giving a decision on such applications would escape a compensation liability, while those who had determined such applications promptly would be at risk and that would not be right.

The role of the Secretary of State is inherent throughout all the constitutional elements of planning law in Britain, and that still prevails.

Dr. David Clark: A number of the authorities are in penalty. For example, it was feared that Lancaster would go over the target if it applied for a stop order and would therefore be liable to compensation. There are precedents —I think that there was a case with Cumbria county council about sheep scab—where the Government were prepared to abate the special payments in cases where

authorities were going into penalty. Would the Minister be prepared to look into that with some London boroughs, because it is important?

Mr. Macfarlane: I am touched by the hon. Gentleman's concern for my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd), who is forbidden to participate in these affairs at the moment. His point affects many local authorities and I have no doubt that they will be swift in coming forward if they feel that they have any request to make. At the moment it is no integral part of the survey which I have initiated with the local authorities.

The House is giving an important approval tonight. I need to identify many issues with hon. Members, and I take note of them and am grateful for their comments.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Major.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

RESTRICTION ON COMPENSATION: ENGLAND AND WALES

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Kensington): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 8, at the end add 'and any individual dwelling in the building would be enlarged by more than ten per cent.'.

I am obliged to you, Mr. Walker, for giving me special permission in the circumstances to move this short amendment in spite of the fact that I was able to table it only yesterday.

It seems that with the Bill as it stands a application could be made for an individual flat within a large structure to be expanded by an amount equal to 10 per cent.—not of its own original volume, but of the original volume of the whole structure. I ask my hon. Friend to examine the possibility of there being a defect in the drafting of the Bill. If he is not happy to accept my wording, which is almost certainly defective, I hope he will ensure that the lacuna is removed from the Bill.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams) has a point which he thinks important, but his amendment would not achieve that which he is trying to achieve. In some respects it would destroy what we are trying to do.

I understand my hon. Friend's point, but the Bill is limited to applications which would increase the number of flats in a block. That is what my hon. Friend is worried about. Penthouse extensions which convert the top storey of flats into maisonettes increase the value without increasing the number of units. The Bill provides that compensation is not payable when two conditions are met. The amendment adds a third precondition — that an extension must also relate to an extension of one or more individual flats by more than 10 per cent. before the compensation right is excluded.

That is incompatible with the second condition which I have mentioned. It would mean that compensation would continue to be payable for penthouse extensions which create new units rather than extend existing units. The amendment should have begun with the word "or" rather than the word "and".

I am ready to examine any evidence, and I shall look at the matter once again. It is important, and I want to be fully satisfied. I suggest that we examine the matter later or urge the House of Lords to table an amendment if necessary. I shall write to my hon. Friend on the subject and keep the House informed.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: I accept that I should have used the word "or" instead of "and" to convey my meaning. That proves that my amendment is defective. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

West Midlands (Industrial Situation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Major.]*

3.18 am

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): We have heard a great deal in previous debates about the cascade of gold. I hope that some gold will cascade in the direction of my constituency. It is certainly long overdue.

I have made regular appeals in Adjournment debates to the Government to halt and reverse the decline of the west midlands and the town of Walsall, yet the situation deteriorates. A few statistics support that assertion. The west midlands has had the lowest rate of growth of any region in the country in the last 10 years. Between 1980 and 1984 the unemployment rate in the west midlands rose by over 10 per cent.—the worst regional figure in the country. Over half the unemployed are classed as long-term unemployed. The official unemployment figure for Walsall South is 7,675. But the actual figure is much worse, as it excludes much of Darlaston and, as we are aware, the unemployment figures have been skilfully manipulated to mask the real total. Without doubt, national unemployment is way over 4 million. In the Walsall area, 17·8 per cent. of the population is unemployed, way above the regional and national figures.

No doubt reassuring words will continue to emanate from the Government. Lord Young assured us a few weeks ago that Britain was not in recession. Try telling that to the army of workless in my constituency. I have the statistics of the increase in unemployment between the 1981 census and the figures for December 1984 on a ward basis.

In the St. Matthew's ward, the increase in unemployment between those few years was 45 per cent.; in the Bentley and Darlaston, North ward, 46·6 per cent. was the increase, much of it due to the collapse of engineering, of the nuts and bolts industry and of many large, well-known factories; and the allegedly more prosperous area of Paddock saw unemployment go up by a staggering 61·9 per cent. Where is the economic miracle that we were promised? What has happened to the so-called recovery?

Recent events have shown the Government's financial strategy to be bankrupt, as they have marched the nation on six years' hard slog in which the public services have been slashed and public works starved of investment so as to cut Government borrowing. The pay-off was the promise of lower interest rates. That has not happened. Now, the pound is at parity with another great currency, the rouble. That shows the depth to which we have sunk.

Regrettably, the Chancellor will not pay the price of the Government's failure. The rest of us will pay. House owners will pay the price by way of big increases in their monthly payments; industry will continue to pay because the big increases in interest rates will cost British industry at least £600 million this year; the unemployed will pay because the interest rates squeeze will force probably another 100,000 out of their jobs and into the dole queues.

If the Prime Minister succeeds in reducing unemployment in my constituency to the level it was when the Conservatives came to office in 1979—when it was 5 per cent.—I will put a good word in with the principal of the West Midlands College of Higher Education and ask that she be awarded an honorary degree of the Council for National Academic Awards—that is, if the Secretary of State for Education and Science has not closed the college down first. I cannot guarantee that my constituents will be as generous or forgiving as I am.

The Minister will, no doubt, tell the House of initiatives that will yield dividends—notably, assisted area status—but not everyone is as enthusiastic as the Government about the efficacy of the economic aspirins that my region is being given. I have a letter written by Mr. G. Bates, president of the Wolverhampton Association of Building Employers Confederation. He went to a seminar recently in Birmingham which looked into what would happen to the region because of assisted area status. He wrote:

"I therefore attended a seminar staged by the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce which was to inform management of what was available to them under the new policy. I left the seminar completely deflated."

I hope he is wrong and that the measures will bring relief to an area that a few years ago was one of the most prosperous in the country.

Not only in employment and industry has my constituency suffered, but also in housing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) knows well, we have made representations to the Government because their housing policy has been a disaster. Public sector housing has been halved and house improvement payments are drying up. Walsall has reached a crisis. Our surgeries are a weekly testimony to the failure of Government policy and to despair. There are over 12,500 on the housing waiting list and there are 30,000 unattended repairs. The local authority asked for £37 million under the HIP scheme and it received £9·5 million about a quarter of what it requested. The problems of single parents are appalling and the problems of single parent families are severe. In an excellent report entitled "Singled Out in Walsall" it is stated:

"the problems of homelessness among single people of all ages are growing rapidly but especially among the young."

There has been such little house building. Surely one way in which the local economy can be boosted is by improving the infrastructure and getting the building workers back to work. This should happen, and I hope that it will.

One of the rays of sunlight over the sad events of the past few years has been the way in which some local individuals and groups have responded and are responding to the crisis. The Pleck Community Association has produced a most imaginative set of schemes to relieve unemployment in the area. I am following closely, as I hope the Minister will, one of the schemes that it is submitting. It seeks to remove much of the responsibility from the shoulders of small business men and to arrange for it to be taken on by experts from the association and by those who they will employ.

There is another experiment involving Darlaston and an experiment which is being undertaken by Roap hall. This is a sign of the way in which local individuals and groups can respond.

Another problem that besets the area is that of derelict land. Walsall has many attributes, but it is not among the most beautiful towns in the land. That is the consequence of industrialisation in years past. Much of the land in the town is derelict. It consists of 225 sites and extends over 560 hectares. Despite the immensity of the west midlands and black country problems of dereliction, Government aid has been cut, though I must acknowledge in fairness that Walsall is getting a slightly larger share of a smaller cake. Derelict land is blighting housing. It is making it

difficult to attract industry to the area and it is a sheer eyesore. Dereliction is growing at a faster rate than the rate at which land is being brought back into use. Walsall has 29 per cent. more derelict land than in 1983. There is a need for land to be brought back into proper use and we need central Government funding. The Government should not seek to rape the green belt in my area instead of pursuing a proper policy of land reclamation.

Linked to the problem of derelict land is that of limestone. The current position is severe. About £75 million worth of property is undermined by limestone. That is the legacy of limestone mining and other works. These works have resulted in the sterilisation of land and the retardation of industrial development. The failure to provide a proper solution to the limestone problem could contribute significantly to a downward spiral in the borough's economic fortunes. Action must be taken.

The Ove-Arup report must be implemented swiftly, especially by infilling where this is necessary. I shall comment briefly on the Mineral Workings Bill, which is passing through another place. Clause 8(3)*(a)* gives an authority power to carry out works where there is "imminent" danger of collapse. We know that it is a moot point whether the risk of collapse in many of the workings is imminent. The wording of clause 8(3)*(a)* seems to be unnecessarily demanding. I can foresee mining engineers and lawyers arguing for years over whether the danger of collapse in any particular case is imminent. Some words such as "where there is the prospect of collapse" would provide an easier test to satisfy.

I propose a limestone workings compensation scheme to supplement the solutions outlined in the extensive and brilliant Ove-Arup report. Such a scheme has been put to the Department of the Environment by local authorities and it would provide a cost-effective option for the mines and zones in which the potential for collapse is low. For example, imagine the plight of a householder in my constituency who recently purchased a £50,000 house. He has paid for a search, yet he now cannot sell. He probably has no claim against the local authority, the solicitor or estate agent. His insurance may not cover that contingency, even if there is physical damage. The insurance does not cover loss of value.

The NCB has a scheme for compensation under the Coal-Mining (Subsidence) Act 1957 and there are other precedents. I believe that certain minimum requirements should be covered in a compensation scheme and that the Government must be sensible about this matter. Compensation should be payable if damage is caused to property by limestone subsidence and where the landowner is unable to obtain redress from any other source. Compensation should be on the basis of the actual cost of repair or market value at the option of the agency responsible for dealing with compensation claims. This would restore confidence in the property market and, because the risk of collape is low, the number of compensation would be small.

I should like to refer to the restoration of ancient monuments, of which there are some in Walsall. The Guildhall goes back many centuries, although the present building dates from the 1850s. I am the chairman of the Guildhall restoration committee and, on a number of occasions, I helped to keep the bulldozer away from this fine building. An excellent scheme has been put up by a local architect, Gordon Foster, and has been supported by the local authority. The scheme has now been submitted to the Department of the Environment. I urge the Secretary of State to look favourably on this scheme, to make a quick decision and to provide financial assistance to those at the heart of the scheme. I am afraid that, if there is a delay, the Guildhall, which has been suffering the effects of erosion, may not survive another bad winter.

I do not expect the Government to change course. They will soldier on with failed policies. The Government will be protected from the consequences of those policies by the Opposition's failure so far to present their alternatives and to have those alternatives accepted. When the party's head bangers have finally been subdued and we can concentrate on presenting the real alternative to this Government's policies, the Government's days will be numbered.

3.32 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. David Trippier): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) for the opportunity to debate the industrial and environmental position in Walsall. As usual, the hon. Gentleman has made his points cogently and diligently. Although I can never agree with his politics, he is a vociferous and able advocate on behalf of his constituents.

We have tonight heard a great deal about the industrial situation in Walsall, and the west midlands, together with the reasons to which the hon. Gentleman attributes the present industrial situation—a situation which must be improved, as I am the first to recognise. However, we must remember that the present position did not come about overnight. Industry in Walsall and the west midlands generally was experiencing a decline in its fortunes long before the present Government came to office in 1979. The decline was greatly accelerated by the world recession which, with hindsight, is not surprising given the region's over-dependence upon a relatively narrow industrial base concentrated on precisely those industries most vulnerable to recession.

Walsall is similar to many other parts of the west midlands in this respect and has not been sheltered from the effects of the recession. Firms—especially those which had for so long experienced overmanning—could not be sheltered from the recession and have shed a considerable amount of labour during the last few years. The result is the historically high levels of unemployment in parts of the region, and Walsall has one of the highest rates in the region—17·8 per cent. in January 1985—which have rightly been of interest to the hon. Member tonight.

As time went on, it became increasingly obvious that the recession alone was not entirely responsible for that situation—although it played a considerable part. There were weaknesses in the structure of some industries of importance to the region. The motor industry is an example often quoted.

Although the Government's general economic policy has laid the foundations for a successful entrepreneurial spirit, and my Department's national schemes of assistance to industry were available throughout the country, it became clear that the worst hit parts of the country, and particularly parts of the west midlands, were at a disadvantage when competing for new industrial investment. Plainly further action was necessary to help rebuild the region's industrial base.

[Mr. David Trippier]

We have responded to that. In December 1983 we published a White Paper entitled "Regional Industrial Development" which made it clear that changes had made the assisted areas map out of date and areas with less acute problems than the west midlands no longer justified assisted area status. That was a point that was frequently being made to us by hon. Members representing west midlands constituencies including the hon. Gentleman.

As a result, and after a comprehensive review, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Industry announced to the House on 28 November 1984 the changes in the Government's regional industrial policy, including the new assisted areas map.

The biggest change in the map was that a large part of the west midlands region was included, for the first time, as an intermediate area, including the hon. Member's constituency which falls mainly in the Walsall travel-to-work area, and a small part of the Birmingham travel-to-work area. Approximately 77 per cent. of the working population of the west midlands now falls within an assisted area.

The new policy, which accompanied the new map, is designed to focus help so that it will have the greatest direct impact on employment at a lower net cost per job. It is intended to be less costly, and more cost effective. However, the increase in coverage of the map from 27 per cent. to 35 per cent. of the working population will mean an increase in selective assistance with the balance between automatic grants and selective assistance throughout the country shifting considerably towards the latter.

What does that mean for Walsall? For the first time, the Walsall and Birmingham travel-to-work areas will be eligible for regional selective assistance under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. This takes the form of, first, a project grant which is available for projects in the manufacturing and service sectors.

Secondly, under the in plant training scheme grants may be made to cover up to 80 per cent. of eligible training costs. Thirdly, there is the exchange risk guarantee scheme which covers firms against the exchange risk on foreign currency loans in return for a service charge. Fourthly, there are loans from Europe. Fixed interest loans from the European Investment Bank of up to 50 per cent. of fixed project costs are available. Similar loans are available from the European Coal and Steel Community for projects which create employment opportunities for redundant coal and steel workers.

In addition, the hon. Gentleman's constituency will qualify for support from the European Regional Development Fund. That will give his local authority access to the ERDF for its infrastructure projects for the first time. Although I appreciate that under the temporary arrangement agreed with the European Commission, Walsall metropolitan district has been eligible since January 1984 for ERDF aid for infrastructure projects by virtue of its Inner Urban Areas Act 1978 designation, intermediate area status will ensure that that eligibility continues. Only last week the European Commission announced a further batch of projects in the region which have been allocated ERDF funding. Those include £52,000 for two projects submitted by Walsall metropolitan district council, and a further £1·8 million for the black country route which will help to open up that part of the region for industrial investment and which is warmly welcomed in the hon. Member's constituency.

Clearly the west midlands' industrial structure and that of Walsall is such that large numbers of companies will now be in a position to benefit from assistance. The amount of aid coming to the region will, however, depend upon the response of the business sector, since regional aid is demand led. The west midlands assisted areas represent 20 per cent. of the total map coverage, and it is important to the region that it receives a fair share of the assistance available.

Initial response has been favourable. Since last November's announcement, the Department's west midlands regional office has received over 3,500 inquiries about regional selective assistance. These have, so far, generated 135 applications that are being examined by the Department's officials. Of those active cases, nine are in the Walsall travel-to-work area.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the hon. Gentleman saying anything that will give hope to the unemployed in my hon. Friend's constituency and my own constituency? Can he say that the misery of mass unemployment in the west midlands and the black country will come to an end in the lifetime of the present Parliament?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman should not be so negative. He is directing his question at someone who represents a constituency not dissimilar to his own or that of his hon. Friend. Only two and a half years ago, the unemployment level in my own constituency was far higher than the level in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, to which I have referred. As a result of concentration on small firms and the assistance given by the Government to that area, we have reduced unemployment by a third. That is not hypothesis. It is a fact.

Intermediate area status is not alone in working to regenerate Walsall's industrial base. The designation of intermediate area status was in recognition of the area's need for greater employment opportunities. As I have already mentioned, this is in addition to the Government's general economic policies which are of paramount importance. The stress on stable prices, a low rate of inflation and a favourable climate for enterprise are prerequisites for a modern industrial economy. There are also specific policies operated both by my Department and other Government Departments. For example, under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, firms in the old Walsall travel-to-work area have received 97 offers of assistance totalling over £2·5 million for projects involving costs of £11·6 million since May 1979.

There is also the small firms sector, which has greatly benefited from our measures in this field. The small firms service, for which I am responsible, continues to offer its services to small businesses in the region. Inquiries have been averaging over 660 a week for the last month compared with just over 600 this time last year.

With regard to other Departments' policies, in 1983 Walsall was made a designated district under the Inner Urban Areas Act and has received urban programme allocations of £461,000 in 1983-84 and £550,000 in 1984-85 — with a further £550,000 allocated for 1985-86.

Walsall has also benefited over the years to the tune of £1 million from the traditional urban programme, the fund open to all authorities seeking grant aid to support social schemes in urban areas of special social need other than in those areas designated under the urban programme as partnership or programme authorities. This represents one of the highest levels of support in the country under the traditional urban programme.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is advised by a panel of experts on appropriate remedies and resources to tackle the legacy of limestone mining in the black country. Under the guidance of this panel a programme of remedial actions has started, including considerable activity in the Walsall area. The Department of the Environment and the local authorities funded a major report from consulting engineers, and so far about £1 million of derelict land grant has been spent assessing the Walsall problem in more detail. Major remedial action in Walsall is planned to start in January 1986 with infilling of the Littleton street mine near the town centre. My right hon. Friend hopes to announce shortly the 1985-86 allocation under the derelict land grant for remedial works to limestone caverns in the black country generally including Walsall.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to Walsall guildhall. I understand that applications for listed building consent and urban development grant for the restoration of the guildhall complex have recently been submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for his consideration. In the circumstances, it would be inappropriate for me to comment about the applications at this stage.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me to respond on matters relating to housing, although it is the responsibility of other Departments. In recent years, Walsall borough council has given priority to the modernisation and repair of the substantial numbers of council houses in its ownership. It has also launched a major initiative to renovate pre-1919 houses in the private sector through the development of what has come to be known as the block repair scheme. These priorities have been very much in accord with national housing policy, which is for the private sector to assume a greater role in the provision of new housing.

The hon. Member mentioned the level of housing investment programme allocation to Walsall. The indications show that Walsall has had its fair share of housing resources available to the west midlands region recently. For 1985-86 Walsall has received £9·636 million, which represents some 91 per cent. of last year's allocation. Walsall has done markedly better than almost all other authorities in the region as most others received only 82 per cent. of last year's allocation. Housing investment allocations have to be seen in the context of the overall need to contain public expenditure. Within this constraint, the extent of housing need in Walsall has been fully recognised in the level of recent capital allocations.

The hon. Gentleman correctly highlighted industrial circumstances in Walsall, but his approach, like that of many in the Labour party, was rather negative. We can all recognise the problems, but some of us can see the steps that have been taken to overcome them. Following the granting of intermediate area status to the industrial heart of the west midlands, the Government have demonstrated their positive commitment to help the regeneration of the region's economy. Intermediate area status will bring many opportunities for those in Walsall to respond positively to take full advantage of what this status offers. I am glad to say that the signs of this are already apparent. Long has been the plea from the west midlands for the opportunity to compete on equal terms with other parts of the country. The opportunity is now to hand and we are looking to see the west midlands generally, and Walsall in particular, strong and vigorous once again.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Four o'clock am.

House of Commons

Wednesday 6 February 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Council House Building

1. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of council house starts in the years 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): The figures for the first six years are as follows: 75,000, 55,000, 34,000, 21,000, 29,000 and 30,000. The provisional figure for 1984 is 23,000.

Mr. Flannery: Do not those figures reveal a disgraceful position? There are 500,000 building workers out of work, longer and longer waiting lists in all big cities, and houses being sold off at half price, which depletes the urban housing stock, yet the Government produce these figures, which alarm anyone who wishes to house our people. When will the Minister resign?

Sir George Young: I urge the hon. Gentleman to broaden his horizon and consider other indicators of housing performance apart from local authority starts. Local authorities' improvement grants have increased from £90 million to more than £900 million. I suggest that he has a discussion with an Opposition spokesman on housing. The hon. Gentleman implied that he was against the right to buy but, as I understand it, Labour party policy, as announced by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Bar (Mr. Rooker), is to admit that the right to buy has been a success, and that the Labour party would face considerable opposition if it went back on it.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Labour party is being hypocritical in trying to stop people from buying their homes? That is wholly contrary to the views of the council tenants, who want to buy their homes rather than to see massive additional house building.

Sir George Young: There is clearly a private debate going on within the Labour party about whether to remain committed to repealing the right to buy. As I understood it, the party is against that, but the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) does not seem to have been party to that decision.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the Minister stop diverting the question away from the abysmal number of local authority starts by referring to the Government's other so-called initiatives, which have not resulted in anything substantial? Has not he or the Secretary of State, had a word, for example, with Laurie Barratt, and their other friends in the building industry, who say that their well-cherished joint venture scheme will no longer go ahead because of the 15 per cent. VAT on building improvements and the Government's freeze on the right to of local authorities to spend their capital receipts?

Sir George Young: If one looks at the performance of the private sector between 1980 and 1983, one sees that the number of starts increased from 98,000 to 167,000. One must put that in the balance, as well as the factors that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Are not Opposition Members foolishly playing the numbers game when they concentrate solely on public sector new building? Is it not the case that many authorities—my own in Nottingham is a case in point, with 47,000 homes in its ownership—should be concentrating on maintaining and improving their existing stocks?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. Whatever the political complexion of local authorities, they have all recognised that the real challenge is to modernise and improve the existing stock and to convert other stock that needs improvement. That has been the thrust of local authority expenditure, and it is wholly misleading to take as the sole criterion of performance, as the hon. Member for Hillsborough did, the number of local authority starts.

Mr. Heffer: Has the Minister had drawn to his attention a report of the commission headed by Prince Philip, which made it clear that those who wanted to rent property were having great difficulty in doing so because of the cuts in capital expenditure determined by the Government?

Sir George Young: I have seen an interim report from that commission containing some evidence. As I understand it, the commission has not yet come to any conclusions. The Government await with great interest the findings of this important commission.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Is it not true that many local authorities choose to direct their housing resources into more productive areas? For example, the borough of South Ribble is the national leader in building sheltered accommodation of a private, housing association or even a council nature. Should not local authorities direct their resources towards that?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. We have encouraged local authorities to provide housing for the elderly, the disabled and the homeless rather than try to meet the general needs, which we believe the private sector will have a crucial role in satisfying.

Improvement Grants

2. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for the future of improvement grants.

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): We intend to issue a consultation document on private sector housing improvement policy, including the future of the home improvement grant system, as soon as possible.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise the great anxiety caused by the fact that many councils have already stopped giving improvement grants? The Government must produce not only a new policy, but the essential cash for councils to do this work. Will he carry out his earlier promise to the Government and resign if that cash is not forthcoming?

Mr. Gow: Not all that we read in newspapers is true. As to the hon. Gentleman's substantive point, it comes ill from a Labour Member to talk about improvement grants. During the last financial year spending on improvement grants was £900 million, compared with £90 million in the Labour Government's last year of office. In this financial year we expect — we cannot give a final figure — spending on improvement grants to be about £750 million.

Mr. Latham: When the document, which is already rather late, appears, will it address the fact that improvement work is especially labour-intensive — the most labour-intensive in the construction industry — and that it is a cost-effective way of repairing urban decay?

Mr. Gow: I agree with both parts of my hon. Friend's supplementary question.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is the Minister aware that many unemployed people who own small terraced houses in cities such as Leeds cannot find the capital sums needed to maintain their homes? Is it not within the Government's brand of Conservatism to assist a property-owning democracy? Do they realise that their schemes would become much more favourable if they made more money available for private sector grants?

Mr. Gow: The primary responsibility for maintaining and repairing a home rests with the owner of that home——

Mr. Straw: Is that what the Minister said before the election?

Mr. Gow: I wish that Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen would not shout from a sedentary position, but would listen to the answer. A major part of the review of our home improvement grant policy is that we should achieve a better targeting of available resources. We shall try to ensure that resources from the public sector go to assist those who cannot afford to carry out improvements and repairs, and to the houses in the greatest need of repair.

Mr. Hargreaves: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is hypocritical of Labour Members to condemn the Government's record on improvement grants when one considers that in my constituency in 1978—the last year of the Labour Government — the local authority spent £233,000 on improvement grants, and that this year it is spending £1,800,000? Does my hon. Friend further agree that unless we spend even more we shall end up building more council houses?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend's point is a vindication of the Government's policies and an indictment of the policies of their predecessors.

Mr. John Fraser: Will the Minister stop his smug, braggart boasting about the generosity of the election bribe of £900 million, which to many people amounts to little more than telling a man about to be executed that he is having a good breakfast? *[Interruption.]* It is all very well for the smug Minister to smirk as well. Does he not realise that 250,000 home owners have had applications for home improvement grants in for over a year, and that his cuts in the housing investment programmes and freezing the use of capital receipts mean that they are still waiting in anxiety and distress and are now unlikely to get their grants? This is an act of treachery by a Tory Government towards many poor and anxious owner-occupiers.

Mr. Gow: Some of that synthetic anger——

Mr. John Fraser: It is not synthetic anger. Come to my advice bureaux.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman is not the only hon. Member who has advice bureaux. When my right hon. and learned Friend the then Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced the exceptional measures for improvement grants in his Budget of March 1982, he made it clear to the House that it was a temporary measure, partly in response to the 1981 English house condition survey. In fact, the exceptional measures for improvement grants were twice extended beyond the period that my right hon. and learned Friend had originally announced.

Ministry of Agriculture Environment Co-ordination Unit

3. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many officials in his Department are engaged in liaison between his Department and the environment co-ordination unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): Contacts are numerous and frequent, and no precise figure can be given.

Mr. Chapman: As land use statistics relating to our dramatically changing countryside are collected and assessed by my right hon. Friend's Department rather than by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, will my right hon. Friend assure the House that there is the closest co-operation between his Department and the recently established environment co-ordination unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? Will he also assure us that the close co-ordination and co-operation will be at ministerial level?

Mr. Jenkin: Happily, I can give my hon. Friend assurances on both those counts. There is increasingly close co-operation and also an exchange of views between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my Department, both at official and ministerial level.

Mr. Ron Davis: I remind the Secretary of State that the level of co-operation between his Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been subject to criticism by the Lords Select Committee, by the Royal Commission tenth report and, most recently, by the House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment. In the light of that, does the right hon. Gentleman not feel the need to introduce a new sense of urgency into his discussions with the Ministry of Agriculture? May we expect a statement or some new policy initiative soon to resolve the undoubted difficulties between the right hon. Gentleman's Department and the Ministry of Agriculture?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is being a little unfair to both Departments. I am sure that he has noticed a

number of recent conservationist initiatives taken by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, including the initiative in Brussels for the new structure directive, the change in the farm grant system to favour conservation, the participation in the new and very welcome experiment in the Broads to preserve the Halvergate Marshes, the reduced levels of financial support for drainage grants, and support for farming and wildlife advisory groups throughout England. These all represent a considerable shift in emphasis, which I am sure is welcomed on both sides of the House.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: When he turns his mind to matters that have to do with agriculture and with the Department of the Environment, will my right hon. Friend consider the European Community fund for the preservation of the habitat of endangered species? Is the United Kingdom drawing on the fund adequately?

Mr. Jenkin: If my hon. Friend would care to put down a specific question on that point, I should be very happy to give him an answer.

Mr. Denis Howell: Does the Secretary of State agree that the Select Committee report of this House was extremely scathing, but also realistic? Will he acknowledge that since the enactment of the Wildlife and Countryside Act it has been reported that over 156 sites of special scientific interest have been damaged? Do the Government not accept considerable responsibility for that damage? They provided only £600,000 to police the Act in relation to land acquisition and management agreements. Although the Government are to provide £7 million this year, which we acknowledge and appreciate, it shows the degree of ineptitude of the Government. May we have an assurance that the Government will provide sufficient money so that all the responsibilities of the Nature Conservancy Council can be carried out?

Mr. Jenkin: I must ask the House to await the Government's response to what is without doubt an important report by the Select Committee. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman's acknowledgement of the very substantial increase in the funding of the Nature Conservancy Council—an additional £7 million—was singularly churlish. I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that this increae has been very much welcomed by the council.

Planning Laws (Contravention)

4. **Mr. John Hunt** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the enforcement procedures provided by the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 in respect of buildings constructed in contravention of the planning laws and subsequently occupied as a main or only residence; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): My right hon. Friend is satisfied with the provisions of section 87 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, as amended. If, however, my hon. Friend is aware of any special difficulties, my right hon. Friend will be glad to consider them.

Mr. Hunt: On tht very point, is my hon. Friend aware that a mobile prefabricated home was recently erected on green belt land in my constituency within a few days without any kind of planning permission and that Bromley council reckons that because of the cumbersome nature of the present planning laws it may take several years for this building to be removed? Is this not an affront to the law-abiding neighbours in that area? Can we not tighten up the law in order to deal more promptly and effectively with those who deliberately flout it in this way?

Mr. Macfarlane: I do not think that either my right hon. Friend The Secretary of State for the Environment or my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is anxious to return to the conditions that prevailed in the 1960s, which involved the use of magistrates' courts. They would lead to all kinds of problems. The vigilance of the local authority is absolutely critical and vital in all these circumstances, and Bromley has a good record. Its officers know what legal measures are appropriate. I am aware that there have been exceptional delays in some cases, in particular in the case to which my hon. Friend has referred. However, local authorities can take more effective action quickly by prosecuting for failure to obtain the site licence that is required under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960. However, we must have a look at these problems, and I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Rural Conservation

5. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent measures he has taken to conserve the rural environment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): Our recent agreement to the Broads experimental scheme is a significant step forward both to safeguard the unique landscape and to test the effectiveness of a new means of achieving a viable agriculture in environmentally sensitive areas. We have also just published the Government's response to the Countryside Commission's review of uplands policies.

These decisions follow my right hon. Friend's earlier announcement of substantial increases in grant-in-aid to the commission and the Nature Conservancy Council in 1985-86.

Mr. Carlisle: I am grateful for that reply, but will my hon. Friend emphasise that if we are to conserve wildlife in the wider countryside we need to develop the concept of integrated farming in its practical applications? In this respect I was glad to hear what my hon. Friend said about the Broadlands experimental scheme, but will he press for the extension of this integrated approach to other areas?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support for the experimental scheme. It has been widely welcomed on both sides of the House and by those who are concerned with the integration of farming and the countryside. Similar schemes are in operation in some of the national parks. This is a major step forward. We all want to learn from it how to go forward in this very sensitive area.

Mr. Chris Smith: In pushing forward his unfortunately inadequate steps to conserve the rural environment, will the Minister be giving wholehearted and full backing to the Bill that is to be introduced on Friday next by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark)?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is a great expert on these matters. The Government have

done much more than the Labour Government did. It is well known that we welcome the blocking of the three-month loophole, as proposed by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). However, I hope that the hon. Member for South Shields will await my proper response to his Bill when we debate it on Friday.

Mr. Steen: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of conserving greenfield sites in the countryside is for the Government to auction off some of the 112,000 acres still on the land register and in public ownership?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that there is something in what my hon. Friend says, but it does not relate directly to these issues.

Dr. David Clark: Obviously the protection of the rural environment depends essentially on closing the loopholes in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Will the Minister state whether the Government intend to back the Bill that will be discussed in the House on Friday, which seeks to close those six major loopholes? Will the hon. Gentleman make a clear and unequivocal statement to the House on where the Government stand? We need the answer now.

Mr. Waldegrave: One major loophole is covered in the hon. Gentleman's Bill, and the Government have long made it clear that they welcome its closure. They also welcome the forthright support given by the all-party Select Committee for the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which has been the subject of much rather ill-informed criticism on the part of some Opposition Members, although not the hon. Gentleman.

South-East (Structure Plans)

6. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the present progress of structure plans in the south-east.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): The south-east region comprises Greater London and 12 shire counties. The latter are covered by 17 approved structure plans, most of which are at varying stages of review and alteration. At present I have before me proposals for nine alterations. My hon. Friend will know that Berkshire county council is preparing a single new structure plan to replace the three existing ones for east, west and central Berkshire. A draft for this replacement plan was published last April for public consultation.

Mr. MacKay: Is my right hon. Friend aware that his Department's diktat to Berkshire county council to make provision in its structure plan for central Berkshire for a vast number of new houses to be built is completely opposed by the population of Berkshire for three very good reasons? First, there is not the demand for those houses. Secondly, terrific damage will be done to the environment. Thirdly, employment in the regions concerned and our inner-city policy will be adversely affected.

Mr. Baker: I understand that the county council issued a consultation document containing a figure of nearly 8,000 extra houses, but that it has now issued a further consultation document, and public meetings are being held and public consultation is being carried out about it. I appreciate that there is considerable pressure around London and in the home counties for new houses, but there is also a strong counter pressure against new large estates. A balance must be struck in such matters.

"Coal and the Environment"

8. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the Government's response to the Commission on Energy and the Environment's report, "Coal and the Environment."

Mr. Macfarlane: Progress continues to be made in implementing the commitments given in the Government's response to the commission's report.

Mr. Dormand: Will the Minister give further attention to two aspects that are emphasised in the report? First, renewed efforts should be made with regard to dereliction. However, I immediately recognise the excellent work that has been done under Governments of both parties. Secondly, the despoliation of beaches is as serious now as it was when the report was published in 1981. In coalmining areas beaches provide an important amenity, yet they are an eyesore now as they are covered with coal waste. Will the hon. Gentleman do something about that?

Mr. Macfarlane: We share the hon. Gentleman's anxieties and agree with the strategy that he wants to see implemented. Within the resources available, I can give the hon. Gentleman that full assurance. The Horden pipeline experiment is of great importance but is not at present operating because of the dispute. However, in use it has proved technically very successful. The experimental period is to be extended to allow a full assessment to be made once the dispute is over.

Mr. Forman: When considering the Government's response to the impact of coal on the environment, will my hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues be prepared to give full weight to the possibility of installing equipment on a pilot basis which might reduce the emissions of acid and other noxious substances from coal-fired power stations?

Mr. Macfarlane: I note my hon. Friend's request. I shall study it and write to him.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: Are the Government satisfied that no longer will opencast coal mine workings be permitted as near to occupied dwellings as 50 yards?

Mr. Macfarlane: We have considered many elements of planning and coal, coal extraction and the general development order. They are all under review and are constantly under discussion, though the role of the local authority is obviously of prime importance. We have made great steps, and I shall look into the point that the hon. Gentleman raises.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister also look into the cost of the protection of the environment arising from coal mining? Does he think, for example, that the Exchequer might relieve the National Coal Board of some of its costs, so making pits more economic?

Mr. Macfarlane: The hon. Gentleman, representing the part of England that he does, will be pleased to hear that my right hon. Friend has agreed to provide £2·5 million to help finance spoil disposal schemes. A list of possible schemes has now been drawn up and discussions between my Department, the NCB and the local authorities involved are continuing. That is good news.

Borough of Brent (Negotiable Bonds)

9. **Mr. Pavitt** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why the London borough of Brent has been forbidden to issue negotiable bonds to assist in its financial responsibilities and with the construction of new homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No such instructions have been issued, either by the Government or, I understand, by the Bank of England.

Mr. Pavitt: Does the Minister realise that the fact that the Conservative-controlled London borough of Brent is rate-capped means that, although the instructions have not been issued, there is no way in which negotiable bonds can now be put on the money market to deal with the crisis there of 17,000 on the housing waiting list and £30,000 a week being spent on the homeless? Is he aware that because of that taxpayers and ratepayers will have to pay an extra 0·5 per cent. if, after July, when we reach the top of the reserve list, the London borough of Brent is then able to borrow capital to deal with its problems? Does he realise that, as a result of the situation, taxpayers and ratepayers will have to pay an increased subvention, all because of the way in which the Government are looking after the money market first and homemakers second?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman has got hold of the wrong end of the stick. The list of authorities wishing to make bond issues is full until the beginning of April, but the Bank of England has accepted bookings for Brent bonds to be issued subsequent to that. The hon. Gentleman rightly says that Brent is under Conservative control. That is why it is one of the rate-capped authorities that will comply with the law. It has already shown the way to many other rate-capped authorities by making savings of up to £20 million without making one person redundant.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question relate to Brent?

Mr. Hughes: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As the right hon. Gentleman will be aware, Brent council is a hung council, with the Tories only governing by agreement with the Liberals. Is he aware that the only way in which that authority will be able to meet the rate-capped limit—*[Interruption.]*—is if the £3 million of housing benefit repayment due is paid into its budget? What does the right hon. Gentleman propose to do to make sure that outstanding repayments of millions of pounds to that and other rate-capped authorities are paid so that they may be able to fix a rate? *[Interruption.]* May we also have an assurance that the money brokers will not charge extra interest just because they are rate-capped authorities.

Mr. Baker: I am delighted that the Conservative group in Brent has the support of the Liberal group there in implementing economies without Brent having to suffer. That is the policy that has been followed by the authority, which is conducting its affairs in a responsible and sensible way.

Alnwick (Urban Aid)

10. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why projects in Alnwick are no longer eligible for urban aid.

Sir George Young: Our policy is to concentrate traditional urban programme resources in the more extensively deprived urban areas with 20,000 or more population. Alnwick district has no urban centre of that size.

Mr. Beith: May we be told who dreams up the arbitrary lines and population figures so as to exclude from urban aid places which his officials have hitherto recognised have problems of social deprivation and unemployment just as great as those of areas of larger population? Will the hon. Gentleman recognise, when making future grants, the problems of areas such as Alnwick, whose problems were recognised in the past?

Sir George Young: I understand that even during the time of the Lib-Lab pact Alnwick did not receive any special treatment under the urban programme. The policy, which I am prepared to defend and which I hope the hon. Gentleman will support, is to concentrate the urban programme on areas which suffer from extensive deprivation. Having looked at the statistics for his constituency, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that the needs do not compare with those of other urban areas, where the need is far more extensive. There are small acute pockets of deprivation in Alnwick, but the scale of the problems is such that the local authority should be able to cope with them from its normal resources.

Housing Capital Expenditure

12. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is satisfied that the amounts allocated to housing capital expenditure in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 to 1987-88" will be sufficient to prevent the deterioration of the housing stock.

Sir George Young: The Government's plans allow for over £3 billion of public investment in housing in each of the next three years. It is for local authorities to decide what proportions of their share to use on renovating their stock, on home improvement grants or on other capital expenditure.

Mr. Alton: What advice does the Under-Secretary of State have for authorities such as my own, which have already entered into legal and binding agreements for next year's capital programme and now find that their allocation is insufficient to meet those contracts? What advice does the hon. Gentleman have for authorities which have stopped their housing action area programmes and have put most of their resources elsewhere?

Sir George Young: The message to Liverpool must be that it needs a heavy injection of realism. The council's stated intention for capital expenditure on housing stretches far beyond any reasonable expectation of capital provision. The message to go back to Liverpool is that Liverpool must try to live within its means.

Mr. Yeo: Is my hon. Friend aware that housing expenditure is one of the most labour-intensive forms of any public expenditure? Is he further aware that the reports in today's press of the possibility of further cuts in housing expenditure have given rise to considerable concern?

Sir George Young: There is no foundation for that headline.

Miss Boothroyd: Is the Under-Secretary of State aware that, because of the Government's pernicious financial policies, for the first time in the history of the Black Country towns within Sandwell are unable to build council houses? What message does the hon. Gentleman have for the more than 6,000 families who are on a council waiting list in that area?

Sir George Young: The first message to any local authority must be that it should look at the number of vacant units it already has. Often those units are vacant for more than 12 months. The local authority's first priority must be to get that stock back into use.

Dr. Hampson: Does my hon. Friend agree that we are accustomed to the press selectively quoting from leaked Government documents? Will he go beyond what he said to my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), because, unless he knocks on the head the impression given in *The Guardian* today that councils will not be eligible to use their assets, there will be no incentive for councils to sell their assets, which is central Government policy?

Sir George Young: I have seen the article to which my hon. Friend referred. The headline in particular is grossly misleading. No such proposal is on the table.

Mr. Steel: Does not the hon. Gentleman's answer to the questions asked by the hon. Members for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) mean that he is denying the figures contained in the reports, which claim to come from his Department, showing that there has been a severe reduction in the number of new starts in house building in the public and private sectors? Is the hon. Gentleman denying those figures?

Sir George Young: When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 18 December his proposals for the capital spending in 1985-86 by local authorities, he indicated that the pesent system was unsatisfactory and that he was embarking on discussions with the local authority associations. My right hon. Friend has held a useful meeting with the chairman of the local authority associations. That article arises from a subsequent discussion between my right hon. Friend's officials and officers of the associations.

Mr. Bendall: As the London borough of Redbridge has had its share cut by £7 million, how does my hon. Friend think that Redbridge, with a large number of Airey houses, can repair those units? The cut will seriously delay those repairs.

Sir George Young: I am well aware of the particular problems in Redbridge, where there are a number of Airey houses. I have had a meeting with the chairman of the housing committee. The representations made by my hon. Friend and by the chairman of the housing committee have been taken into account in assessing Redbridge's housing allocation for next year.

Mr. Rooker: I ask the Under-Secretary of State two questions. First, will he answer question No. 12 and say whether the money will prevent a deterioration in the housing stock? Secondly can the hon. Gentleman categorically tell the House whether the proposal announced by the Secretary of State to cut to 20 per cent. the amount that local authorities can use will be the figure in the order brought before the House, or will the figure be less than 20 per cent., as forecast in *The Guardian* this morning?

Sir George Young: The figure will be 20 per cent. On the first question, the responsibility for preventing the deterioration of the housing stock has to rest in the first instance with the owner-occupier, who is, in the vast majority of cases, the owner of the stock, rather than the Government.

Council Housing (Privatisation)

13. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take action to privatise local authority housing other than through individual sales to sitting tenants or third parties.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Private developers have bought, improved, and successfully resold, thousands of derelict and vacant local authority dwellings. Some local authority tenants are taking on the responsibility for running their own estates through management co-operatives. I want to see these welcome trends accelerated.

Mr. Marlow: As it appears that in those countries where rented accommodation is provided by commercial enterprise rather than by a municipal organisation the housing and the environment are better and the cost is somewhat less, will my right hon. Friend consider being more radical in his proposals and require some local authorities to divest themselves of some of their larger and less well-run estates to private enterprise organisations licensed by the Government and operating within certain requirements?

Mr. Jenkin: There are now some 70 schemes of substantial local authority estates or blocks of flats being refurbished and developed in partnership between the public and the private sector. Some of those include tenanted estates. It is encouraging to find that when tenants are offered the chance of and consulted about participating in such ventures they prefer to do that rather than to stay with the local authority. That is something that we are pursuing with considerable energy, because I believe that it is an important development.

Mr. Winnick: Why does the Secretary of State not recognise that hundreds of thousands of people are living in great housing hardship and misery because they cannot be housed by their local authority? Is it not a striking illustration of the Government's callous indifference that they have each year cut the amount of money made available to local authorities? In my borough, only because it has not had the money available, no contracts for new council housing have been entered into for the past six years. When will the Secretary of State recognise his responsibility towards people in such a desperate housing plight in my borough and the rest of the country?

Mr. Jenkin: I am a bit surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to welcome schemes where private sector money will relieve local authorities of the cost and responsibility of refurbishing some of their most unattractive and difficult to let areas so that the local authorities can concentrate on providing for the needs where the hon. Gentleman has identified. He has a blinkered view of the best way forward in this matter.

Mr. Spencer: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is only too self-evident from the evidence of Socialist city

councils up and down the country that the vast amounts of money that have been directed into those quarters have not benefited the council tenants, who were meant to be the beneficiaries, and that it is necessary to consider new methods of financing housing for those who cannot afford to pay for it themselves?

Mr. Jenkin: I agree with my hon. and learned Friend. I am prepared to adopt the words of one Labour leader of a council in the north-west, who said the other day:

"In many of these great urban estates the public sector has caused the problems, and they will not be solved without the support of the private sector."

I agree with that.

Mr. Cartwright: Does the Secretary of State confirm that the best way to deal with monolithic council estates is not to sell them for private profit but to devolve power to the tenants to enable them to run their own affairs through management and maintenance co-operatives? What practical steps is he taking to encourage local authorities to make progress along those lines?

Mr. Jenkin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. There is room for a variety of solutions. Some of the tenants' co-operatives that have been developed have been extremely successful. If he consulted his hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), he would find that it is a matter of great regret that Liverpool city council has cut off tenants' co-operatives from any access to city finance——

Mr. Simon Hughes: Quite right.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Member says "Quite right." He should go and talk to the people who are waiting for their houses from those co-operatives.

Mr. Hardy: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that in many areasa local authorities are not allowed to improve as many houses as they would like, or as their tenants and local ratepayers would like? Is the right hon. Gentleman also aware that in those areas regional and local newspapers are frequently given to criticising councils for their failure to improve as many houses as they would like? Will the right hon. Gentleman make it absolutely clear to the media that councils cannot improve the number of houses that they would like because of Government policy and ministerial action, rather than because of their own decisions?

Mr. Jenkin: If the hon. Gentleman has only just discovered that it is the Government's policy, in pursuit of their general economic initiatives and the control of inflation, to keep a firm control of public spending, I am not quite sure where he has been for the past five years. I would have more sympathy for any council that had gone out of its way to seek private sector partnership to try to resolve some of its problems—*[Interruption.]* I am glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman's council has done just that. That is the way in which those blocks of flats and estates can be refurbished and developed. There are now examples all over the country which are cheered and applauded by those who live on the estates.

Thames Water Authority

14. **Mr. Sims** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Thames water authority; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Gow: I met the chairman on 14 January. We discussed several subjects, mainly financial.

Mr. Sims: Can my hon. Friend tell me why he has chosen to ignore the view put forward by the chairman of Thames water authority that the figure that my hon. Friend uses as a reasonable return on assets is hypothetical and unrealistic? Is my hon. Friend seriously asking me to vote this evening in support of orders to limit the extent to which local authorities can increase their rates, and is he asking me tomorrow evening to vote for orders that will place on the Thames water authority the duty to impose a far higher rate than it wishes or needs to impose?

Mr. Gow: The net tangible assets of Thames, as at 31 March 1984 and as certified in the accounts that were signed by the chairman and the director of finance and audited by Arthur Andersen, are £4,425 million. I understand the views expressed by my hon. Friend. He is correct in that, to my regret, there is no agreement between the chairman of Thames and myself about the basis on which a proper return on investment is required. Nevertheless, it is true that for the current financial year the rate of return required by Thames is 0·5 per cent., which is the lowest target for any water authority, and for the coming year the target set for Thames is 1·37 per cent., which is still the lowest target for any of the 10 water authorities.

Mr. Pavitt: Will the Minister convey to the chairman of Thames water authority the admiration of many hon. Members on both sides of the House for the way in which he has resisted the Government's attempt for the first time, to make water a taxable commodity? Will the Minister convey our thanks to the chairman for standing up to the Government in the vigorous way that he has already done?

Mr. Gow: We are setting higher targets for the water industry as a whole, including Thames. I should like to join the hon. Gentleman in paying a tribute to Mr. Roy Watts — *[Interruption.]* Oh yes. The chairman of Thames water authority is fully aware of the fact that he was chosen by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to be chairman of Thames because he had the qualities that were required of the chairman. I pay tribute to what he has achieved. The dispute is about the rate of return that should be required on a current cost accounting basis.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend please explain why any financial return on capital is needed at all for this public utility operating in a monopoly beyond what is required for current outgoings, for provision for future construction and repair and for repayment of debt over a reasonable period, such as eight or 10 years?

Mr. Gow: Because it is the Government's policy that assets in the public sector should earn a proper rate of return. In that respect we are following precisely the principles that were laid down by the Labour Government in their White Paper in 1978.

Mr. Eggar: When my hon. Friend met the chairman of the Thames water authority, did he discuss the denationalisation of that body? Is he aware that the board is in favour of such a course of action? Could he not agree with the chairman of the board on that objective at least?

Mr. Gow: I did not discuss that possibility with the chairman of Thames Water Authority on the occasion to

which the question relates. My hon. Friend will be aware of a reply that was given last week by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to a question on this subject.

Dr. Cunningham: Is the Minister aware that we welcome his confirmation that Mr. Roy Watts has not only acted with courage but within his terms of reference, unlike the hon. Gentleman, who seems to be doing everything possible to exceed his in leaning on the chairman, second-guessing him, overruling him and imposing a tax on water consumers in the Thames area? Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, by normal accounting methods, Thames Water is the seventh most profitable business in Britain? Will he also confirm that the current cost accounting methods he is seeking to impose are not widely employed in business in Britain and amount to an imposition by the Government of a naked tax on water consumers?

Mr. Gow: It is strange that there should be this conversion of the hon. Gentleman. The orders that will be debated tomorrow evening are the fourth and fifth orders that have been laid before the House. The first three orders, which were made under section 29 of the Water Act 1973 and which were calculated on exactly the same basis of current cost accounting, were not opposed by the Labour party. I remind the House of the conclusions reached by Price Waterhouse and Co. in its report in 1981 on the principle of current cost accounting. It said:

"The approach to current cost accounting, which has been adopted by the water authorities, is both soundly based and sensible."

Domestic Rates

15. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from ratepayers concerning the likely level of rates for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received a variety of representations. If authorities budget to spend at target the average increase in rates should be in low single figures.

Mr. Proctor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that high rates are inimical to job creation and that there is much support for the Government's rate-capping proposals in areas such as Basildon, which is spending £600,000 on housing administration, and Lewisham, which has just commissioned a report that will cost the ratepayers of Lewisham about £5,000, into the psychological impact of golliwogs on children in Lewisham?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend has to suffer under the district council of Basildon, which is living in an unreal world, having increased its planned spending last year by 20 per cent. Undoubtedly, the ratepayers of Basildon will be helped considerably by the rate-capping that we are introducing this year.

Mr. Fatchett *rose*——

Mr. Boyes: Does the Minister agree that the natural solution to the level of rates is to let those who have to pay them speak through the ballot box? Through various measures, such as the abolition of the GLC and metropolitan councils, and now rate-capping, the Government seem to think that democracy can be thrown out of the window at their whim. They will suffer as a consequence of that in future.

Mr. Baker: Only 18 out of the 413 local authorities will be rate-capped this year. This means that some 390 will be living within the system. Some of those authorities will be allowed—and are already predicting—very large rate increases. For example, Liverpool city council, which is not rate-capped this year, is predicting a very substantial rate increase. We feel that the Government share the responsibility for protecting ratepayers in the hard-pressed areas.

Mr. Forth: Could not my right hon. Friend hold out hope for hard-pressed ratepayers, and avoid the necessity for future rate capping, by bringing forward proposals to reform local Government finances in such a way as to re-establish the connection between voting and paying tax, the lack of which is one of the main reasons for the current problems in local government?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The link between the rate demand and the ballot box has grown very thin in many areas. This is one of the many matters that I am considering in my review of local government. I hope that it will be possible to bring forward proposals later this year for public discussion.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Minister not understand that at a time of mass unemployment, when thousands of people are awaiting housing, and when, in many towns and cities, there is an aging population, local authorities need not less but more finance to provide for those problems, which have been directly caused by the present Government?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman represents part of the city of Liverpool. His city council is making such demands upon the national Exchequer that no Government could possibly meet them. I hope that that will not result in a grave crisis in the city of Liverpool later in the year. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to help to solve the housing crisis in Liverpool, he should persuade the city council to end its policy of buying co-operatives and instead to encourage co-operative housing development, which is what many of the people of Liverpool want.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: In Leicester, which is to be rate-capped, I have received fewer than 12 letters expressing opposition to rate capping and more than 150 expressing approval of it. Will my right hon. Friend assure his Department that the majority in Leicester believe that rate capping is important for the future of the city?

Mr. Baker: I thank my hon. Friend for his robust defence of Government policy.

Mr. Speaker: I must correct a wrong. I call Mr. Fatchett.

Mr. Fatchett: I am most grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the embarrassment that you caused my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), I thought that he did very well with his question.

Is not the reality that the Minister has had to introduce rate capping because the Government have totally failed to honour their commitment in relation to local government expenditure? They have failed to abolish rates. They have lifted the burden of local authority expenditure away from the taxpayer and on to the individual ratepayer. Rather than helping the ratepayer, the Government have made themselves the enemy of the ratepayer by ensuring that they are paying more for less in terms of services.

Mr. Baker: Since 1979 we have succeeded in restraining the rate of growth in local government expenditure to 1 per cent. a year in real terms. In the 1960s and 1970s there was growth of about 3 per cent. a year in real terms. The 18 rate-capped authorities together account for excess spending this year of £550 million.

Mr. Straw: When Mr. John Clout, the leader of Conservative-controlled North Yorkshire county council, complained last month that of the 8·6 per cent. increase in the rates more than half was due to cuts in central Government grants, was he telling the truth?

Mr. Baker: Speaking from memory, I believe that in North Yorkshire there was an increase in grant this year. Several shire counties have suffered a reduction in grant this year, including my own county of Surrey, which has just announced a rate increase of 4·9 per cent.

Water Authorities

17. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the response of water authorities to the Government's decision to revise their financial targets in 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gow: Mixed. If I should catch your eye tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, I hope to make a statement then.

Mr. Hicks: Can my hon. Friend explain the logic of the Government pursuing a strict anti-inflation policy and then deliberately imposing an increased scale of water charges on business and domestic consumers?

Mr. Gow: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but it is Government policy that a proper rate of return should be earned by assets in the public sector. As to the effect of inflation, a 1 per cent. increase in water charges would add one hundredth of 1 per cent. to the retail prices index. Mercifully, charges for water are a modest part of household budgets. Moreover, water charges are taken fully into account when calculating supplementary benefit, and 3 million households receive help in that way.

Mr. Harris: Will my hon. Friend think again, even at this late stage, as many of us do not see the logic of the Government's policy? What is more, many people outside will be angry when they receive their water rate bills in a couple of weeks' time.

Mr. Gow: I shall do my utmost to persuade my hon. Friend in the debate tomorrow.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the Minister come clean either now or tomorrow and admit that the Government are imposing a tax on users of water, whether private or industrial? There is a tax on gas and electricity for the benefit of the Government's coffers, and water authorities are now being used in exactly the same way.

Mr. Gow: I do not agree that the Government are imposing a tax on water. We are requiring a higher rate of return on assets owned by water authorities. A consequence of that higher rate of return will be higher investment and a reduction in borrowing. The latter is a central purpose of the Government's economic policy.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must move on, but in the debate tomorrow I shall bear in mind those hon. Members who wished to get in on this important question.

Mr. Winnick: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the point of order arise out of questions?

Mr. Winnick: I cannot pretend that it does. If you cannot accept it now, Mr. Speaker, may I give notice that I intend to raise a point of order with you at the first opportunity?

Gibraltar

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the outcome of my meeting yesterday in Geneva with the Spanish Foreign Minister, Sr. Moran, about Gibraltar.

As I foreshadowed in my statement to the House on 28 November, our meeting marked the start of the restoration, after an interval of 15 years, of direct communications and the free movement of persons, vehicles and goods between Gibraltar and Spain. We have also started the negotiations that were envisaged by the Lisbon statement of April 1980. They are aimed at overcoming all of the differences between us on Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation between Gibraltar and Spain on a wide range of matters. In addition, Spaniards in Gibraltar and Gibraltarians in Spain will enjoy European Community rights in advance of Spanish accession to the Community.

Spanish, British and Gibraltarian officials will now meet to deal with several specific areas for practical co-operation. They include aviation, tourism and economic and cultural matters. The first such meeting begins this month. Mr. Moran specifically reaffirmed to me the undertaking set out in the Brussels communiqué that the Spanish Government will take the early actions necessary to allow safe and effective air communications in the region. Specific ideas for this are now under consideration.

Mr. Moran raised the subject of sovereignty at our meeting. He was entitled to do so under the terms of the Lisbon and Brussels statements. He also outlined informally to me some ideas on the subject and said that he will later make formal proposals. However, Mr. Moran underlined the importance that he attaches to the interests and feelings of the Gibraltar people when dealing with this issue. For my part, I made clear that the British Government's commitment to honour the freely and democratically expressed wishes of the Gibraltarian people, which is plainly set out in the preamble to the Gibraltar constitution, stands unchanged.

Sir Joshua Hassan, who has led his people so resolutely over many years of difficulty, participated at my side yesterday as a member of the British delegation. He subsequently described the meeting in Geneva as positive and constructive in every way, and expressed himself fully satisfied that the results are good for Gibraltar. I greatly valued his wise advice. I am sure that the whole House will join me in paying tribute to his courage, steadfastness and statesmanship.

The task ahead is to see that practical co-operation between Gibraltar and Spain develops in a way which will benefit both peoples and that Spain and the United Kingdom continue to manage our differences as befits friends and allies.

In conclusion, I should like to make quite clear to the House that this result is good for Britain, good for Spain and, above all, good for the people of Gibraltar whose wishes we are pledged to respect.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): I welcome the statement of the Foreign Secretary and the fact that the frontier is now open. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House will feel that it is important that the increase in contacts at the human level between Gibraltar and Spain and the close economic and cultural links which the Foreign Secretary foreshadowed should be able to reduce the fears and suspicions which have long tormented relations on both sides.

I am glad that the Foreign Secretary was able to tell us that Sr. Moran recognises the importance of the feelings and interests of the people of Gibraltar on this matter and has therefore made no formal approach on the question of sovereignty at this stage. He must recognise that there is widespread opposition on the rock, and there would be increased opposition if there were any pressure from the Spanish side for early negotiations on this matter. I hope that the Spanish Government also will consider the implications for any negotiations on the rock with regard to their own position in the Moroccan enclaves across the straits.

Nevertheless, I hope that all hon. Members will recognise that the existence of a strong democratic regime in Spain after so many years — a regime which, moreover, will join Britain in the Community in the very near future — increases the importance of developing links at every level between Gibraltar and Spain.

May I ask the Foreign Secretary two specific questions? First, can he tell us yet which civil servant will be responsible for pursuing the course which he has described to us this afternoon? Secondly, has the Prime Minister now any plans for visiting Madrid? The Foreign Secretary will be aware that she is the only Prime Minister of a community country who has not yet visited the capital of Spain.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): She has been everywhere else.

Mr. Healey: I must confess to my hon. Friend that my suggestion was not wholly without concern for assuring that there is no disagreement between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary on this matter as so unfortunately occurred during the negotiations on Hong Kong.

Finally, I hope that the precedent of better relations with Spain will be followed by seeking better relations with another democratic regime in another hispanic country which also maintains historic claims to sovereignty over a British colony.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. There is no parallel between the case of Gibraltar and that of the Falkland Islands. They are historically, legally and constitutionally quite different. Perhaps the most important difference is that Spain recognises the validity of our title under the treaty of Utrecht whereas Argentina refuses to acknowledge our sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. Spain's attitude to the rights of the inhabitants of Gibraltar is also markedly different. Spain is an ally in NATO and a prospective partner in the European Community and has publicly stated that it intends to pursue its claim by peaceful means. The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that that is in total contrast with the historical, geographical and constitutional position of the Falkland Islands. Our position in relation to the Falkland Islands remains unchanged.

The discussions between Spain and the United Kingdom will be monitored by civil servants on both sides at suitably senior level, subject to my direction on behalf of the Government.

As for possible visits, at this stage I say only that the agreement reached in Brussels and its implementation from yesterday plainly opens up prospects of visits far more clearly than has been the case thus far.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the part that he has played in ensuring that the border was finally opened. We hope that tourism will benefit from that, but does he agree that the main economic enterprise in Gibraltar remains the dockyard? Does he agree that it would be most helpful to good relations between Spain and Gibraltar if the Spaniards sent some ships to that yard for repair?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his congratulations. He was right to draw attention to tourism as being perhaps the most important component of economic growth in and around Gibraltar. Nevertheless, the dockyard remains important. I am glad to be able to tell the House that in the first nearly two months of its existence as a commercial yard it has got off to a very good start, that 500 people are now employed there and that the management expects a substantial increase in that number in the months ahead. A significant number of craft have passed through the yard. I am sure that the Spanish Government and, perhaps more important, Spanish commercial interests will appreciate the importance of the point made by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on a well balanced and fair statement which safeguards the democratic wishes of Gibraltarians and paves the way for better relations with Spain. So why is Mr. Joe Bossano getting so excited?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations. As he will know, there are circumstances in which Opposition parties do not always take the same view as the Government of the day. I believe that the developments likely to take place in Gibraltar in the months and years ahead are likely to be seen as so much to the advantage of the people of Gibraltar that the understandable anxiety that now exists in Gibraltar —I seek in no way to diminish its significance—will respond to the practical consequences of the steps that we have taken.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's achievement and that of Sir Joshua Hassan. In telling the Department that the Government stand firm on the commitment to the Gibraltar constitution, will my right hon. and learned Friend stress that in no circumstances will the House of Commons permit any retreat from that position?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have made it quite plain, not just in the Department where it has always been abundantly plain but to the Spanish Foreign Minister and the people of Gibraltar throughout the negotiations, that the commitment set out in the Gibraltar constitution stands without qualification and is of the utmost importance. One of the most important features of the negotiations has been the extent to which that has been wisely and practically acknowledged by Spanish Government spokesmen.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that on an important constitutional matter the view of every opposition is important? In view of the narrow margin between the parties in Gibraltar, what consideration was given to the views of Mr. Joe Bossano?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree that one should not disregard the view of any opposition in a parliamentary democracy. When one discusses a matter of such importance with a democratically based community such as Gibraltar, it is right to pay attention to the views expressed by the democratically elected Chief Minister. He offered wide and sustained advice throughout the matter, and has been responsible for carrying through the Gibraltar legislature the necessary measures, which he has done. That is the right way to handle such an issue. I am grateful for the support and advice that I have received from Sir Joshua Hassan.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that most Conservative Members will wish to congratulate him on what has been achieved and, even more, on the responsible attitude adopted by Sir Joshua Hassan and many people in Gibraltar. Will my right hon. and learned Friend say a word about the defence implications of the agreement, and confirm that Gibraltar will continue under the new set-up to be an important factor in our defence of that part of the Mediterranean?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for his opening remarks and endorse what he said about Sir Joshua Hassan. The defence component of Gibraltar remains important. One of the points touched on in the Brussels communiqué was the possibility of discussions on military matters with the Spanish Government. That has not arisen yet, and a number of other questions in the NATO context do not arise in the present circumstances.

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): Although most hon. Members will welcome the Government's position, which honours the freely and democratically expressed wishes of the Gibraltarians, they must be worried that in the statement the Secretary of State made a distinction between our Government's position and the position of the Spanish Foreign Minister. Will he explain further the distinction that he made when he went out of his way to say that the Spanish Government simply and merely attaches importance to the interests and feelings of the Gibraltar people? That is certainly not recognising their democratic rights.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is right to acknowledge the extent to which the Spanish Government, founded, as the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) pointed out, on the basis of a democratic constitution, and democratically elected, recognise the importance of Gibraltar's democratic institutions. Some time ago, Sr Moran observed:

> "If they gave me Gibraltar on a plate against the will of the Gibraltarians it would not be a good deal for Spain."

That is an important recognition of the importance of the wishes and interests of the Gibraltarians. I take the opportunity of paying tribute to Sr Moran's contribution to the negotiations. I repeat that our commitment as set out in the 1969 constitution stands unqualified.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Clearly the House will wish to congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

and Sr Moran on the positive way in which the talks have begun. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that clearing the air on this matter will facilitate Spain's entry into the European Community, and also enable it to continue its membership of NATO?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's opening remarks. We attach importance to Spain's continued membership of NATO and its accession to the Community. I hope that the agreements that we reached on this matter will help to sustain both those things. It was also important for us to reach a conclusion on these matters bilaterally between our two countries to establish a co-operative atmosphere and to make it plain that it was not in any sense being agreed upon in the course of securing agreement to Spain's entry to the Community.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that congratulations are due both to him and, more important, to the democratic Government in Spain who have acted intelligently throughout the discussions? Is it not clear that in the long run the question of sovereignty must be settled through negotiations with Spain? Is it not also clear that Joe Bossano has much in common with Felipe Gonzalez if we could only get the two people together and discuss the matter in such a way that Gibraltar could be considered as part of the new approach of the Spanish Government towards devolved government in Spain, which is in line with their Socialist policies?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I repeat my tribute to the way in which the Spanish Government, democratically elected as they are, have approached this matter. The fact that the border is now open, and that there is an atmosphere in which good contacts and personal and social relationships are likely to be established, may lead to all sorts of changes of mind on both sides of the border. I cannot predict what course those will take, save to reaffirm our commitment to the wishes of the Gibraltar people as set out in the 1969 constitution.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): My right hon. and learned Friend will know how much I admire his efforts as Foreign Secretary, and how much I oppose the ignorant attacks on the Foreign Office. But ordinary people are puzzled by the talks with Spain about Gibraltar. They say, "If we have no intention of surrendering the sovereignty of Gibraltar to Spain, why have the talks at all?"

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The answer to his question is that the sovereignty of Gibraltar has been at issue between the Spanish and British Governments for many years. It has overshadowed and made much more difficult the conduct of relations between those Governments. It has created conditions that have made the prospect of social and economic prosperity for Gibraltar much more difficult. The agreement that we have reached is that the topic can be discussed by the two Governments on the firm basis that I have outlined of our continued commitment to respect the wishes of the Gibraltar people. From that can flow nothing but advantage. As I said in my opening statement, it is a good agreement for Britain, for Spain and for the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): With regard to the Foreign Secretary's reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) on the historical differences between Gibraltar and the Falklands, does the Foreign Secretary accept that he is making a serious criticism of his hon. Friends and mine on the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, who expressed the gravest doubts about the legal and historical background? Does he dismiss the Select Committee? What is his attitude to

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman will have many opportunities to discuss the Falkland Islands, but that subject does not arise from this statement. It would be wrong for me to swap views with the hon. Gentleman now. I raised the subject in answer to a question from the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). I answered his question by saying that the two matters are completely different.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Does my right hon. and learned Friend realise that his statement today, together with his efforts and those of Sr Moran and Sir Joshua Hassan, will be broadly supported by the great majority of hon. Members? Will he confirm that top of the agenda for the talks will be allowing more flights into Gibraltar as soon as possible.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's opening remarks. As I said in my statement, and as was set out in the Brussels agreement, the Spanish Government reaffirm their commitment to take the early action necessary to ensure the safe and effective use of airspace in the region.

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): Honourable Members on both sides of the House will be grateful if we can reconcile the three conflicting points of view. Before we sink into a swamp of self-congratulation, may I point out that many Gibraltarians believe that they are being sold out the back door economically, if not politically? What will the Foreign Secretary do to consult the official Opposition on this matter? Does he recognise that Spain is again playing on the fact that Gibraltar is still a colony? Would not one of the options be to offer self-government if the aspirations of the Gibraltar people were not satisfied?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As to consultation with the Opposition, the hon. Gentleman will have noticed that these matters have been the subject of frequent debate in the Gibraltar Legislative Assembly, and that has been the background against which the Chief Minister of Gibraltar has been playing his part in these negotiations.

As to self-government, the treaty of Utrecht, on which our sovereignty is founded, contains in it a provision to the effect that, in the event of the United Kingdom wishing to give up sovereignty, Spain should have first refusal. It has been clear, and was emphasised, for example, by Sir Joshua Hassan in London last Wednesday that the choice for the people of Gibraltar is either to remain under British sovereignty or to move under Spanish sovereignty. There is no third option under the provisions of the treaty. In that context, we emphasise the importance that we attach to the pledge to respect the wishes of the Gibraltar people.

As to the hon. Gentleman's accusation of a sell-out, economically if not politically, the state of affairs in Gibraltar up to now has been nothing but bad for the Gibraltar economy. It has involved an outflow of money

across the border of about £150,000 a week, about £16 million in the past two years. As a result of the changes that came into force yesterday, the prospects for economic prosperity for the people of Gibraltar and the region have been substantially improved.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the future of the Gibraltar economy will increasingly depend on the ability of the Gibraltarians to develop it? To this end, will he give what support he can to the establishment and development of some basic further education in Gibraltar? At this stage, this is very limited, which means that the necessary skills for the future are not being developed?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I take note of that specific point without making any comment about it. My hon. Friend is right in the premise of his question, that the prosperity of Gibraltar will depend on the enterprise of the people of Gibraltar, matched with the courage that they have always shown during the difficult years through which they have just passed.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): Does Sr. Moran now fully appreciate that the only way for Spain to regain sovereignty over Gibraltar is for her to set out to win the hearts and minds of the people of that colony?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That has been clearly stressed in the remarks that I quoted about the need for any negotiating process to have respect for the wishes of the people of Gibraltar. I underline that point.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I would not wish to be unhelpful in the face of considerable diplomatic triumphs, but, like many other hon. Members, I am concerned to establish that the opening of the gate has merely returned the situation to that which pertained for many years, and that it does not represent a step towards ceding Gibraltar to the Spanish. Therefore, will my right hon. and learned Friend remember that many Gibraltarians are able to trace their ancestry back to this country for many generations?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I assure my hon. Friend that I have been mindful throughout of the factors to which he has drawn attention, and that in all these matters we have been concerned not just with finding a conclusion that will promote good relations between Spain and Britain but in paying attention to the interests of the people of Gibraltar. I have no doubt that this agreement is in their interests, and it is underpinned by my repeated emphasis on the continued validity of the preamble to the 1969 constitution.

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): Having arrived in Gibraltar with a parliamentary delegation on the day that the Brussels communiqué was announced, may I ask the Foreign Secretary whether he will take it from me that there is considerable mistrust of Spanish officialdom in Gibraltar? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give an assurance that he will do more to reassure the official socialist opposition and the official democratic opposition in Gibraltar that they need not be equally distrustful of the intentions of the Foreign Office?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I take this opportunity to tell the House that there is no question of the Foreign Office adopting a separate position or policy over this matter. The decisions taken by the Foreign Secretary on behalf of Her Majesty's Government are taken not out of any consideration for Foreign Office interests but because we judge them to be in the best interests of Spain and Britain and of the people of Gibraltar. I well understand that, in the light of the experience of the last 15 years, there is bound to be some mistrust of officialdom of the kind that the hon. Member described on the Spanish side of the border. There is mistrust not just of officialdom but elsewhere. One of the benefits of opening the border will be the gradual dissolution of that mistrust and the improvement of the economic prospects of the people of Gibraltar.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Is it not clear that this is a splendid agreement, because one can now buy whisky in Gibraltar at £3.50 a bottle? Will my right hon. and learned Friend have a word with the Chancellor of the Exchequer in order to find out whether that price can be emulated here?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I hesitate to respond favourably to my hon. Friend's invitation to job back in my previous existence in this House.

Mr. Healey: If the Foreign Secretary rejects the Falklands as a precedent for Gibraltar, does he accept the view of King Juan Carlos of Spain and of his colleague the Spanish Foreign Minister that Hong Kong may provide a useful precedent?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I would counsel the right hon. Gentleman against following that course. He must remember very clearly that British sovereignty over Gibraltar is plainly founded upon the treaty of Utrecht without any limit to its term. That is in total contrast to Hong Kong where 92 per cent. is held on a lease that is due to expire in 1997. I would not encourage the right hon. Gentleman to go down that road.

RAF Molesworth

4.3 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Heseltine): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the operation conducted last night at RAF Molesworth to clear the site of trespassers and to fence it.

The then Secretary of State for Defence announced on 17 June 1980 the Government's decision that Molesworth, a disused airfield in Cambridgeshire, had been selected as the second United Kingdom cruise missile base. The normal process of planning consultation was set in hand towards the end of last year against the requirement to begin major construction on the site this autumn if deployment by 1988 is to be achieved.

As the House will be aware, RAF Molesworth, as an unfenced and open site, has been the scene of continued trespass by individuals and groups opposed to its use as a cruise missile base. Their activities have given rise to much local anxiety. The anti-nuclear protest groups have made clear their intention to engage in a systematic programme of deliberate delay and disruption, not excluding unlawful means, in order to prevent its development. It would have been quite wrong to allow such a protest to build up on Ministry of Defence land and to accept that the serious inconvenience to local people would continue.

I therefore directed that the necessary steps should be taken to end this as quickly as possible and with the least likelihood of danger to all concerned. To do so, it was necessary to act in secrecy and with speed in order to prevent the very serious problems which would have arisen from the reinforcement of the protesters that had been threatened. This could have led to a major confrontation with all the risks which that involved to both demonstrators and those responsible for the maintenance of law and order.

The operation began shortly before midnight last night with the arrival of Ministry of Defence police to clear the site of trespassers and to take control of it. The civil police were responsible for policing outside the site itself. At the same time, 1500 Royal Engineers began to fence off the whole site with dannert-type fencing. They are also providing observation platforms and perimeter lighting which will assist the Ministry of Defence police in their continuing task of guarding the site. In addition, members of the Property Services Agency and civil contractors moved heavy equipment on to the site to begin the construction of a permanent weldmesh fence for which planning agreement has already been given.

This House reaffirmed in October 1983 its support for the NATO twin-track decision on intermediate range nuclear forces. The Government very much hope that, now that the Soviet Union has returned to the negotiating table, it will be possible to make progress on the arms control element of that decision. But until progress has been achieved which makes this unnecessary, we shall continue with preparations for the deployment of cruise missiles. That is a decision approved by Parliament. No responsible Secretary of State for Defence, or Government, could countenance such preparations being frustrated by a small, unrepresentative minority within our society.

That is why the action that I have described has been undertaken today. I have myself visited Molesworth this morning in order to pass on the Government's thanks to those concerned. The House will, I know, wish to join me in paying tribute to all those involved in ensuring that this major operation has proceeded so successfully.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The operations about which the statement is made demonstrate again how heavy-handed, how insecure and how insensitive the right hon. Gentleman is when trying to deal with those whose only offence is their wish to protest peacefully against nuclear weapons. We remember the right hon. Gentleman threatening from the Dispatch Box that he would authorise the shooting of unarmed demonstrators. We remember how relentlessly he pursued the prosecution of the hapless Sarah Tisdall. We have read this week, in matters that are sub judice, how he exaggerated the problems of the Ministry of Defence on that occasion. Now we see the right hon. Gentleman doing exactly the same thing again. Clearly he has no understanding of what some of us thought was a civilised and humane way of trying to deal with these problems in Britain.

When the right hon. Gentleman strutted around Molesworth this morning in his flak jacket, did he not realise that he was not evicting some wild, Baader-Meinhof terrorist gang, but that he was evicting 100 British citizens, most of whom are Quakers with a long religious tradition of honourable protest against the weapons of war?

Will the right hon. Gentleman answer three questions? First, how many troops were involved and what regiments did they represent, how many military police were involved and how many civilian police were involved? Secondly, did he personally authorise this ridiculous operation? Thirdly, is he aware that all that he has done has been to sow 100 dragons' teeth? The protest not only will go on but will intensify because of what the right hon. Gentleman did this morning.

Mr. Heseltine: The whole House will have noticed that when what I have done has been to secure the maintenance of law and order and the legitimate rights of my Department to use its own land for its own purposes, the determination that we in this country share to live within the law is wholly repugnant to the Opposition.

If the right hon. Gentleman had taken the least trouble to read the statements of many members of the peace protest groups about the plans they had in mind deliberately to frustrate the Government's intention to develop that base—their widely publicised plans to lie in the path of necessary equipment, to frustrate the contractors, to stop us brick by brick—he would have realised that if I had acted with less dispatch they would have begun to implement those plans and to call up additional resources from all over the country. We could have faced civil disobedience on that site not just for days or weeks but for months.

If the right hon. Gentleman reads what has been clearly stated he will understand that about 1,500 Royal Engineers were used to build a fence. The people who maintained law and order were the Ministry of Defence police and the civil police. However, it would not be appropriate for me to give details of the numbers of policemen involved. If I did that, the only gain would be that it would enable the right hon. Gentleman and his friends to calculate how

many more demonstrators they need in order to — *[Interruption.]* Today we have heard the petty response of a party whose only real cause of complaint is that it has been deprived of one more opportunity to support lawlessness.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney (Peterborough): Does my right hon. Friend realise that his decision has the full support of my constituents in the nearest city to Molesworth and that it has, in particular, the support of the constituents of my next-door neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who is today in his customary place on the Treasury Bench? He has vigorously defended his constituents' interests for many months. Does my right hon. Friend accept that his decision, coupled with that of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to meet extra police costs arising out of demonstrations at Molesworth, has reconfirmed the belief of the people of Cambridgeshire that this Government will provide the necessary national defence, but not at the expense of their local legitimate interests?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for both of his questions. Of course I completely support what he has said about the decisions of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend for his words on behalf of his constituents, which I very much appreciate. I am particularly grateful to him—and he will understand if I make the distinction —for what he said on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). Throughout the long occupation of parts of the Molesworth site my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon has been in the most invidious position as a member of the Government. He has continually made representations to me. I have tried to keep him as fully informed as possible, and I am glad that only about six hours after he was involved in the presentation of a petition on behalf of a very large number of his constituents, we were able—I am sorry about the short delay—to act.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Does the Secretary of State agree that we should get last night's events into proportion? Does he accept that within a democracy protesters have a perfect right to demonstrate against aspects of Government policy with which they disagree, but that the authorities are equally entitled to outwit them? That is just what happened last night at Molesworth.

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, as he has made two important points. Every hon. Member recognises that there is a legitimate opportunity for peaceful protest within certain understandable conventions. Indeed, this House is about peaceful protest, and that is one of the great traditions of our democracy. But if a Secretary of State charged with responsibility for maintaining the law in these matters, reads that unless he is careful and gets his plans right he may endanger the very lives not only of male protesters but of women and children, he has a positive duty to take all reasonable steps possible to minimise the force necessary to secure the Government's proper objectives.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members very much welcome his statement because of the relief that it will give to law-abiding constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who is a Whip, and to the constituents of other hon. Members? Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have shown our determination to retain and maintain the credibility of our deterrent posture?

Mr. Heseltine: I am most grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for that point. Now that the arms negotiations are under way, nothing is more evident than that our policy of deterrence has paid off. Those who are concerned with the deployment of cruise missiles should remember that one of their principal arguments against the missiles was that if we went ahead, the Russians would not talk to us and would move out of the negotiating conferences. However, they have actually moved back. Since we took a decision to deploy cruise missiles in this country in 1979, the Soviet Union has increased its deployment of SS20s by more than 250.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that the peace camps in Britain, founded on the Gandhi principles of non-violence, are very highly respected all over the world, that the transfer of British territory to an American President so that he can make war from that base without the consent of the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister or the House of Commons is unacceptable, and that the decision to build a Berlin wall around the camp, together with the right hon. Gentleman's readiness to shoot those who might try to get into the camp, shows that the Government are prepared to use the full apparatus of the state to obliterate opposition to their policies?

Mr. Heseltine: I heard what the right hon. Gentleman said about American bases in this country. If I had an apology to make to the House, it would be that I have so slavishly followed the conventions that he so honourably defended when he was a member of the previous Labour Government. However, I do not feel it necessary to make that apology, because I took the view that the right hon. Gentleman's defence policies were broadly right. I do not understand why, in opposition, he has so extraordinarily abandoned them. Perhaps I can take issue with the right hon. Gentleman on this, as on so many other things. He says that the peace groups are respected throughout the world. That is a matter of judgment. But what is respected about this country throughout the world is our love of law and order and our respect for parliamentary democracy.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that these pests who have made the lives of the citizens of Huntingdon a misery are certainly not respected by the people of Cambridgeshire or Huntingdon? Is he further aware that our constituents very much welcome the firm and efficient way in which he has carried out this operation? Does my right hon. Friend realise that they greatly admire the dedicated way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) has fought on their behalf for several months? Finally, is my right hon. Friend aware that he is to be congratulated because the operation was undertaken, remarkably, without any leak from his Department?

Mr. Heseltine: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, and I agree with everything that he said. However, I have unselfishly to admit that the credit for there being no leak must be extended much more widely than just my Department.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): How much did last night's exercise cost? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that

[Mr. Peter Pike]

that exercise was more consistent with a police state than with a democracy in the way in which it was carried out in such secrecy? The right hon. Gentleman said that the protesters at Molesworth represented a minority opinion, but does he not realise that opinion polls have consistently shown that the majority of people are opposed to cruise? The Government were elected by fewer than 50 per cent. of the voters and it is they who are in the minority on this occasion.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will realise that the Government have one of the largest parliamentary majorities since the war. The Conservative party made it quite clear that if it was elected to office it would proceed with the deployment of cruise missiles. We very much believe that the Labour party was quite right in 1979 when it took the decision that led to their deployment in this country.

The cost of the exercise last night was probably relatively small because of the large number of service men involved. It was probably the cheapest way of proceeding, because if we had not carried out that operation we might have suffered substantial delays in the construction programme, which would have imposed a larger cost on the Ministry. The hon. Gentleman asked whether our action was not representative of that of police states. I do not know how one can maintain law and order in a parliamentary democracy without asking the police to ensure that it is maintained.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that most, probably all, Conservative Members believe that the protection of defence establishments is an integral part of our defence policy? Will he continue to take whatever action is necessary within our democratic traditions to avoid a repetition of the shambles at Greenham common?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking those questions and I sympathise with the approach that he adopts in asking them. The shambles imposed on our society is organised by those indulging in the protest movement. Precisely because we live in a parliamentary democracy and follow the proper traditions of that democracy, there is a limit to the scale on which the police can prevent people from indulging in demonstrations of the sort that we have seen. That imposes a terrifying cost, not just financial but social, on large numbers of citizens who profoundly disapprove of what the protests are all about. A balance must be struck, and what guides my Department, as it did last night and on earlier occasions, is that we always try to use the minimum of force compatible with securing our objectives.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that what took place was an eastern European type of operation—which illustrated only too well the continued erosion of civil liberties that has taken place under Conservative rule? *[Interruption.]* The shouts that are coming from Tory Members may be likened to the nods of approval that one would expect in eastern European states for action against protests. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, no matter what operation took place last night, the campaign against cruise missiles will continue because we live in a democracy and people who feel so strongly about such matters that they wish to demonstrate will not be stopped?

Mr. Heseltine: The House will think it extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman can be so selective. In talking about what happens as a challenge from the East he conveniently ignores the fact that the East began the deployment of the weapon systems that led to the protests at Molesworth and Greenham common in the first place. If he had a shred of objectivity, he would consider what might happen to people who tried to occupy bases in the Soviet Union in similar circumstances.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Will my right hon. Friend agree that CND consistently and deliberately misleads as to the amount of public support it enjoys in Britain? Does he agree that the true level of support was evidenced by a petition for the removal of the camp at Molesworth, which was signed by more than 90 per cent. of the local population within three days; by a poll at St. Ives which went against CND's protest appeal against cruise; and by a petition at Alconbury for the removal of a camp, which was signed by more than 90 per cent. of the local population in a short time? Will my right hon. Friend join in urging CND to cancel its pointless and disruptive Easter march?

Mr. Heseltine: I support my hon. Friend and admire the energy he puts into the articulation of the case. When public opinion is consulted on these matters, it finds the tactics of the protest groups wholly unacceptable. The problem in a democracy such as ours is that a burden is imposed by tiny minorities behaving in a way that is unacceptable to the vast majority of us. My hon. Friend asks whether I am aware that the views of these minorities are unrepresentative. Yes, I am aware of that, and in my constituency at the last election one such person stood against me. The House will be pleased to hear that I won.

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the Secretary of State accept that the tactics employed by the state are equally unacceptable in a parliamentary democracy? Does he understand that the use of massive force in a paramilitary operation by the Ministry of Defence, using troops against civilian peace protesters, undermines the very quality of democracy that he pretends to support?

Mr. Heseltine: It was an interesting choice that someone with my responsibilities had to face. Had I pursued the logic of that question, I would have given notice and presumably deployed what I would have believed to be an inadequate force, and then we could have had thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of men, women and children with whom to cope. Presumably at that point the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends would have told me that I should abandon the Government's policies because an even larger and less representative minority was challenging us.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the western boundary fence of Molesworth is also the county boundary between Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire? Will he accept from me the welcome that my constituents in Northamptonshire will give to the action taken by his Department and the civil police during the evening? Is he further aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and I have, during

the last weeks and months, received a growing volume of protests from our constituents in Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire about the growth of criminal and antisocial behaviour by the campers at the Molesworth air base? Will my right hon. Friend accept that our constituents will fail to recognise the description of those people, who have now been removed, as Gandhian in their behaviour, as has been claimed for them? Will my right hon. Friend accept that my constituents will welcome his statement that the preparations for Molesworth will continue, because they know that the surest way in which it will be unnecessary to deploy at Molesworth is if we continue with our efforts until such time as agreement is reached at Geneva?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. I agree wholly with his last point, and I assure him that the interests of the citizens of Northamptonshire were as much in my mind as the interests of the citizens of Cambridgeshire.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): Will the Secretary of State admit that this has been another example of the right hon. Gentleman informing the House that he has carried out his orders from General Bernard Rogers in the Pentagon? Did not last night illustrate again the Government's increasing determination to carry out by force what they cannot do by persuasion? It is clear that the majority of people in Britain are opposed to cruise missiles. Given all the heart-rending stories about the dilemmas and so on that the right hon. Gentleman faced, will he now say whether any warning was given to the men, women and children that they would be moved? *[Interruption.]* Did they receive eviction notices? If it was not appropriate to issue such notices, why have eviction notices been issued at Greenham common since the peace campers first went there? Is it not a fact that because of the tremendous resistance of the women at Greenham, he is now using the iron fist at Molesworth? The logic of the right hon. Gentleman's argument that he is saving money —[HON. MEMBERS: "Too long."] I am taking no longer than did the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). If the right hon. Gentleman is arguing that his action will save money in the long term—by nipping the protest in the bud now—the logic of that is that he might as well get the troops out now and round up the lot of us—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and achieve what he wants in one go.

Mr. Heseltine: It may come as a severe disappointment to the hon. Gentleman to learn that we went to a great deal of trouble to give proper warning to those involved at the peace camp. The chief constable involved, using words which were designed to ensure that the campers were given the chance to go of their own free will, made it clear that coaches were available to take women and children, that welfare services would be available, in conjunction with the Cambridgeshire county council, and that no pressure to move would be put on until the morning. I believe that he went as far as could seriously have been expected in all the circumstances. Great attention was paid to ensure that that message was delivered to the people occupying the land.

The hon. Gentleman repeats parrot cries about the Pentagon which suit the convenience of his prejudices. It will come as a disappointment to him to hear that I did not discuss the plans of last night either with the Pentagon or with General Rogers, and I have no reason to suppose that they were aware of them in time for them to make any impact whatever on them. The hon. Gentleman talks about persuasion, presumably thinking that we should try to persuade tiny and and unrepresentative groups. We believe that the real challenge of persuasion is to persuade the British electorate to give us a mandate to carry through certain policies.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that a further statement follows this debate before quite a heavy day. I ask for shorter supplementary questions, which will lead to shorter answers.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the vicinity of the great air bases in my constituency, where by far the largest number of American aircraft and personnel are located, the most popular sign in the windows of the houses of the ordinary people who live nearby is not "Yanks go home" but "No peace camps here"? My right hon. Friend's action has been a clear response to the wishes of the vast majority of ordinary people who have the experience of living alongside the American camps and the peace camps and who have no doubt that they prefer the Americans.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend puts more eloquently than I can the deep conviction that exists on this matter. Any Government since the war could have asked the Americans to go. They did not, because they knew that we gained immeasurably from the American presence.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that what happened at Molesworth last night will be seen by people as nothing more than an irrational operation that is part of an irrational policy of having first strike nuclear weapons on this soil? Is the right hon. Gentleman telling the House that the question of law and order is for the Minister of Defence and not for the law courts?

Mr. Heseltine: The answer to the first question is no. The answer to the second question is also no.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): In the interests of lowering the risks of confrontation between the demonstrators and the military, will my right hon. Friend urge my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to bring forward at the earliest possible opportunity the implementation of section 25 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984? I believe that this measure would be widely welcomed by the local constabularies involved.

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand if I say that I shall ensure that his views are drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): The Secretary of State has clearly failed to note that the majority of people have, in opinion poll after opinion poll, spoken against cruise missiles. Has the right hon. Gentleman recognised that point? Will he recognise that the majority of thinking people will see the action last night as crass insensitivity at a time when the Geneva talks are continuing? Will the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the majority of people who have protested peacefully and non-violently at Greenham common and elsewhere are doing the only thing they can to show the Government that they wholly oppose the deployment of nuclear weapons?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Lady is completely wrong. Those people could have stood for election in the constituencies, where the people express a proper democratic view. Many of them stood for election and failed. A large number of them sit on the Opposition Benches, and that is why they were humiliated in the last election.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): Amid all this mock furore from the loony Left, will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to remind the House of the real success of last night's operation? The real success is the fact that we have revealed again the determination which NATO, with Britain leading, has shown in bringing the Russians to the conference table to discuss disarmament. That is the real success of last night.

Mrs. Clwyd: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take the point of order after the Minister's answer.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) strikes at the core of the matter. Those who were against the deployment of cruise missiles told us that, if we proceeded, the Russians would not negotiate about arms control. Now that the Russians have come back to negotiate about arms control, those people tell us that, if we continue, the Russians will not negotiate about arms control. Our view is diametrically the opposite—the firmer our deterrent, the more likely it is that the talks will be successful.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Rogers: Am I allowed to state my point of order, or am I being challenged, Mr. Speaker? —*[Interruption.]* I know that Conservative Members do not have any belief in democracy, so I shall forget all about them. My point of order is——

Mrs. Clwyd: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rogers: My point of order is—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am trying to help the hon. Member. It might be best if I took the point of order later.

Mr. Rogers: I am trying to control my feelings, Mr. Speaker. I felt that, when I rose to make a legitimate point of order, you were challenging my right to make a point of order. I respect your independence. In that respect, I must admit that I was concerned about the way in which you asked me about the point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member should come to the point.

Mr. Rogers: I shall, Mr. Speaker. As previous Speakers have ruled that it would be wrong for Opposition Members to refer to Conservative Members—whether it is right or wrong—as Fascists or neo-Fascists, is it proper for an hon. Member to refer to other hon. Members who have spoken during this debate as the loony Left?

Mr. Speaker: It might be thought to be a term of endearment.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State accept that one of the most important outcomes of his action yesterday was the reinforcement of the right of the majority to be heard? Is it not time that the minorities were told—as my right hon. Friend has done on this occasion —that the majority's views must be understood and that their lives should not be continually allowed to be made a misery by these loony people who feel that they have a right to run into the ground the lives of everyone else?

Mr. Heseltine: I do not think that I should adopt the use of the word "loony" as its use appears to be rather sensitive in certain sections of the House. I believe that it is necessary for the parliamentary democratic process to be upheld. That is why we argue in elections, and when we win elections we carry through policies precisely as my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) that I was not seeking to get a cheap laugh at his expense. I believe that we should seek not to raise the temperature of hon. Members through anything we say in the Chamber. Although I do not think that "loony" is a very unparliamentary word, let us avoid its use this afternoon. Mr. Tam Dalyell. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In view of the comment I heard made by a Conservative Member, I point out that I hope that matters of sub judice and privilege will be referred to in the proper way after a certain case is concluded. The remark was quite audible.

On what date was the Prime Minister consulted about this operation, or was it her idea?

Mr. Heseltine: I took the original decision in November. We began planning procedures within my Department. I informed my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister of my plans some considerable time after that, when I believed that the plans could be fully implemented.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the moves at Molesworth last night were moves not against peaceful demonstrators but against those people who, when they decide to demonstrate, reserve unto themselves the right to break the law, be it civil or criminal? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is immensely sad to note that not one single voice will be raised this afternoon from within a party which still has some pretensions to office to praise the fact that the rule of law has been upheld?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend has come to the centre of one of the most depressing features of this Opposition. There was a time when there was a consensus about the maintenance of law and order, but the Labour party seems to be incapable of ever standing up for the rights of the majority or, in fact, for the maintenance of law and order.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Is the Secretary of State aware that the Opposition are for the defence of Britain and that they believe, along with the vast majority of people—as expressed through opinion polls—that the deployment of cruise missiles will make Britain a more dangerous place in which to live? Is the Secretary of State aware that the people of Britain will contrast very much the building by the Ministry of a 7½ mile long 7 ft high fence of barbed wire with the building by the peace people of a school and a church, which was dedicated by the Bishop of Huntingdon, and the sending to Ethiopia of 20 tonnes of wheat grown by them on that site?

Mr. Heseltine: The British people will understand that if we had not put a fence around that land, the Ministry of Defence land would have been occupied by increasingly large numbers of people determined to act illegally.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Has my right hon. Friend thought about the strange anomaly of the enthusiasm of Opposition Members for opinion polls? May we expect an opinion poll on capital punishment to be as highly regarded by the Labour party? Following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), would it not be right and proper to recognise that the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), who speaks for the Social Democratic party and presumably for his Liberal allies, did not share the ridiculous view held by Her Majesty's loyal Opposition towards the maintenance of law and order? May I ask that the word loyal be put in inverted commas in *Hansard*?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes a critical point. If the Labour party had its policies tested by opinion poll, it would virtually never secure a majority on any one of them. It cannot secure a majority in any circumstances.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Secretary of State accept that last night's jackboot-method attack on the peace camp at Molesworth is but another example of the paranoia and increasing brutality of the Government's policy of foisting nuclear weapons on an unwilling population? What steps is he taking to inform the people of Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and the surrounding districts of the increased danger to their livelihoods of a nuclear explosion because of the presence of nuclear weapons on that site? How many of the people living near to the camp could expect to survive a nuclear attack or the explosion of a cruise missile?

Mr. Heseltine: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I would rather tell the truth. That will perhaps be rather more attractive to the citizens of Huntingdonshire who, I think, know as well as I do that the decision to modernise NATO intermediate nuclear weapons was taken in April 1979 by the Labour party then in government.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Does not last night's massive use of force demonstrate that the Government are hellbent on the further deployment of cruise missiles, which will be American-owned, controlled and operated? Surely he recognises that further deployment in Europe must damage prospects of progress in the forthcoming United States-Soviet talks on nuclear disarmament?

Mr. Heseltine: I have answered that question. There is no truth in it, and that is why the Soviet Union is back at the negotiating table. This Government are broadly pursuing policies pursued by every Labour Government since the war.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): We have had some splendid revelations today. It took a three-month planning exercise for the Secretary of State to go down in history as the victor of Molesworth common. More British troops were used against 100 British peace campaigners and Quakers at Molesworth common than were used against the Argentines at Goose green. That is the extent of Secretary of State's victory today. If ever a nut used a sledge hammer, it was the Secretary of State on this occasion. Is the Secretary of State aware that with the Geneva talks about to take place, many people throughout the world and in this country believe that we should not be going ahead with any preparations for further deployment of cruise, but that there should be a complete freeze on any deployment until we know the outcome of those talks? When the Labour party is on the Government Benches—*[Interruption.]*—it will not be long—it will be our policy to rid these islands of cruise, other nuclear weapons and nuclear bases.

Mr. Heseltine: I suppose that it is too much to expect the hon. Gentleman to report accurately what the House has been told. The only people who had contact with the demonstrators were members of the civil or Ministry of Defence police. The Royal Engineers were used to build the fence. To the best of my knowledge—I shall correct this if it is wrong—when I was on the site at about 11 o'clock, no force had been used in connection with moving any demonstrators because they had gone peacefully. One of the reasons why they had gone peacefully was that it was apparent that there was no purpose in them doing anything other than that. If there had been an inadequate presence on that site, they would then have been tempted to resort to the tactics that they had told us they would use — to call up more demonstrators from all over the country. The hon. Gentleman tells us that when the Labour party is in power it will pursue a whole range of non-nuclear policies. He fails to understand that it is because of that threat that it is not in power.

Local Government (Practices and Procedures)

4.45 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement.

In the debate on the Address on 7 November I said that I intended to set up an inquiry into various practices and procedures in local government. Following discussions with the Opposition parties and the local authority associations, I am now in a position to give further information to the House.

The terms of reference for the inquiry will be as follows:

To inquire into practices and procedures governing the conduct of local authority business in Great Britain, with particular reference to:

a. the rights and responsibilities of elected members;

b. the respective roles of elected members and officers; and

c. the need to clarify the limits and conditions governing discretionary spending by local authorities

and to make any necessary recommendations for strengthening the democratic process.

Within those terms of reference I am inviting the committee to pay particular attention to the following issues:

ensuring proper accountability for decision-taking to elected members and to the electorate generally; and examining possible ways of strengthening local democracy within the existing structure of local government;

clarifying the status and role of party groups in decision-taking;

ensuring the proper participation and accountability of individual elected members in the decision-taking process;

examining any problems of propriety which may arise from members' conflicts of interest, particularly where officers of one council serve as councillors of another;

considering the merits of the development of full-time councillors; and the related issues of the use of members' allowances and the remuneration of councillors generally;

reviewing the system of co-option of non-elected members;

studying officers' relationships, particularly in view of their legal and professional obligations, with elected members and political groups;

clarifying the limits and conditions governing discretionary spending, including the use of sections 137 and 142 of the Local Government Act 1972, and sections 83 and 88 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, for political purposes in local government, or in relation to bodies set up, and largely financed, by local authorities.

Local government franchise, finance and structure will be outside the terms of reference.

In view of the growing public concern about the use made by some local authorities of their discretionary powers to engage in overt political campaigning at public expense, I am asking the committee to submit an early interim report on this question. As far as the report as a whole is concerned, I am asking the committee to aim to report within a year.

It is essential that the inquiry should be both impartial and effective in dealing with these difficult issues. The best way to achieve this is to establish a small committee of people of judgment and ability, headed by a chairman of known integrity. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales and I therefore propse to appoint a committee of four or five members chosen for the personal contribution which each can make to the wide-ranging subject matter of the inquiry.

I am glad to inform the House that Mr. David Widdicombe, QC, has indicated to me that he would be prepared to accept appointment as chairman of the committee of inquiry. Further appointments to the committee, of which I shall advise the House, will be made shortly.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The Secretary of State has just made a very important statement about local government, which plays a crucial role in our plural democratic society. It is important that the matters that he intends to have examined are examined as objectively and impartially as possible. I welcome the fact not only that the right hon. Gentleman consulted Opposition parties, but that he has placed particular emphasis on the need for impartial approaches on these very sensitive matters.

I should like to ask the right hon. Gentleman several questions, arising not so much from the terms of reference, which my hon. Friends and I believe to be broadly satisfactory—I understand that that is the view of the local authority associations, too—but from some of the points of detail that he spelt out in the statement. Why did he refer only to conflicts of interest in respect of officers who seek to be elected to councils? There are other conflicts of interest in local government at present and they, too, must be examined, particularly when they involve business and commercial interests.

I hope that in taking account of those matters and appointing members to the inquiry the right hon. Gentleman will ensure that the interests of women in local government are represented on the committee of inquiry——

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Why?

Dr. Cunningham: If the stupid exclamation by the hon. Gentleman is anything to go by, I had better spell out what I think. We very much hope that one of the members of the committee of inquiry will be a woman.

Why does the Secretary of State feel it necessary to have the interim report, especially in view of the time scale? I ask him to assure the House that, if he feels that he must proceed with that—we would prefer him not to — the many more fundamentally important issues involved in his statement will not suffer as a result, and the role and functions of councillors, for example, the legal rights and obligations of officers and the work of local authorities, will not be squeezed out by over-emphasis on the voluntary expenditure of local authorities, the discretionary use of sections 137 and 142. I remind the Secretary of State and the House that when those matters have been tested in the courts, the councils have always

been exonerated in their use of such money, perhaps with one exception, which is still sub judice and on which I shall not comment.

I believe that many people involved in local authorities of all political persuasions, whether councillors or officials, will welcome the right hon. Gentleman's assurance that those matters are to be examined, as he described, in an impartial way. If that particularly important aspect of his statement is not adhered to, it is unlikely that there will be a successful outcome.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's ready welcome for the inquiry. He said in his speech on the Loyal Address that that was the line he would be likely to take if he were satisfied about impartiality. I think that he has shown that he is.

I shall take the hon. Gentleman's final point first. I was gratefully reassured by my consultations with all the local authority associations. They welcome the inquiry and are fully prepared to co-operate with it. That is a very important matter. The hon. Gentleman also asked some detailed questions, one of which was about the conflicts of business interests. They were examined by the Redcliffe-Maud report, but they are comprehended within the phrase that I used about the individual accountability of councillors. I take note of what the hon. Gentleman said about the desirability of having a woman on the committee. I hope that the decision will be made shortly, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to wait until then.

With regard to the interim report, the hon. Gentleman must recognise that there is and has been rapidly mounting public concern over the misuse by some local authorities of their discretionary spending powers at the same time as——

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State is speaking about an impartial inquiry, yet referred to the misuse of public funds. That must prejudice the impartiality of any inquiry.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State must take responsibility for what he says, but he was asked a long question and he is now having to answer it.

Mr. Jenkin: Many people regard it as a misuse of public funds. I am prepared to accept that. It is because there are complex legal and political issues that I thought it right to refer the matter to the impartial inquiry. Legal cases demonstrate the complexity of the issues. That is why it is right to ask for an urgent interim report. However, I give the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) the assurance that that will in no way detract from the work of the committee, and I hope that it will report within a year.

The hon. Gentleman is not right to say that none of those matters has yet been resolved. The case of City of Westminster against the Inner London education authority was decided in the High Court. I understand that ILEA has now dropped the idea of appeal, so that judgment stands. However, the Greater London council case is being appealed. I hope very much that all those concerned with the wellbeing of local government will think it right to respond in due course if the committee decides to call for evidence that would be helpful to its members in reaching their conclusion.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, which some of us feel has long been due. Will the inquiry examine the problem whereby a local authority can give itself planning permission, thus sitting as judge and jury in its own court? It is a long-term problem, sometimes discharged honourably and sometimes not, and it exercises many people.

Mr. Jenkin: I should like to look at what my hon. Friend said. I had not thought of that problem as being within the purview of the committee, except in so far as it might reflect upon the propriety of the decision and the manner in which it is reached. The question of the details of planning law should be examined in another context.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On behalf of my party, I join in welcoming the inquiry, the chairman as named and the Secretary of State's courtesy in fulfilling his obligation to consult spokesmen in Opposition parties about the terms of reference and appointments. I endorse the view that for practical reasons a woman on the committee of inquiry would be a good idea. There are women serving in local government, and they have particular needs. They should be taken into account for all sorts of reasons.

This is an important point. I hope that the Secretary of State accepts that consideration on conflicts of interest should be as wide as possible. All sorts of interests should be considered. I have one substantial regret, that the question of the franchise has been excluded. The Secretary of State's former PPS, the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton), shares the view of many hon. Members that proportional representation in local government is the best safeguard against abuse by tyrant majorities — not elected majorities, but majorities of councillors — who are tempted through the grey area into indiscretion and malpractice. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and others in Liverpool and elsewhere know full well the implications of such views. Proportional representation in local government, as Bradford demonstrates, would be a much healthier form of local government.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have again just heard reference to something that has appeared in the newspapers — allegations made in relation to people in Liverpool which have not been substantiated. No charges or court cases are pending against anybody. Under the circumstances, is it right that hon. Members should raise such matters in that way when we are discussing setting up an inquiry commission into local government?

Mr. Speaker: I must say again that I cannot be responsible for what hon. Members say in this place. If the hon. Gentleman seeks to put a question about his constituency I shall do my best to accommodate him.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the committee and for the advice that he gave when I consulted him. It would be inappropriate for the question of the franchise to be referred to such a committee. I understand his views but that matter must be for another occasion.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement of an inquiry, but will he act now and act quickly against those authorities, whose actions are nothing less than corrupt, which are allowing extremists in their midst to soak the ratepayers to fund

[Mr. Michael Forsyth]

miners, women's committees and every other trendy cause? To give one example, Fife region has spent more than £1 million on funding striking miners. Will my right hon. Friend accept that we welcome a detailed look but we want action against political contributions?

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We cannot have questions following statements peppered with points of order. I shall call the hon. Gentleman to put his question and perhaps he will include his point of order in it.

Mr. Ewing: I know that you are fed up, Mr. Speaker, but I have an important point of order. You have just given a ruling to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) about what Members say in the House and their being responsible. Is it in order for hon. Members to use the privilege of the House to make statements about councillors being corrupt? The hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) is using the House to describe councillors as corrupt when he simply does not have the courage to go outside and make the same statement. He knows that those statements are simply untrue.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us keep moderation in our language. It would be completely out of order to impugn the integrity of any hon. Member in the House and we should be extremely careful about what we say about those outside because they have no right of reply.

Mr. Jenkin: I am well aware of the strong feelings expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) and many people outside the House about some of the payments that have been made by local authorities. They raise complex questions of law and propriety. It would be wise for the House and the Government, before reaching a conclusion on this, to have the impartial advice of a group of men, and perhaps women, of integrity on those difficult matters.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will my right hon. Friend accept that my constituency and Teesside as a whole will welcome his announcement, particularly, I imagine, lifelong Labour councillors, who hope that the committee will look into some of the practices on selection and deselection which are taking place in that area at the moment? In particular, I hope that my right hon. Friend will include in the report the activities of Middlesbrough councillors who are able to claim attendance allowances for themselves for so-called surgeries held in their own front room any evening of the week while they are watching television.

Mr. Jenkin: Members' allowances are well within the terms of reference of the inquiry but I have to disappoint my hon. Friend because I doubt whether the activities of local Labour parties in choosing their candidates will be.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that he is not proceeding with this inquiry on the presumption that anyone who is mentioned by his hon. Friends is guilty of some sort of corruption? How will the committee go about taking evidence and who will be allowed to give it? As it is clear that some of the matters to be discussed are matters of opinion and judgment rather than simple legality, will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that all the evidence provided to the committee of inquiry will be published in full? As the inquiry has obviously been in the right hon. Gentleman's mind for some time, why has he given only the name of the chairman of the inquiry? How shall we be consulted, for example, about who will be the impartial member nominated to represent Scottish interests?

Mr. Jenkin: I have made no assumptions whatever about any activities that may have been referred to in the House during the course of the statement, or outside, where many hon. Members are aware that there has been growing disquiet about a number of activities that have become apparent in local government. That is why we are having the inquiry. It will be for the committee to decide whether and how to call for evidence but the committee is not empowered to compel witnesses to appear. It will be for the committee to decide whether any evidence given to it is published or given in confidence. The hon. Gentleman may make his own inquiries, but there may be a number of people, perhaps serving council officers, who would like to feel that any evidence or help that they may be able to give to the committee would be treated as confidential. But it will be for the committee to decide how to conduct its affairs.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): Is my right hon. Friend aware how welcome the inquiry will be in High Peak and in Derbyshire as a whole? Will he ensure that the inquiry investigates the decision of Derbyshire county council to force schools to overprint school stationery with anti-nuclear slogans?

Mr. Jenkin: That would be a perfectly good piece of evidence on which to seek to apply to the committee.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The Minister is prejudging the matter.

Mr. Jenkin: I am not prejudging anything at all. I am merely saying that it is a matter on which it will be appropriate to give evidence to the committee.

Mr. Banks: Is the Minister aware that the reason local authorities and the GLC decided this morning to submit evidence to the inquiry is that local government has nothing whatever to hide, which is more than one can say for the Government. This will not be an impartial inquiry in that sense because the Government have already had their mind made up for them by their Back Benchers, as we have seen this afternoon. Will the terms of reference of the inquiry extend to the influence of freemasonry in local government, which we consider to be insidious and dangerous? Will the Secretary of State be accepting nominees for the membership of the committee of inquiry from the local authority associations?

Mr. Jenkin: The question of evidence of outside influences on members would, I should have thought, be germane to the question of the independence and accountability of members of local authorities. I have no doubt that, if there is an opportunity and the hon. Gentleman wishes to present evidence on freemasonry, the committee will welcome that. I consulted all the local authority associations, including the Association of London Authorities and the GLC, and I found unanimity for the view that it would be better not to have any serving councillor or serving officer of any existing local authority

on the committee. In considering the membership I shall take close account of that advice. The hon. Gentleman must await the announcement of the further members.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): My right hon. Friend's statement is welcome, particularly for people in the metropolitan counties such as west Yorkshire and Leeds, where we are already well on the way to seeing £1 million spent in political propaganda. Will he reassure people in those areas that the interim report will be speedy and that it will be the prime and sole concern of the committee initially and not just part of its general examination of all the other issues as well? We do not want to feel that my right hon. Friend is fudging the issue or that the committee will simply identify abuses. Can he assure us that the committee will produce positive recommendations upon which he will act? People in Leeds and west Yorkshire know that there is abuse.

Mr. Jenkin: It is my intention to ask for an urgent interim report. I assume that the committee will do its very best to fall in with my request. No doubt the committee will receive much evidence on these matters and will wish to take account of it—including evidence of the strength of many people's feelings on the issue.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): To demand from the committee an interim report on one narrow party political point will not help it to stand a chance of being accepted as impartial. Would it not have been better to allow the members of the committee to decide which issues they wished to tackle in an interim report? Secondly, if there is to be an interim report, could it not consider the problems of those many councillors who, as a result of the economic policies of the Government, have been made redundant after giving long service to local government and now find it extremely difficult to receive sympathetic treatment in relation to social security and unemployment benefit because of their duties as councillors? Would not that be a better topic for the interim report than the narrow party political issue that the right hon. Gentleman has dragged in?

Mr. Jenkin: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. There has been a general welcome both inside and outside the House for my intention to ask the committee to study a matter that is the cause of widespread public concern. No doubt the other matter could be tackled in connection with the question of the remuneration of councillors.

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): Contrary to what was alleged, my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) has already widely published a pamphlet listing in detail the abuses to which he has just referred in brief summary. Is my right hon. Friend also aware that the representatives of about 95 per cent. of my constituents will warmly welcome his announcement? Their only anxiety will be to know how long it will be before the abuses about which they are concerned are brought to light by the committee. Can anything be done in the worst cases? Well over £1 million has already been spent by Fife regional council in helping people with jobs to stay on strike, and many unemployed people and pensioners in my constituency feel bitterly that their rates are being abused without discussion or vote in the regional council.

Mr. Jenkin: Those problems fall squarely within the terms of reference of the committee. It would be right to leave them to the committee. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall ask for an urgent interim report.

Mr. Ewing: Can the right hon. Gentleman give us an assurance in relation to the spending referred to under section 88 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act? Can he assure us that the purpose of the inquiry is not to stop such spending altogether but to define the parameters within which it may take place? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is an equal possibility that the inquiry might agree on wider rather than narrower parameters?

Mr. Jenkin: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no intention to ask the committee to consider the abolition of that section. Whether it should be redrafted to resemble the corresponding English section is a matter on which we should await the committee's advice.

Sir John Osborne (Sheffield, Hallam): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the education committee chairman in Sheffield has written to school governors and chairmen of governors, and has embarked on a publicity campaign directed at parents, blaming the Secretary of State for Education for failures in the education system? Would that be a suitable subject for investigation by the Committee?

Mr. Jenkin: The gentleman would be perfectly entitled to express his view as a private citizen, but perhaps he would not be entitled to spend ratepayers' money on so doing. That is the issue that is causing concern and on which the committee will be asked to judge.

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Surely the clue to the real purpose of the inquiry lies in the innuendos of the Secretary of State, Conservative Members and the whingeing Liberals? The inquiry is part and parcel of an attack on Labour-controlled authorities, prompted by the campaign that is to ensue in the coming months. Is not the Government's intention to mask the successes in Liverpool, where 200 jobs have been created and 2,268 council houses will have been built by May, while the Government and big business have done nothing? Should we not borrow a doctrine from the British Boxing Board of Control, which would diagnose the Secretary of State as being punch-drunk from last year's hiding and in no condition to take on Liverpool and other areas this year?

Mr. Jenkin: I am afraid that the affairs of the British Boxing Board of Control will not fall within the terms of the inquiry.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who served in local government before we came to this place are reassured by the setting-up of the committee? One of the fears engendered by our experience was that there was plenty of evidence that public money was spent on a basis of political partiality. If local government has nothing to hide, it has nothing to fear, and one can expect widespread submissions to the committee from every quarter.

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. and learned Friend's proposition was also put very firmly by all the local authority associations. I found that most reassuring. These matters could very properly be subjects for the inquiry.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): We have witnessed the jackboot methods of the Ministry of Defence in the

[Dr. John Marek]

previous statement. If the Secretary of State for the Environment is to avoid the same charge, can he assure us that the composition of the committee will be truly impartial and generally acceptable to both sides of the House? Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to pay tribute to the thousands of councillors of both parties throughout the country who give sincere and loyal service well beyond any recompense in terms of expenses and allowances? If the Secretary of State is worried about democracy and about proper financial accounting, surely he should set up an inquiry into the workings of central rather than local government.

Mr. Jenkin: I am entirely at one with the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the many councillors who give loyal service far beyond the call of duty. It is a matter of public record that the proposed chairman of the inquiry, Mr. David Widdicombe, stood as a Labour candidate for the constituency of Totnes in his youth. He has authorised me to say that he is not now a member of any political party. I shall certainly keep the questions of impartiality and balance in mind when appointing the other members.

The hon. Gentleman's last question is not relevant except in so far as it bears upon the conduct of business by local authorities.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. Is he aware that it will be especially welcome to my constituents in Newcastle upon Tyne, who have laboured under the spending abuses of both Tyne and Wear county council and the Newcastle city council? Would it not be appropriate for the inquiry to take evidence connected with the donation of more than £300,000 by the county council in support of the miners' dispute and a similar donation by the Newcastle city council, the operation of the Newcastle city council priority area teams in spending large sums of money on political propaganda, and the noted increase in the past year in spending allowances for members of Tyne and Wear county council?

Mr. Jenkin: All those matters seem to be proper subjects for evidence to the committee. The interim report will be confined to the question of the use of local authority powers to spend ratepayers' money on political propaganda. Many of the other matters suggested by hon. Members on both sides of the House will fall entirely within the committee's terms of reference but would not be subjects for the interim report.

Mr. Hugh Brown (Glasgow, Provan): The Secretary of State has made a very important statement. I make no complaint about the fact that there was no similar statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland. I know that the right hon. Gentleman is here, and I accept the convention, but it is never satisfactory.

What consultations have there been with Scottish interests? The Secretary of State was asked whether the committee would have a Scottish member. Would it not have been better to set up a sub-committee or a separate committee if, in the opinion of the Secretary of State for Scotland, there is a need for such an inquiry?

Mr. Jenkin: I assure the hon. Gentleman that there was full consultation with COSLA by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. I understand that COSLA is satisfied with the proposed terms of reference. It is within our contemplation that a distinguished Scot might be asked to serve as a member of the committee.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Will the terms of reference permit the committee to consider the practice of local authorities that use pre-tender conditions and contract clauses to impose political views? I refer to councils that have barred from their tender lists contractors who have carried out operations at Greenham common and other military installations. Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to study Dr. Goodison-Wicke's book entitled "The New Corruption" which charts the enormous growth of such activities in local government? Will all of those issues be considered by the committee?

Mr. Jenkin: Contract conditions are specialised matters and hardly bear on the conduct of council business. I do not think that that would be within the terms of reference. However, it will always be open to anyone to make a suggestion as to how the terms of reference should be widened. Dr. Goodison-Wickes' pamphlet has been read widely in local government. Although it presents a particular view of the problem, it shows some of the grounds for concern that many right hon. Members have expressed.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): In view of the Government's record of attacks on local government in the past five years and in view of the outrageous statements that Conservative Members have made today, is the Secretary of State beginning to form the opinion that the inquiry can be regarded as impartial only if he ensures that not one member of it has anything to do with the Conservative party?

Mr. Jenkin: I suspect that that might be difficult to achieve but I intend to ensure that the members of the committee are recognised for their impartiality and integrity. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman. The questions that have been put to me at the Dispatch Box today have served only to reinforce the wisdom of referring these issues to a committee of this type.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Is my right hon. Friend aware that West Yorkshire metropolitan county council, through its leader, recently issued a secret memorandum exclusively to Labour councillors asking them to suggest up to £50,000-worth of spending on road programmes in their wards? Does he agree that that is a legitimate cause for anxiety among many people who regard it as an erosion of the traditional values of local government? Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the terms of reference of the inquiry will be sufficiently wide to enable it to consider this and similar cases?

Mr. Jenkin: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance for which he asks.

Mr. Guy Barnett (Greenwich): The Secretary of State will be aware that, for years, the responsibility borne and the business carried out by leaders and chairmen of committees has grown. Will the committee be competent to re-examine the proposals that were made by the Robinson committee on the possibility of paying leaders and chairmen of committees in view of the substantial responsibilities that some of them now have?

Mr. Jenkin: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Perhaps my right hon. Friend could meet at least two of the Opposition's requests by appointing a Scottish woman. That would kill two birds, as it were, with one stone. My right hon. Friend has said that franchise, finance and structure will not be considered by the committee. Structure is being dealt with differently, but can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government are dealing with the financing of local government urgently? Can he also confirm that any recommendations that arise from the investigation into the financing of local government will appear before, or at least at the same time as, the recommendations of the committee of inquiry, so that the matter might be dealt with comprehensively?

Mr. Jenkin: I assure my hon. Friend that I have nothing but respect for Scottish women, as my mother was one. I also assure my hon. Friend that the finance study that I have asked my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to undertake are well under way, but it will be some months before we shall be able to embark on public consultation. I see no overriding need for the work of the committee and those studies to proceed in tandem. They are addressed to important but different matters. However, I take my hon. Friend's point.

Mr David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I especially welcome what the Secretary of State said about protecting people who give information from vindictive retaliatory action. Will he consider two issues that arise out of his decision yesterday to reject the Asda hypermarket application, which the police have announced today that they will investigate? Will he ensure that the committee investigates that matter? Secondly——

Mr. Terry Fields: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Alton: Will the Secretary of State examine issues raised by the "jobs for the boys" policy that is being pursued by councils such as Liverpool, in which political placemen are put in positions of power purely because their political faces fit?

Mr. Terry Fields: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot make a point of order just because another hon. Member has made a provocative statement.

Mr. Terry Fields: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take the point of order after the Secretary of State's answer.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Some of them are crooks.

Mr. Jenkin: The matter that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) has raised would be quite inappropriate for referral to the committee now. The appointment to councils of paid officials with party affiliations is a matter that the committee could consider, but I would not wish to argue that it would necessarily be appropriate. Many of the changes in the conduct of local authority business reflect fundamental changes in the nature of the business that is done and the nature of the societies in which councils operate. Far be it from me to suggest, by referring many of these issues to the committee, that the changes are necessarily wrong. On the contrary, it might well be that the law could catch up with the way in which many councils wish to conduct their business. In those circumstances, it is right that democratic freedoms, the rights of oppositions and fundamental freedoms should be preserved.

Mr. Terry Fields: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I must object most strongly to the language of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). Such language is part and parcel of early-day motion 353 in which the hon. Gentleman impugns the integrity and honesty of people outside who are in no position to defend themselves. The hon. Gentleman talked about "jobs for the boys". We are creating jobs for the boys and girls of Liverpool, which he and his crowd cannot do.

Mr. Speaker: Every hon. Member must take responsibility for what he says in the Chamber. I cannot repeat that too frequently.

Mr. Heffer: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have been in the House for 21 years now, and important points of order of this type have always been listened to with care by Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) referred to certain people as crooks. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) said that the police are investigating an event in Liverpool. Is it not clear that when the police are investigating a matter it is not right for any hon. Member to make statements in the House impugning anyone who might be involved? It is certainly wrong for hon. Members to refer to people who might be involved, or who are being investigated, as crooks. Only after the investigations, legal action and a decision by the courts can such statements be made. On that basis, I trust that we shall not have any more of this, otherwise the hon. Members concerned should leave the House, make their statements publicly without privilege and face the consequences. I believe that they should withdraw their statements.

Mr. Alton: I leave it to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) to make his own statement to the House.

Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The early-day motion to which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) referred precedes the statement made by the Merseyside police this afternoon that they intend to investigate the matter. As far as the statements made in that early-day motion are concerned, the deputy leader of the Liverpool city council and a developer who wanted a £20 million development in Liverpool——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That has nothing to do with me. Let us seek moderation in our language in this place. That has always been our tradition. I never heard any accusation or use of the word "crook" referring to any hon. Member. If that happened, I would expect the hon. Member concerned—and I did not hear it—to withdraw the remark.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I made no mention of any hon. Member. I merely heard one Opposition Member refer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) as a rat, and while he has certain unattractive——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would not like that either.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): On the basis that every hon. Member should be opposed to

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

corruption wherever it occurs, would the Secretary of State talk to the Leader of the House and his Cabinet colleagues and suggest, as there is continuing disquiet about the behaviour of hon. Members and the behaviour of lobbying organisations that operate in the House, and, to a large extent, finance lunches and dinners in some of the dining rooms of the House, that while it is appropriate for there to be an inquiry into allegations of corruption and malpractice in local government, it would also be proper for the House to prove that, while endorsing the inquiry, we are not living in a glasshouse and throwing stones at other people?

Mr. Jenkin: It may be within the recollection of the hon. Gentleman that such a study of affairs in the House led to the setting up of the Register of Financial Interests to which most hon. Members contribute, even if it is only one way. Obviously this would be quite outside the terms of the inquiry.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Given the extent to which Conservative Members have been prepared this afternoon to throw cheap political jibes and to prejudge the issues, would the Secretary of State reconsider his earlier comment that evidence will be taken in private in certain cases? Surely, if evidence is taken in private, cheap allegations can be made against individual councillors and officers without those councillors and officers having the right to reply to such allegations. All that, I argue, will lead to a judgment on the part of the public and those involved in local government that, far from being an impartial inquiry, the inquiry is already predetermined to come up with one particular decision.

Mr. Jenkin: There is no suggestion that the inquiry is predetermined. As I made clear in what was, perhaps, a rather lengthy answer to the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, there is no presumption whatever that the existing statutory framework is necessarily the right one.

On the question of evidence in private, this must be a matter for the committee. It would not be improper for the committee, if it considered this necessary in order to protect witnesses who might be serving officers or who may have other roles, to be prepared to hear evidence in private. But, of course, the membership of the committee will be a sufficient talisman of its ability to distinguish between what it should take note of and what, if there is no possibility of challenging it, it might do better to ignore.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Is not the real purpose of the Minister's inquiry to try to prevent the use of sections 137 and 142 of the Local Government 1972 Act by councils such as Leicester which are suffering from the ugliest and highest levels of rate-capping, so that they will no longer be able to inform their electors as to the awful results of the Government's rate-capping legislation? When the Minister says that information is proper but political propaganda is not, is he not defining information as that which he and the Government put out and political propaganda as that which is put out in the same way by their opponents in the honourable traditions of Her Majesty's Opposition?

Mr. Jenkin: All I can say—and I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman has studied the recent judgment of Mr. Justice Glidewell—is that this is a distinction that is drawn in the interpretation of section 142. I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that this is by no means the central purpose of the committee's inquiry. The wide-ranging nature of the comments that have been made in all parts of the House indicates that the committee is, indeed, welcome and that it will have a wide range of issues to which to address itself. Indeed, I think that the members of the committee are in for a rather interesting time.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does not the Secretary of State accept that since 1979 he and his Government have pursued a vendetta against local government and, in particular, a vendetta against those authorities that have sought to use existing local government legislation to the full to try to ameliorate some of the social and economic conditions in which they are placed?

The statement that he has made this afternoon and the observations of his hon. Friends suggest to me and, I believe, to many people outside the House, that this is not an objective inquiry at all, but a form of attack on those local authorities that are trying to use existing local government legislation to the full.

Does the right hon. Gentleman not further accept that implicit in the terms of reference that he has announced this afternoon is an attempt to curtail local government democracy in the country? I refer him to the section in which he states that there will be an inquiry into the propriety of members of councils being employed by another council. Should he not be considering the difficulties and the lack of democracy suffered by many local authority workers who are denied the right to stand for election to a local authority or to participate in local authority affairs? Finally, has the right hon. Gentleman consulted any trade unions on the matter?

Mr. Jenkin: The purpose of the inquiry and the terms of reference of the inquiry in general were welcomed by the local authority associations of all political persuasions. One issue on which there was no argument by those associations is that it would be right for the committee to examine the growing practice of officers of one authority being councillors of another. The obvious conflicts of interest which could, but do not necessarily, arise are matters that, rightly, should be subjected to such an impartial inquiry.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Will not the Secretary of State accept that, despite his repeated assurances throughout the statement that it would be an impartial inquiry, the large majority of people who are interested in genuine local government, bearing in mind the Government's track record of the last six years, will view this as an attempt by the Government further to restrict local government? Would it not be far wiser to hold an inquiry into giving genuine freedom, power and finance to local government to meet the needs and requirements of the local communities who elect councillors?

Mr. Jenkin: There is no reason why the committe should not examine the giving of genuine freedom and power to local government. The only matter that I think it should not examine is local government finance, which is the subject of separate studies.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): Will the Secretary of State agree that often, during business in the

House, when Parliament considers local government in terms of its democracy, its accountability and its finance, the old proverb springs to mind, "Physician, heal thyself"? Would it not be useful, therefore, if we had that pinned up on the wall as a reminder to ourselves?

Mr. Jenkin: I think that I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. If the affairs of all local authorities were as open and accountable as are the affairs of any Government of whatever party to the House of Commons and to the electorate, there would be fewer grounds for the disquiet that has arisen and for the general welcome that the inquiry has received.

New Zealand (Nuclear Vessels)

5.39 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As I understand the position, it is not possible to table private notice questions relating to the policies of other Governments. I raise this point because many hon. Members are deeply concerned about the pressures that are being applied to a democratic Commonwealth country, namely, New Zealand, arising from its policy of using port facilities for nuclear vessels.

We have close ties with Commonwealth countries. There are items of furniture in this very Chamber given to us by New Zealand and other Commonwealth countries. Is there any way in which we can express our concern about the pressure being applied against New Zealand, especially by the United States? Could a message be debated and sent from this House?

Finally, as this concerns a Commonwealth country, will the Table Office be able to accept questions on it?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has more or less answered his own point of order. He is an experienced Member and there are many ways in which matters of this kind can be raised. There is, however, no ministerial responsibility for anything that the New Zealand Government may do.

People's Right to Fuel

5.40 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prevent disconnections of domestic fuel supply in cases of hardship; to implement a statutory code of practice for dealing with such cases; to introduce a fuel allowance scheme to help eradicate fuel poverty; and for related purposes.

This is my third attempt to introduce a Bill of this nature. I shall not dwell on the aspects of disconnection and threatened disconnection, save to say that last year the domestic fuel supply of 120,000 households was disconnected when most of the people involved were already suffering hardship. The Bill would make it an offence to carry out such disconnections without a court order. Those cases show that the present voluntary code is not working. The Bill therefore seeks to introduce a statutory code of practice.

I shall address most of my remarks today to the third aspect—the introduction of a comprehensive system of fuel allowances tied to housing benefit. Understandably, a great deal of public attention and controversy has recently centred on the DHSS regulations for payment of the severe weather extra heating allowance. Indeed, the controversy was such as to provoke the Minister for Social Security to come out with the Newtonian admission in the House that the regulations were "weird and wonderful". They are so weird and wonderful that people in the north and in Scotland, where the weather is coldest, are excluded from extra payments while people in the south and parts of the midlands where it is not so cold are included.

It is worth pointing out that the rules in question are internal to the DHSS and have never been approved by Parliament. If everyone is sitting comfortably, I shall explain just how weird and wonderful they are. If X is the 24-hour mean atmospheric temperature in degrees Celsius, subtract X from 15·5 for each day of the week, add up the seven answers and call the total Y. That gives the number of degree days. If Y is greater than or equal to Z, where Z is the DHSS trigger point, you get your money. If Y is less than Z, you do not get your money. Hands up all those who understand that. It seems that Members of Parliament find it impossible to understand. If Members of Parliament do not understand the formula themselves, they certainly have a brass neck expecting the public outside to understand or accept it.

When I taught mathematics I used to try to teach from examples rather than merely speaking in the abstract. I shall therefore give some examples of the way in which the trigger mechanism works. The trigger point varies from place to place. I have tried to obtain support for the Bill from both sides of the House, so I shall not seek to score party points by choosing one Labour and one Conservative area. Instead, I shall take my own constituency of Falkirk, West and compare it with that of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), a non-party leader who occasionally sits beside me. The trigger point for Falkirk is 122 degree days. For Plymouth where the climate is warmer it is only 105 degree days. In other words, if the temperature in Plymouth remained at half a degree above freezing point for a week the extra allowance would be paid. In Falkirk, it would have to remain at about 2 deg below freezing point all week for the extra allowance to be payable. The

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assumption seems to be that the people in Falkirk are thick skinned. In fact, they are very warm-hearted people, although that is no thanks to the Government's cold-hearted policies.

It may be argued that my example is hypothetical because temperature is not constant but varies from day to day and from one time of the day to another. In an area such as Falkirk the temperature at the coldest time of the day would probably have to fall as low as minus 25 deg Celsius before people qualified for the extra allowance. A further anomaly is that for the purpose of the allowance the temperature is measured not in Falkirk but at the meteorological station 45 miles away at Leuchars, where the weather could be quite different.

The Bill seeks to introduce a scheme based on climatic differences. I have broken my own tradition and sought all-party support. I normally just ask my hon. Friends. Last year the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) introduced a Bill covering just one aspect of this matter. My Bill is more comprehensive. The hon. Member for Dundee, East asked me to sponsor his Bill on that occasion and he has reciprocated by sponsoring my Bill.

I also invited the Leader of the House to sponsor the Bill, and he very kindly replied that he would consider my request, but he wrote to me recently saying that on second thoughts he had decided to turn down my invitation. I am sorry about that, as the Scottish Conservatives are reported to have passed a resolution last weekend demanding an end to the disparity that I have described. It is perhaps a measure of the lack of interest on the part of Scottish Tory Members that not one of them is present, although I invited several of them to sponsor the Bill. Indeed, I received what I thought was a sympathetic response from one of them. To save him embarrassment, I shall not give his name, but he once held very high rank, he is a well known lawyer, well respected in Scottish legal circles, and a close friend of the Prime Minister. He said that he would listen to my speech before making up his mind and then signal to me if he was prepared to sponsor the Bill. Unfortunately, he is not even here to listen to my speech.

The *Glasgow Herald* today reported that the Solicitor-General

"felt it extraordinary that while Braemar had been the the coldest place in Britain one night the 'trigger' point for payment had not been met because the temperature recording station was at Dyce, Aberdeen."

The report also states:

"Mr. Fraser, in his letter to Mrs. Thatcher, said that the present scheme could be so flawed it might have to be wholly reconsidered under the Department of Energy review."

As a member of the Government, he should have known that it is not the Department of Energy but the DHSS that is supposed to be reviewing the matter.

I have heard rumours that the Government intend to scrap the heating allowance altogether. That would be an absolute travesty of justice, not only for the people of Scotland, but for people in all parts of the United Kingdom. It would be better to introduce a comprehensive system of fuel allowances with a regional element based on climatic differences. I do not have time to go into the details of the scheme now, but under the terms of the Bill the detailed regulations would be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

At present hundreds of thousands of people are suffering from hypothermia, or the threat of it. Many of them are old-age pensioners. In some cases it would not be an exaggeration to say that they are not merely suffering but dying from hypothermia. Therefore, the House must respond to their needs constructively. My Bill is an attempt to introduce a comprehensive charter to eradicate fuel poverty, and I therefore ask the House to support it.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?

Mr. Canavan: Mr. Kevin Barron, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Gordon Brown, Mr. Robert Parry, Mr. David Winnick, Mr. William McKelvey, Mr. Gordon Wilson, Mr. Jim Craigen, Mr. Eddie Loyden, Mr. Bob McTaggart, and myself, and I have still space for one Tory Member, if he wants to signal me that he wants to sponsor my Bill.

PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO FUEL

Mr. Dennis Canavan accordingly presented a Bill to prevent disconnections of domestic fuel supply in cases of hardship; to implement a statutory code of practice for dealing with such cases; to introduce a fuel allowance scheme to help eradicate fuel poverty; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 76.]

Local Government (Rates)

5.52 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As the Chairman of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, the Committee asked me to express its concern at the unusual speed with which the order has been brought forward for debate today. I believe that it was laid in the House only last Wednesday, which has placed the Scrutiny Committee in considerable difficulties.

Under Standing Order No. 104(9) we are obliged to draw any instrument to the special attention of the House. If we want to do that we must afford the Government Department involved the opportunity first to furnish us with a written memorandum and, if necessary, to give oral evidence. You will appreciate that as the Government laid the order only on Wednesday, it is extremely difficult for us to scrutinise it, ask for witnesses, and oral or written evidence. I appreciate that under the Standing Orders of the House the Government are not required to ensure that an instrument has been to the Scrutiny Committee before it is brought to the House, but the custom and practice have always been to attempt to do that unless there is an extreme reason of urgency why they cannot give the Scrutiny Committee reasonable time to carry out its functions.

Can you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or Mr. Speaker, look into the matter to see whether it was urgent, what attempts the Government made to ensure that the Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to hear witnesses and to take written statements if it wanted, and why it was necessary to introduce it in such a way as to break the traditional convention that the Scrutiny Committee is given adequate time to consider an order? That is especially important in view of the controversial nature of much that is contained in the order.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I may be able to help the hon. Gentleman. I wish to preface my remarks by saying that the whole House appreciates the work done by the hon. Gentleman, as Chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, and those who serve with him. The House is indebted to them.

I am aware that some members of the Committee expressed concern about the timing of the debate after the meeting of the Joint Committee. The arrangement of business is a matter for agreement through the usual channels and subject to correction. I am not aware that the Opposition expressed concern about this issue. However, it is not unusual for important business to follow swiftly after Joint Committee consideration. I assure the hon. Gentleman that had the Joint Committee raised an important query about the validity of the draft order, business would have been rearranged. However, in this case the Committee had no doubts. Although the timing may be unusual, I do not think that it is in any way improper and, therefore, I think that the business may proceed.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It seemed unfortunate for the Secretary of State to imply that because I happen to be a member of the Opposition, I am a party to the business of the House regarding this matter. I raised the point as the Chairman of the Select Committee on behalf of all the members of that Committee. It must be the duty of the Whips on both sides of the House to ensure that traditional procedures are observed as far as possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I cannot help the hon. Gentleman very much on that. He has had the opportunity to put his case, it has been heard by the House, and there has been a further point of order from the Secretary of State. Both he and the right hon. Gentleman have dealt with the point. Their remarks were addressed more to the usual channels than to the Chair. The hon. Gentleman will realise that it is not possible for the Chair to assist him in this matter. However, he has had an opportunity to put his point on the record, and I am sure that it has been heard on both sides of the House.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) makes a valid point. He is not party to any agreement that is reached through official channels. Regardless of the fact that we cannot alter the position today, it would be appropriate that if in future there is a departure from normal conventions in relation to timing, at least the Chairman of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments should be informed and given an opportunity to consult his colleagues on whether they wish to make representations to the leaderships of both sides of the House. Will that be considered in future?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that the exchange has assisted the House. This is not a matter over which the Chair has any definitive authority.

5.58 pm

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I beg to move,

That the draft Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Precepts) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

The order is the first of two that will come before the House under section 4 of the Rates Act 1984. It is a stage in the rate-capping process, and the House is asked to approve the maximum rate or precept limits for each of the authorities selected for rate capping. This order covers the four precepting authorities, and my present intention is to table the order covering the rating authorities that have not agreed their limits in a few days. I certainly take note of the point you made, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the question of timing.

The House knows that the Government's case is that the purpose of rate capping is to protect ratepayers from the impact of high rates caused by high spending. All the authorities designated last July have budgeted this year to spend both more than 4 per cent. above their targets and more than 20 per cent. above their GREs. The order covers the Greater London council, the Inner London education authority, the Merseyside county council and the South Yorkshire county council. I shall say a word about each in turn.

The GLC has doubled its spending in three years. It has more than doubled its precept since the Socialists took control of county hall in 1981. It spends as if there were no tomorrow, and I suppose that for the GLC, there is no tomorrow. Its £10 million advertising campaign has become a national scandal. This year, it is recruiting 1,700 extra staff, and last week GLC councillors—I quote from *The Standard* of 1 February—were

[Mr. Patrick Jenkin]

"deluged with 125 separate spending plans together as thick as five telephone directories. Most had been delivered to their homes (at more expense no doubt) only the night before. Others were actually trundled in while the meeting was going on. Small wonder,"

writes *The Standard*,

"that even a Labour councillor complained that he had not had time even to look at the proposals and could not vote for them."

In the face of that evidence, how can the GLC argue that the precept limit in the order is impossible?

The Inner London education authority is unique, not only in its constitution but in its unrivalled extravagance as an education authority. During the past three years, its school population has fallen by 10 per cent., but its spending has increased by almost a third to more than £900 million. Compared with other authorities, ILEA now spends per pupil 29 per cent. more than Manchester, 31 per cent. more than Sheffield and 54 per cent. more than Bradford. Those familiar with Bradford will know that it has a large immigrant population.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the Secretary of State turn his mind to the Z scores of deprivation produced by his Department, which show that those who live in the Inner London education authority area are far more deprived than the populations of any other cities? Will he also confirm that Her Majesty's inspectors of schools have never substantially criticised the organisation, operation or standards of ILEA? Indeed, when a special survey of the authority was carried out by Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools, it endorsed the progress being made by that authority.

Mr. Jenkin: If the hon. Gentleman catches your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will be able to make those points. The fact is that ILEA's spending per pupil is extravagant compared with other inner-city areas that have high incidence of deprivation, large ethnic minority populations and many children whose mother tongue is not English.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that until ILEA was stopped by the court, it was spending no less than £750,000 on a blatant political advertising campaign. I wonder whether my hon. Friends who represent London constituencies noticed a recent advertisement in *The Guardian* for a personal assistant to the leader of ILEA? That person must have

"Political sensitivity and a supportive understanding of the objectives of the majority party (Labour)."

What will be the cost of this person's salary to be paid by inner London ratepayers? The answer is £17,598 a year.

Since 1978-79, Merseyside county council has increased its spending——

Mr. Guy Barnett (Greenwich) *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: I shall not give way. This is a short debate, and the hon. Gentleman may have an opportunity to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Merseyside county council has increased its spending by almost 150 per cent. since 1978-79. That is faster than any of the five Merseyside district councils, including Liverpool. It is the worst spending record of any of the six metropolitan counties. Its annual transport deficit is no less than £82 million, and during the past three years, Merseyside's precept has increased by more than 50 per cent. Yet Merseyside has decided to help to fund Liverpool's first novelist in residence. The council has just given a £1,500 grant to the makers of a record album attacking the police. The council gave its staff the day off with pay to strike against abolition—the strike did more to generate support for abolition than anything else the council had done.

South Yorkshire council has increased its spending since 1978-79 by 132 per cent., which is more than any of the four district councils in its area. Recently, it gave £100,000 to the miners. It has decided to put nuclear-free-zone signs on 21 primary routes through the county at a cost of £100 per sign. It subsidises public transport to the tune of no less than £73·5 million a year. Buses cost the passenger transport executive £1·92 per passenger mile, but the passengers pay less than a quarter of that sum. The hapless ratepayers must pay the difference.

Those are the councils which claim to be starved of money for their essentials, yet the examples that I have quoted show them to be wildly extravagant. Why should the hundreds of responsible councils suffer for the extravagance of the few? Many councils, Labour as well as Conservative, budget to stay within the guidelines, and those four should do the same.

Before I discuss the individual precept limits, I should remind the House of the stages in the process that have already happened. On 24 July last year, I listed the 18 authorities to be capped and announced their maximum expenditure levels. Under the Rates Act they could appeal against those expenditure limits and ask that they be increased. As the House knows, the Labour party's national executive committe decided on a policy which it described as "non-compliance". As a result, not one Labour-controlled authority availed itself of the appeal procedure. I extended the time and gave the clearest sign, both inside and outside the House, that the professed reasons for not appealing were misconceived. But still not one authority appealed——

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Including Portsmouth.

Mr. Jenkin: Portsmouth is now prepared to accept the rate limit that has been set and will budget within it.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): In view of what the Secretary of State said about redetermination, and especially his reference to Portsmouth, perhaps I could remind the House of what the Conservative leader of Portsmouth city council, Mr. Ian Gibson, said about applications for redetermination in the *Municipal Journal* of 3 August last year:

"The thing about redetermination is that it could come with strings attached that my council could not possibly accept."

"My council" is a Conservative council. That is the reality of redetermination.

Mr. Jenkin: The truth is that Portsmouth city council quickly came to the conclusion that it did not need to apply for redetermination. Councillor Gibson assured me the other day that the council will make a budget fully in line with, and conceivably below, the rate limit that has been set.

On 11 December, I announced the rate support grant settlement and, basing myself on those expenditure levels, I announced the rate and precept limits to the House. Again, the Rates Act provides a right of appeal. Any authority that wishes to challenge its limit can come in and argue for a higher limit. None of the four precepting authorities named in the order has done so.

However, in recent months non-compliance has taken a curious form. Substantial quantities of paper arrived on the desks of my officials, through various routes, setting out, often in considerable detail, many of the facts and figures that those authorities wished me to consider in reaching decisions on their rate limits. Indeed, the information flowed in so thick and fast that when I met a deputation on Monday from 17 rate-capped and nine other Labour-controlled authorities, the pile of information on the table in front of me stood over six inches high. If that is non-compliance, so be it. Around that table were sitting some of the real non-compliers, who had put in no information because they had followed the national executive committee's instruction. I gained the impression that they felt a little let down by what their colleagues had done.

That brings me to the individual precept limits set out in the schedule to the order. The GLC's precept limit of 36·52p is what I proposed on 11 December. It corresponds to a spend of about £785 million, assuming a modest drawdown of balances. Compared with the GLC's proposed budget of more than £860 million, the result of passing the order will be that next year's GLC precept will be about 7p less than it would otherwise have been. Of course, if we add the London Regional Transport levy, the amount that ratepayers will pay will be higher than this year's precept—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] It is no good hon. Members saying "Ah". Everyone knows that this year the GLC manipulated its precept downwards by drawing over £200 million from balances while increasing its spending by over £100 million. Because of this manipulation, there would have had to be a big increase in the joint precept of the GLC and ILEA anyway next year. Without rate capping, the fact remains—it cannot be seriously challenged — that from next April, Londoners would have had to pay 7p more in the pound than will be the case.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The right hon. Gentleman referred to "modest reserves". What reserves has he calculated that the GLC has to draw on? Why, after three requests from the GLC for him to give the information on how he arrives at that reserve, has he still refused to reply?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman knows that, under the Act, I am entitled, if I do not have all the detailed figures, to make assumptions. There would have been no need for me to make any assumptions if all the authorities had followed the procedures laid down in the Act and provided the information for which they were asked. It has been open to them to have discussions with me and my officials about expenditure levels and rate limits. I have dealt as even-handedly as I can between authorities in calculating limits, but in setting those limits I have to take account of the individual circumstances and the differences between authorities.

I have made assumptions only where information has not been provided or is not available about authorities' individual circumstances. I have sought to compare reserves with statistical average levels for the class of authorities and have also allowed for possibly inadequate reserves in 1985-86 in those cases where local authorities have made substantial use of funds this year, 1984-85, so depleting their reserves. I point out to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) that the councils not giving us information could have worked both ways. By not using the statutory procedures, the authorities, and the GLC is one, may have concealed contingencies built into their budgets.

Mr. Tony Banks: The GLC has not.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman may say that, but it may have shortfalls in spending. I know that the GLC has been trying to get rid of money as fast as it can, but this could happen. I have had to make assumptions, and those assumptions may well have been in favour of the authority. The effect will be to make the limits more generous than they appear. The percentage cuts of which the authorities are making much are unreal because they include large allowances for planned growth.

The ILEA precept is a different story. In December, I proposed a precept limit of 74·19p. The limit of the order is now 3·06p higher, at 77·25p. The reason for the increase is straightforward. ILEA has been helpful in supplying information. Part of this consisted of a breakdown of its reserves. It appeared that part of those reserves—those contained in its building and renewals fund — represented money from the sale of capital assets. By law, such money is not available for use to support revenue spending.

Now that I have the detailed figures, I have made an allowance for this factor and I have made a number of other adjustments in the light of ILEA's information. Accordingly, ILEA's precept has been raised to 77.25p. This still represents a reduction of nearly 3p compared with this year's ILEA precept of 80p. Only a few moments ago, I received a further letter from the chairman of ILEA, and this is being considered.

The 3.06p uplift does not allow ILEA to spend any more money. It is still based on an expenditure level of £900 million. What has changed is how much of that spending can be financed from precept and how much from reserves. I hope that if any of the rate-capped authorities believe that the same consideration might apply to them, they will note that it was information given to us from ILEA that led to a modest easing of the precept limit. In the absence of rate capping, ILEA was proposing to spend not £900 million but £957 million. This would have required a precept not of 77.25p but of 83.1p.

Let us take the GLC and ILEA precepts together, and apply that to a typical, two-storey terraced house in Tower Hamlets, with a rateable value of £211—quite a humble house. The ratepayers of that house will next year save £32 from what they would otherwise have had to pay. Without rate capping, they would have had to pay £32 more, on the budgets that both the GLC and ILEA say that they would have introduced without rate capping.

I shall give another example, of a small corner shop in Lambeth, with a rateable value of £350. There, next year the ratepayer will pay no less than £52 less than he would have paid without rate capping. When further savings are added because of rate capping in some boroughs, I think that ratepayers will see quite clearly that rate capping is at last coming to their rescue.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): In that case, will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House what the ratepayers with children in Inner London will say when they have to pay more for school meals and when school facilities and the quality of education go down as a result of this decision?

Mr. Jenkin: They will think much the same as the parents in any other area who have been paying higher prices for school meals for years. The level of payment for school meals in ILEA, given all the available concessions, has become a scandal. It is possible for ILEA to do something about that, but that is up to it. I am merely setting the upper limit, and it will have to decide how it will live with the limit.

There is a different story on Merseyside. Here, the precept limit of 82.86p, though no change from what I proposed in December, represents a 27 per cent. increase on this year's precept. There is a clear reason for that. This year, Merseyside is planning to draw down special funds so that its precept is much less than would be necessary to support its spending this year if it had to be financed by ratepayers. The information that I then had suggested that the council would not be able to do this again next year. Even a reduced level of spending would have to be financed almost wholly from the precept. Therefore, in any event, the precept will have to be higher. Again, after carefully considering the further information that Merseyside county council gave me—non-compliance again—I decided to confirm the limit that I originally proposed.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): It may seem to the right hon. Gentleman that he is benefiting Merseyside by allowing it to increase its rate precept to 82·5p in the pound, which is a 27 per cent. increase on last year. The right hon. Gentleman is presumably trying to protect ratepayers against increases. Is he interested in value for money? By asking Merseyside council to reduce its budget by £23 million, which is 10 per cent. of the budget, he is asking the ratepayers to pay 27 per cent. more for 10 per cent. less.

Mr. Jenkin: Both sides will get a great deal more value for money from what the council spends. The hon. Gentleman is anticipating my next point.

Compared with a £249 million budget, which Merseyside says that it would have introduced in the absence of rate capping, this precept, although a 27 per cent. increase on last year, is 50p in the pound less that it would otherwise have been. That is what Merseysiders would have had to pay if there had not been rate capping.

I can take an example from the constituency of the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts), of a typical semi-detached house in Bootle with a rateable value of £250. There will be a saving for the owner of that house of about £125 compared with what he would have had to pay in the absence of rate capping. I ask the House to contrast what will happen to that ratepayer in Bootle with what will happen to a similar ratepayer in Liverpool, whose rates will not be capped. I think that the ratepayers in Bootle may well consider themselves to be mighty lucky.

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): I am interested in what my right hon. Friend is saying about how much the domestic ratepayer will save, but will he bear in mind that a large proportion of rates is paid by commercial and industrial ratepayers, who get no relief according to their ability to pay? It is that sector as much as any other that needs relief from the high-spending authorities.

Mr. Jenkin: That is why I quoted the corner shop in Lambeth as an example of a saving of £1 a week.

Finally, there is south Yorkshire. In December I proposed 81·32p, a reduction on this year's precept of just over 2 per cent. South Yorkshire sent me a certain amount of information, but I concluded that it was not such as to lead me to change my proposal. South Yorkshire was proposing to spend £206 million next year. Thanks to rate capping, south Yorkshire's precept will be about 35p in the pound below what it would have been, saving the ratepayer in a typical three-bedroomed semi in Barnsley or Sheffield about £63. That is on a rateable value of £180.

Those are the precept limits for the four precepting authorities. If the House approves the order they will have over a month in which to decide on their budgets and declare their precepts which, to be legal, must not be higher than the figures in the order.

Mr. Barnett: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain upon what basis the limit of a precept has been fixed in each case?

Mr. Jenkin: The Act obliges me to take account of the spending level, the amount of the rate support grant and the availability of reserves. I was given a great many figures by these authorities, but I still had to make assumptions, and I explained to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) the basis upon which they were made.

Mr. Barnett: Will the right hon. Gentleman publish the calculations in each case?

Mr. Jenkin: The Act requires me to make assumptions. I have said that if an authority asked for an alternative level, I should be prepared at that point to discuss the assumptions with the authority, but as none has done so I was entitled to make the assumptions that I did.

Dr. Cunningham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish what I have to say on this point. In answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West I said that one of the factors that we had in mind was what would be the appropriate average level of reserves for authorities in that class. The Inner London education authority and the Greater London council are each in a class of their own. Therefore we had to make assumptions on the best information available. If an authority wished to challenge those assumptions, it should have made an alternative proposal which could have been discussed.

Dr. Cunningham: How can the right hon. Gentleman ask the House to approve this order with its so crucial consequences for four elected authorities while at the same time he denies to the House the fundamental information upon which he has made his calculations? Is not the House of Commons entitled to know the assumptions that have been made?

Mr. Jenkin: The Act is quite clear. It entitles me to make assumptions. And the procedure is quite clear. I have made it clear on many occasions, both individually to the authorities and in public, that if any of these four authorities had come forward with another proposal it could have sat down with me and my officials and gone through the figures. As it was, not one of them chose to do so. Therefore these levels are before the House.

Predictably, the capped authorities prophesy all sorts of doom and disaster. Yes, they will have to make savings, as others have done already. Nevertheless, having considered the matter with some care, and bearing in mind

the GLC's grossly inflated budgets, the very modest level of savings being sought from ILEA and the huge subsidies to transport in south Merseyside and Yorkshire, I am in no doubt, and the House should be in no doubt, that all four authorities can budget to spend sensibly on services while remaining within the limits in the order.

All four authorities were represented in the deputation which came to see me on Monday. Let me tell the House what that deputation asked for. Although this House had voted on 15 January to accept the rate support grant settlement for next year, as set out in the report, the deputation asked in effect that I should cast it aside; that I should abandon targets and hold back; that I should make some huge but unspecified increase in the amount of rate support grant; that I should abandon the Rates Act which was passed by the House last year; and that, apparently in return for all this, the 26 authorities represented round the table would be good enough to join me in some commission of inquiry. They said nothing about cutting out growth or about trimming their spending. Indeed, the figures they tabled at the meeting assumed continuing growth in spending.

I doubt whether the House was therefore surprised to read in Tuesday's press that I had been unable to accede to those requests. But of course it is worse. I do not suppose that there was a single person in that room in 2 Marsham street on Monday who thought that those proposals were seriously intended. On the contrary——

Mr. Tony Banks: Why not?

Mr. Jenkin: I shall answer the question "Why not?" Every one of those council leaders was there for quite different reasons, which had been spelt out with admirable clarity in a two-page report that had been presented to them three weeks earlier by Councillor David Blunkett of Sheffield, the leader of the deputation. It has come to be known as the Blunkett report.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East) *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: Perhaps my hon. Friend will allow me to deal with this point. They wanted to be able to say that when I laid this order before the House today I would be unable to claim that the capped authorities simply refused to meet me at all or that they were unwilling to put their case collectively. They also wanted to

"ensure that at the councils' budget meetings in March elected members cannot be accused of failing to challenge the Secretary of State face to face in this way prior to considering the kind of tactics, potentially illegal or otherwise, being considered by the councils concerned".

The Opposition might be interested to hear that the Blunkett report went on to say that it was their aim

"to prevent the break-up of groups arguing about whether or not we should meet Jenkin."

Finally, it was their aim to dislocate the Department of the Environment's parliamentary timetable.

Rarely can a deputation have been launched with such shoddy and transparent humbug. Rate capping will not only curb the spending of the most extravagant over-spenders. It will protect the ratepayers in those areas. And as I said in our rate support grant debate last month, it will allow me to set fairer targets for the much larger number of prudent, low-spending councils which for too long have had to suffer for the extravagance of the few.

For all these reasons I ask the House to approve this draft order.

6.27 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The House is asked today to approve an order through which the Conservative Government will impose a maximum rate on four democratically elected local authorities. We are being asked to take an unprecedented step to impose further central control over the lives of more than 9·5 million people in Merseyside, south Yorkshire and London.

In spite of repeated assurances since taking office in 1979, Tory Ministers are now face to face with the reality of the abysmal mess that they have created in local government during the last six years. In 1980, the present Secretary of State for Defence promised that the Government would not fix the level of an authority's rates. He said:

"Those decisions remain with the authority." — [*Official Report*, 5 February 1980; Vol. 978, c. 251.]

The present Secretary of State for Employment made a similar promise. When he was Minister for Local Government and Environmental Services he said:

"It is not suggested that it"—

the needs assessment—

"prescribes a specific level to which an authority ought to spend . . . I want to make it quite clear that that was not the purpose. We are seeking to find the fairest way to distribute public money to local authorities . . . " — [*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 1 April 1980; c. 941.]

The right hon. Gentleman also said:

"My Department will not be in the business of saying how much each authority should spend, where it should or should not make cuts or on what it should spend money. . . Local authorities are autonomous . . . but the ultimate decision on rating and on the volume of expenditure of local authorities is a matter for the councillors themselves." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 27 March 1980; c. 840-41.]

That is the sort of promise that the House has been given by Conservative Ministers since they came to office. Now all of that is being swept aside by the Secretary of State's proposals.

As policy failures have embarrassingly mounted, the Government have simply ploughed deeper into the rights of local councils — *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) wish to intervene or does he just want to waffle on from a sedentary position? As policy failures have embarrassingly mounted, the Government have ploughed deeper into the rights of local councils, casting aside promises in the way that I have described, ignoring all evidence, defying good administrative experience and refusing to learn the lessons — and that from a Government who are allegedly committed to freedom, choice, accountability and the better use of public money.

Market forces are apparently no longer in vogue, at least in the Secretary of State's Department. Massive intervention on a widening scale is the reality. Whitehall-imposed decisions are his practice. The second-guessing of every council in Britain by civil servants is the norm, and chaos is the result. Even *The Economist* was recently moved to describe the Government's approach to local council finance as "lunatic." Need we say more?

Tory Ministers have legislated themselves and local government into a legal quagmire and they know it. As councillor Roger Parker Jervis, the Tory leader of Buckinghamshire, said, councils have been "legislated into a corner" by this Government. The truth is that the Conservative party no longer has any clear philosophy of local government or well-based body of coherent thought about its role or contribution in a plural democratic

[Dr. John Cunningham]

society. It has no consistent principles in its approach and no thoughts about a stable, productive relationship between the centre, national Government, and local government. Indeed, in stumbling into the real crisis that exists, successive Ministers have displayed contempt and imcompetence towards local administration on a quite staggering scale.

I say quite bluntly that the order has no place in the House of Commons. The House is not equipped or competent to fix the rate of any local authority in Britain, let alone that of four altogether, in one brief debate. In our view, Government have no right to these powers either, and are similarly and singularly unfit to use them with any proper understanding of the consequences. The budget of Merseyside county council is £180 million, of south Yorkshire £172 million, of ILEA over £900 million and of the GLC over £900 million. Yet Parliament is asked to discuss, understand and approve in three hours the consequences of reducing those budgets by more than £200 million. It is a preposterous proposition and the House is singularly unfit to decide upon it.

Of course the request is absurd. We do not have the information. We do not even have all the information that the Secretary of State possesses. As he has just made clear, he refuses even to be candid with the House about the assumptions that he is making. In reality, we are being asked to rubber-stamp an imposed control, regardless of the consequences for the education of children in London, for bus services in south Yorkshire, for police and fire services in the metropolitan counties and for the quality of public services for millions of people.

The Rates Act is an enabling Act, and a general powers measure that allows Tory Ministers to bypass the ballot box and to decide in Whitehall on the quality and level of services provided in the towns, cities and counties of Britain. The order makes the accountability of elected council members to their communities an irrelevance. It destroys the relationship, based upon universal suffrage, through which voters have always been able to hold their elected councillors to account. Nothing positive or worthwhile will emerge from the application of these powers which, judging by today's detailed story on the front page of *The Guardian*, are about to be extended to the total control of local councils' own money from their own capital receipts.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: At Question Time the hon. Gentleman will have heard my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State deny absolutely and categorically the suggestion embodied in the two headlines involved in the story in *The Guardian*. There is no foundation for it at all. No such proposal is on the table. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are discussing with the local authority associations, as I promised, what changes will be necessary in the capital control system in order to reconcile their legitimate aims with the Treasury's legitimate aim of keeping control over public expenditure. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not pursue that point.

Dr. Cunningham: I heard the Under-Secretary of State and I have listened carefully to what the Secretary of State has said. They have both denied the headline, but they have not denied the detail of the story at all. They have admitted that the matter is under consideration, and that causes me considerable concern. On the subject of promises, I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman what one of his Cabinet colleagues, the Secretary of State for Employment, said. I quote from the *Local Government Chronicle*. The right hon. Gentleman was talking about local government finance and said:

> "It will certainly not involve central Government telling local government what to spend . . . nor will it mean cash limits with a statutory ceiling on rate increases."

The reality is that we have had all these promises before, and they are simply hollow. Moreover, they have been cynically cast aside by, among others, the Secretary of State.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): The hon. Gentleman used the phrase, "their own capital receipts." Is it not true that many of those capital receipts were originally subsidised from central funds, sometimes by as much as 65 per cent.? How does that make them the local authorities' own capital receipts?

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman should read the words of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment who, in making his statement in December, and in the emergency debate the following day, was at least moved to concede that it is the councils' own money. If on nothing else, I agree with the Secretary of State on that point.

The Government are forcing local councils to be lenders and, on an increasing scale, using councils' own money to buttress the political aims and objectives of Government policy. That is another grotesque abuse of power, and one that will be totally destructive of local accountability. Just as the water industry is to be used as a tax collector for central Government, regardless of that industry's economies, and as with the gas and electricity industries, local government's financial control and freedom over its own money is to be removed. In pursuit of a manifestly failed economic policy, which is leading this country deeper into unemployment and despair, this Government choose scapegoats on all sides. Local government is a favourite target, but not one credible economic argument has been, or can be, advanced in favour of total control of councils' expenditure generated from their own resources.

The right hon. Gentleman made a number of claims about reductions in rates. As usual, he had nothing to say about the fact that it is widely recognised that the real reason why rates have increased by 141 per cent. since 1979 is because of Conservative policies, in particular the systematic reduction of rate support grant.

He also had nothing to say about the impact of the order on the quality and availability of services to the almost 10 million people who will be affected by it. He chose singularly to ignore the fact, in speaking of the authorities, that, despite his criticism of them, their local communities had voted for Labour administrations, and in some cases had consistently done so. The right hon. Gentleman is asking the House to bypass the political decisions of those communities.

Rates have gone up dramatically as a result of Government policy. All local authority associations say so and the Audit Commission says so in its report. Tory councillors say it, as do national newspapers such as the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*. Only the right hon. Gentleman, his ministerial colleagues and a few trusty Back Bench supporters try to deny it.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Will the hon. Gentleman agree that there are only low turn-outs in the areas about which he has been talking? Only a small number of people pay rates, the number of votes cast in those areas is not high and consequently the voting numbers are not representative of the local communities. The hon. Gentleman cannot say, therefore, that the voting figures reveal the kind of services and spending that he is advocating. People want a reduction in rates and a reduction in services as well.

Dr. Cunningham: I remind the hon. Gentleman that in our democracy we have a universal franchise; everyone is entitled to a vote. More households in Britain pay rates than pay taxes. I assume that the logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument is that if people do not pay they should not vote, a concept which we fundamentally reject and which has no place in a democratic society.

Neither the Act nor the order will enable the Government to give any significant or meaningful help to Tory councils, which Ministers have persistently promised to do, and the right hon. Gentleman made that promise again today. The recent rate support grant report laid bare the hollowness of that promise. Nor will the Act mean any significant advantages for industry and commerce, as the Department's consultants recently reported.

After its leak to *The Guardian*, I was sent a copy of a report commissioned by the Department entitled "The Effect of Rates on the Location of Employment". It cost £50,000 of the taxpayers' money to produce; its 100 pages cost £500 a page. It concludes that there is no foundation for the Government's argument that rates have caused the loss of jobs. Three years ago my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) produced a paper on the subject. It covered three pages, as against the 100 pages of this document, and my hon. Friend's paper was presented to the right hon. Gentleman free of charge. It gave him the information that is now given at a cost of £50,000.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I have had a communication from the south Tees business community. They, not the accountants or the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), create jobs and wealth, and I will send a copy to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). It shows that, as a direct result of this year's imposition of rates in Cleveland, the business community estimates the loss of a further 8,000 jobs in that area.

Dr. Cunningham: Surveys done in the past—many were done at the time of the passage of the Rates Act—concluded that rates formed a small percentage of business costs. I have not seen any evidence, from the Government or the Tory party, to contradict that information.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: I will not give way. I must move on.

The Secretary of State also ignored his powers in section 5 of the Act to set an interim limit while the negotiations to which he referred took place. Why did he do that? He announced his intention on 11 December 1984, with the deadline of 15 January 1985, a hopeless timetable, given the two-week holiday period in between.

To add confusion and to cloak his intentions, the Secretary of State has persistently refused to tell the councils or Parliament what assumptions he has made about councils' finances in fixing their rates. What is being hidden? The right hon. Gentleman's political bias as well as his inconsistency are being disguised, and I again challenge him to explain why the House of Commons, in being asked to approve this order, and the councils affected, are being denied this crucial information.

I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he will give an explanation. Of course he cannot, and he will not, because he is afraid that the House will understand why he has made the assumptions that we believe he has. He is afraid to put his fairness, or lack of it, to the test.

I learn today, most disturbingly, from the Labour leader of Haringey borough council, Councillor George Meehan, that Conservative councillors in the borough have told him that they have been told of the assumptions made by the right hon. Gentleman in respect of Haringey borough council. That can only be described as contemptible, especially since, as everyone knows, the Labour party is in control of and responsible for the affairs of that borough. It is yet another way in which the right hon. Gentleman is seeking to bypass the democratic wishes of the people of the borough.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Either Councillor Meehan or the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the position. I have said nothing to the Conservative members of Haringey which would justify the hon. Gentleman's statement. What I have said—what I said the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)—is that one of the factors which we have had in mind is to compare the reserves of an authority with the average level of reserves of authorities of that class, and that would seem a reasonable exercise.

Many of the authorities have told us their reserves and have given us many of the figures that go to make up the reserves. Where they have not, we have had to make assumptions. It would have been perfectly proper for Councillor Meehan or anybody else to have come to us and said, "We think that this is too tight. It can only be raised. The Act does not allow us to reduce the rate limit, only to raise it." Anybody could have come and discussed that issue with my officials and the whole thing could have been gone into. They chose not to do that. I am entitled to say, therefore, that the limit is acceptable to them.

Dr. Cunningham: If this is all so innocent, why will not the right hon. Gentleman publish the assumptions? There has been no convincing answer. We have received correspondence about the matter, it has been raised on the Floor of the House and repeated requests have been made, but the right hon. Gentleman has given no explanation which is satisfactory to the House and the councils concerned. As to what I have said about George Meehan—he is not only a political colleague but a friend—I specifically had the assertion checked before I raised the matter in the House. Councillor Meehan authorised me to say what I am saying. I do not say this lightly, without authority or frivolously. The action to which I referred cannot contribute to the happy or speedy resolution of these difficulties.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman has made his point. There is no truth in any suggestion that I have made available details of the assumptions. It would have been improper for officials to have had meetings of that sort

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with minority members of the council. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw any suggestion that my officials have behaved improperly.

Dr. Cunningham: The argument about the application of these rate limits rests not just on the right hon. Gentleman's assumptions but on the use of grant-related expenditure as one of the two crucial tests before authorities are designated under the Act. Grant-related expenditure assessments have been rejected as an objective test by all local authority associations. None of them, including associations under Conservative political control, accepts that test. Yet ministerial decisions are based on dubious calculations and outdated information. In a report published in 1984 entitled "The Impact on Local Authorities' Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Block Grant Distribution System" the Audit Commission said:

"The existence of so many unresolved questions after four years experience of operating the Block Grant system also casts doubt upon the use of GREs for any purpose other than grant distribution. And it is evident that complexity has not, so far, produced a general perception of equity."

The report went on:

"Unfortunately, the information used to calculate both the needs for local authority services and the availability of local resources is open to serious question."

That is the independent and considered view of the Audit Commission about one of the two principal tests on which the Secretary of State has based his decision to impose this order on the four authorities.

The order will place huge strains on the budgets of the authorities affected. There will be expenditure cuts for Merseyside of more than £44 million, for south Yorkshire of almost £28 million, for the Greater London council of almost £75 million and for the Inner London education authority of £57 million. I have received a copy of the letter sent to the Secretary of State today by the leader of ILEA, Frances Morrell, who leaves him in no doubt that there are serious questions to be asked about even the right hon. Gentleman's new limit for that authority and the limit's impact on the quality and scope of education in London.

All these cuts are made on the basis of the decision of the Secretary of State which, in turn, rests on a shambles of incoherent and failing Government policies. The arguments for the order are false and racked with contradictions. The performance of Ministers in dealing with local council policy is incompetent, dishonest and deplorable. The House should reject the Government's case.

6.54 pm

Sir John Osborn (Sheffield, Hallam): I assure the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that rates are driving businesses out of Sheffield and have been a perpetual cause of increasing unemployment. If the hon. Gentleman thinks differently, I assure him that many industrial leaders deplore the fact that I, as the only Conservative Member of Parliament in the region, have not been able to stop this drain and to persuade my hon. Friends to do something about it before today.

Dr. Cunningham: Given the hon. Gentleman's long experience in the industry, he must know, as I know from my association with the industry, that the devastation of the steel industry as a result of the Government's policies has been the principal factor that has driven business from Sheffield.

Sir John Osborn: I shall now revert to the debate. If the hon. Gentleman would like me to talk about steel, I shall. I am afraid that if I do, not many hon. Members would have much chance of dealing with the subject of the debate. I shall therefore refrain from talking about steel.

The order arises from the Rates Act 1984. The order is, in fact, the Act put into practice, and that is happening none too soon for householders and those who run industries, commerce and businesses in the city and south Yorkshire. Today's debate covers familiar ground.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Osborn: The hon. Lady should bear in mind the fact that if I am interrupted, I shall spend between 15 and 20 minutes on my feet and may prevent other hon. Members from speaking. I give way.

Ms. Harman: On the point about commercial rates, is it not the case that the link between unemployment rising and rates has not been proven? Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that in low rate areas the rents on those commercial properties increase and, therefore, at the end of the day the amount spent on rents or rates is about the same. The money going into rates is at least ploughed back into the local community for services and jobs. When the money goes in increased business rents, it goes goodness knows where and therefore is not ploughed back in. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that his argument about unemployment and rates is totally spurious?

Sir John Osborn: The hon. Lady should let me continue with my speech.

As the hon. Member for Copeland knows, the last Labour Government were concerned about the level of spending in south Yorkshire and Sheffield before 1979. I attended many meetings involving local councillors who were worried about what would happen under a Labour Secretary of State for the Environment. Since 1979, this Government have tried hard to control the increase in local authority expenditure grants. The targets and penalties have been designed to encourage moderation, and many authorities have co-operated.

We are dealing with those authorities that have resisted. For those few authorities encouragement has had to become compulsion. Those councils, and south Yorkshire especially, have only themselves to blame. They have tried to portray my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in an uncompromising light by saying that they have not had sufficient time to make their case. The hon. Member for Copeland made that point. What rubbish! The high-spending councils have had too long to make their case. They have been making their case since 1979. The Government have a clear mandate to control the level of public spending. Local authority expenditure is about £33 billion, or a quarter of all public spending. Local authorities employ roughly one tenth of the total work force. It is daft to think that local authority spending is exempt. The hon. Member for Copeland, councillors and others think that their mandate has been invalidated by the control from Government that the order provides. Those arguments are based on the claims of local democracy.

There we move to the heart of the matter which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester,

East (Mr. Bruinvels)—the link between the ballot box and the rating system has worn thin. Of every £1 spent by local councils on local services, less than 25p in the £1 is provided by householders. Slightly more than 25p comes from businesses and other non-domestic ratepayers and about half comes from taxpayers. That means that, in a city such as Sheffield, one out of every two households, or roughly one in four of those entitled to vote, pay full rates. Those who pay do not vote while those who vote do not pay. That is taxation without representations. What sort of a mandate is that?

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: It is not a mandate.

Sir John Osborn: Quite right, it is not a mandate. In previous debates I have said that I should prefer some form of rate reform, but consensus on that has not been possible. Something must be done now, and I therefore welcome the present measure.

In the *Daily Telegraph* last week Anthony Lejeune said:

"The weakest point in the moral armour of modern democracy is that citizens can vote money for themselves out of the pockets of other citizens and are encouraged by politicians to do so. The most notorious current example is the unscrupulous use of the rating system by Left-wing local authorities."

At last something is being done to limit the damage that they cause.

Sheffield has suffered harshly in recent years at the hands of the city council and the South Yorkshire county council. Domestic rates in Sheffield have risen by 245 per cent. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said that rates have risen by 132 per cent. in Yorkshire over the past six years. District and county councils have recklessly, deliberately and profligately ignored every request to limit their spending. Commerce and industry must welcome the introduction of rate-capping. They have seen the disastrous effects at first hand, and a survey by Sheffield chamber of commerce shows that 48 per cent. of the firms that cut their work force during the previous two years laid part of the blame on rates.

Sheffield has a tradition of heavy industry, and the rate burden is exceptionally heavy. The result is viciously circular. As businesses close, residents leave to avoid the high rates, and the declining rate base hits those left behind even harder.

It is no good pretending that those are not the effects of high rates. They are, and it would be an irresponsible Government who did nothing about it. Predictably, authorities designated to have their rates limited have produced scare stories of how that will decimate local services, and I referred to education earlier this afternoon. What an admission of poor management. South Yorkshire has been set a limit that requires the council to absorb the cost of inflation in next year's budget. Many a company in south Yorkshire and elsewhere would have been happy with such moderate cutting proposals during the recent recession, and I speak with some personal experience of the matter.

South Yorkshire will still be left to spend large sums of money—£178 million. In south Yorkshire the local authorities have spending targets which I calculate amount to £660 million for 1985-86. That is over £500 per head of population. That is solely local authority spending. It is rubbish to claim that such sums will result in the destruction of services and the neglect of statutory duties. If my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State or the Minister for Local Government disagree with my figures, I hope that they will put the record straight. Last year, south Yorkshire county council spent over £90 million subsidising transport and recouped a bare £20 million in income as the Secretary of State said.

Is it unrealistic to suggest that there is room for improvement there? Spending on transport revenue support in south Yorkshire amounts to more than £45 per head. That is almost double the average for metropolitan counties. The total cost per head for the provision of all services is about £158 while the class average is £20 per head less. Even after rate capping the council will have plenty to spend.

As is widely acknowledged, the rating system is far from perfect and a review of all local authorities, finance is welcome. Today's measures are regrettably necessary. They will make the system a great deal less imperfect.

The Labour-controlled Sheffield city council and South Yorkshire county council have briefed Members of Parliament of all parties about their position. When Socialist councillors have been present at those meetings — the House must bear in mind that I am the only Conservative Member of Parliament at these meetings— they have interpreted the briefings as advocating that public expenditure, in itself, must be good.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, local authorities have spent money on nuclear-free zones and funds to striking miners. How can we be sure that they have gone to the families rather than to the pickets? They have financed CND conferences, and an anti-apartheid headquarters. They have politically appointed staff in town and county halls. These matters also involve Sheffield district council because it is a collecting agency.

My right hon. Friend's statement about an inquiry on abuse must be welcome. The reference to industry and commerce not backing the Government must relate to the rate support grant. I have a copy of a letter sent to my right hon. Friend from the Sheffield chamber of commerce. South Yorkshire and Sheffield have special problems related mainly to regional development. The level of GRE needed to cover a population that is aging because the young are moving out is a problem, but industry and commerce must work closely with county hall and the town hall. It is part of the process of living with local government as they find it. They must eliminate retribution if possible but above all they must attempt to make bad local government for industry and commerce better.

The Sheffield chamber of commerce—I have been a member of the council for some 30 years—does not want a militant confrontation involving county hall, town hall and the Government. That is why I should back it in seeking any negotiations with councillors.

Since the April tragedy at county hall in Barnsley many of the councillors, including the chairman of the police committee, George Moores, have been sponsored or closely connected with mining and the mining communities and objectivity has been lacking during the miners' dispute. They must surely have learnt that violence begets violence. The tragedy of the coal strike illustrates that.

I hope that moderation and common sense will prevail in relations between Government and local government. I appeal to South Yorkshire county councillors and the

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district councillors to act sensibly and work with the Government rather than to continue to show defiance that they have shown for the past 10 years.

My right hon. Friend referred to the Blunkett letter. I have seen press releases suggesting that as leader of the Sheffield city council he may think differently from what I have hoped. I hope that the permanent officials and the councillors will accept the guidelines laid down by my right hon. Friend. I know that Conservative councillors on the county and district councils in south Yorkshire, including their leaders, County Councillor Irvine Patnick and Sheffield councillor David Heslop gave my right hon. Friends their full backing. They have advised me that, if anything, the measures come too late; they cannot come too soon. My right hon. Friend has the support of Conservatives in the area I represent.

7.9 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): When I hear Ministers speak from the Conservative Front Bench it increasingly reminds me of when I first became a city councillor in Liverpool, and was put on the children"s committee. At that time, the council was run by the Conservative party, and the lady who became our chairperson was opposed to central heating in the children's homes on the grounds that it was not good for them. Also, we decided to get some bicycles for the children, and we actually got that through. Then the lady said, "But don't forget that they must be second hand."

That is the penny-pinching, miserable attitude that the Conservatives have towards local government, but at least at that time we had the opportunity of determining how much we spent. We had the opportunity of explaining to the general public at the election what had happened and why they should get rid of Conservatives and put Labour people on the council. The local people took the decision. They had the right to decide. However, with this Government that right is, slowly but surely, stage by stage, being taken away from the people. We have the rate-capping procedures as well as the forthcoming abolition of all the metropolitan authorities, only because they are Labour authorities doing a good job for the people they represent.

The Secretary of State made great play of the extravagant overspending by the Merseyside county authority. He said that one of the dreadful things that it was doing was supporting what was called the "resident author" and giving money for a record against the police. He hinted that a certain amount of money had gone to support the miners. With regard to the police, one person who was constantly opposed to what the police were doing on Merseyside was Sir Kenneth Thompson, the old Conservative leader of the council. I read more letters in the local papers complaining about the authoritarian development of the police written by Sir Kenneth Thompson, than I have ever seen from any Labour man in my life. That was interesting. Even if a few bob is going towards a record, it could not possibly be in the same category as the opposition to what was happening in the police from Sir Kenneth Thompson.

The amount of money that might go into those peripheral things is very small. They are the things that Ministers pick out, use and exaggerate. No doubt there were Tories on the Nottingham city council who, many years ago, opposed a grant for Torvill and Dean, yet because of that grant they become gold medallists in ice skating. Time after time we can give examples of such grants having been tremendously helpful to individuals and the nation, but Conservative Members would never understand that.

I should like to mention some of the problems that have arisen, for example on rate support grant. I have a table showing the changes in rate support grant for the Merseyside council over the past decade. In 1975-76, the Government grant was 66·5 per cent., and the ratepayers' contribution was 33·5 per cent.; in 1980-81 the Government grant was 61 per cent. and the ratepayers' contribution 39 per cent.; in 1984-85, the Government grant was 51·9 per cent. and the ratepayers' contribution 48·1 per cent.; and in 1985-86 the Government grant is 48·7 per cent. and the ratepayers' contribution 51·3 per cent. That is the truth about what is happening. When the Government talk about rates going up, they do not explain that they have gone up because the Government grant—the rate support grant—has gone down. Therefore, the local authorities have been faced with the prospect of cutting their services or giving the people a decent service and having to put the rates up. Then they are called extravagant overspenders. These are the wicked people——

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heffer: I shall not give way. I shall speak for only 10 minutes because many hon. Members want to participate——

Mr. Bruinvels: But the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) has gone to sleep.

Mr. Heffer: Even if my hon. Friend has gone to sleep, his contribution to the debate will be much greater than the hon. Gentleman's.

I should like to bring out what is really happening and the effect of the Government's proposals on Merseyside. I understand that the maximum precept that the county can raise is £219 million. The council's estimate for maintaining existing services is £242 million. Therefore, there is a gap of £23 million. The county council believes that the Government have got the figures wrong. I shall not argue at length because these are technical arguments, and hon. Friends who are members of the county council can argue that case better then I can. However, on the basis of the present situation, with the Government's decision and the £23 million gap, it is important to understand what would happen to vital and important services on Merseyside.

First, the county authority would need to reduce the amount available for the police by £5 million. In real terms, because of the financial relationship with the Department of the Environment, that amount would be £10 million. That could mean at least 700 to 800 policemen and women not receiving any payment. In the area crime is rising, drug usage is on the increase. A recent survey that we quoted in the House last week shows that policing in poorer areas is worse than it is in better-off areas, and the poor are getting a raw deal from the police service on Merseyside. The police are overstretched. More foot patrols are needed. It is absolutely absurd that the concil should be faced with that position.

Expenditure on the fire services would have to be reduced by £2·5 million. Expenditure on road maintenance would go down by £4 million. Anyone who goes around Merseyside now knows that the roads have deteriorated terribly over the past few years. They are getting worse because even now the money is not there as it should be. There would be a reduction of £1 million in expenditure on waste disposal.

The Secretary of State spoke at length about the passenger transport subsidy. There would be a reduction in that of £8 million.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): So there should be.

Mr. Heffer: The hon. Gentleman, who represents Bebbington in Merseyside, is actually saying that the people of Merseyside should pay much higher fares than at present. He is saying, "Put the burden on the shoulders of those who can least afford it because they are the people who use the public transport." For my part, I believe that it is important that the ordinary people be given the opportunity of using public transport at a reasonable cost.

It is estimated that if the £23 million reduction were achieved it could lead to about 3,000 redundancies among the personnel of Merseyside council, and that is in an area with one of the highest levels of unemployment in Britain.

I do not know whether Conservative Members ever go beyond Watford. One or two may, but those who do not should go to areas such as Merseyside. I can tell the House why we do not have the problem of a Tory Member of Parliament. Unfortunately, Sheffield still does, but Liverpool does not. We have a semi-Tory in the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who is not present at the moment, but we have no Tories because Liverpool has suffered under the Tory party over the years and it is fed up with them.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels *rose*——

Mr. Heffer: I shall not give way and I have explained why.

The Secretary of State is right to say that the Merseyside council can increase the precept by 27 per cent. Nobody argues with that. But if it does, I am told by the county authorities that it would lose about £29 million from Government sources. That would mean a cut of £23 million for services over the period. It is in a catch 22 situation.

I hope that all hon. Members, including Conservative Members, who are concerned about local democracy and about stopping the trend towards increasingly centralised government, will come with us into the Lobby tonight and support my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

7.21 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): The alliance Members will be voting against the order tonight, not because we necessarily endorse the spending levels or priorities of the authorities named in the order, but because we are opposed to the principle of rate capping. We argue now, as we argued during the progress of the Rates Bill, that it is inappropriate for Parliament to set the rate or precept of an elected local authority. That is the job of the elected councillors. If Members of Parliament take unto themselves the responsibility for fixing rates, there is no point in continuing to have elected local councillors in our town and county halls.

Nor do I accept that civilisation as we know it will be threatened if some local authorities spend more than the Government believe to be appropriate. Some local authorities have always spent more than the average and some have come to grief with their electors at the subsequent election. The level of rate that is charged by a local authority to its ratepayers is a matter between itself and the local ratepayers. If they do not like it, they will react through the ballot box in the traditional way.

It may well be that some Conservative Members will say that the current system of local government finance is not sufficiently accountable. There is some strength in that argument, but the response should be to make the system more accountable rather than to create some big brother in Westminster and Whitehall to lean over the shoulders of councillors and to second-guess their decisions.

Nor is it true, as was argued during the passage of the Rates Bill, that capping the high-spending authorities will automatically release resources for the traditional low-spending counties and other authorities which have stuck to the Government guidelines. If one doubted that, one has only to consider those cries of pain and bewilderment from representatives of the shire counties during the recent debate on the rate support grant. That underlines the fact that the low spenders in the shires continue to be held to low spending, despite the introduction of rate capping.

The second ground on which we shall oppose the order is that there are doubts about the basis of the precept limits in the order. For example, the original maximum precept allowed for ILEA in December 1984 was 74·19p and £44 million was to be taken from the ILEA reserves. The order raises the maximum precept to 77·25p and only £9 million is to be taken from reserves. The Secretary of State was good enough in his introduction to explain some of the reasons for that alteration, but we still do not have any disclosure of the assumptions surrounding the £9 million to be taken from the ILEA reserves. The same is true in relation to the GLC where £71 million is assumed to be available in its reserves for current spending. Again, there is no supporting evidence for that decision.

It is not good enough for the Secretary of State to tell the House that that sort of issue is between himself as Secretary of State and the councils concerned. The House is being asked to approve the maximum precepts in the order. We are being asked to make a judgment. I cannot understand how we can be expected to make a judgment without the available evidence being given to us of the sort of assumptions which the Secretary of State has made in relation to those reserves. We are being offered a straight take-it-or-leave-it decision. We are being asked to rubber-stamp the figures in the order. That brings the House into disrepute and it bears out the predictions and forecasts that some of us made in Committee on the Rates Bill.

Against that background, it is sad and regrettable that the designated authorities have not strenuously and vigorously argued their needs to the Secretary of State. I am not suggesting that they should have sought formal redetermination. I understand the risks that are involved in that course. But they should have taken the opportunity to argue their case with the Secretary of State and to demonstrate the flaws in the figures which he has put forward. That is a matter of regret because they have let down the people that they represent in not taking that opportunity.

One of the sad things about the whole business is the sense in which both sides — Ministers and local

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councillors—seem to be more concerned with scoring points off each other and legally wrong-footing each other than about the future of the services which are under discussion. It is a case not just of extracting the maximum political gain but of safeguarding services which are vital to a great many people that we represent.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does my hon. Friend agree that cities such as Liverpool are being turned into "Confrontation Streets" with the longest-running soap operas and farces in local government? People are being used as pawns in a power game that is being played out over their heads. That means that in the long term ratepayers will be disadvantaged. It is sad that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) is not present to hear that point.

Mr. Cartwright: It would be unwise to involve myself too far in the internal politics of Liverpool. They are obviously dangerous politics and certainly bitter. I shall only say that the threat to refuse to levy a precept on the part of the authorities concerned is a threat to gamble with other people's jobs and services. That is a dangerous thing to do. If the gamble fails, many people will be without a job and will not have the vital services on which they depend. The money at some point or other will simply run out if no precept is levied.

One of the most worrying aspects about the way in which the rate-capping operation is being conducted is the fact that all rate-capped authorities will face the damaging impact of sudden cuts. For example, ILEA is being asked to cut about £66 million off its budget. If that cut were phased over a period, it might be possible so to organise it that damage to top priority services was limited. Instead, cuts will have to be made suddenly, in a hurry, and there will be no opportunity to look across the various spending areas and to try to protect the high priority services. When cuts have to be made in a hurry, they fall on whatever can be cut at speed, irrespective of priority. An education authority is likely to make cuts in books and equipment, not to fill staff vacancies wherever they occur, and to cut discretionary student awards.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman claims that those are the results of the way in which rate capping is being run. Does he not agree that ILEA has known its expenditure limits since last July? If it had taken a realistic view of the outcome of the ensuing process, it could perfectly well have made its dispositions months before it had to draw up a budget. We are not asking for a substantial cut in its present level of spending. The difficulties described by the hon. Gentleman are to be laid fairly and squarely at the door of the present majority party on ILEA.

Mr. Cartwright: The authorities concerned should certainly have argued their case with the Government. I would certainly take issue with those authorities which, far from trying to take account of reality, have simply planned to jack up their expenditure higher still. That will make the impact even greater, the cuts will have to be even sharper and the brakes will have to be slammed on at the last minute. I believe, however, that suddenly imposed cuts are inefficient, wasteful and harmful to the services.

There is another risk of chaos and of a dangerous impact on the services. It will arise if the precepting authorities accept the maximum precept, and levy a precept on that basis, but are then unable or unwilling to face the necessity for the consequent spending cuts. Some authorities simply will not face that necessity. Others may not be able to do so, because of the political realities of the council chamber. There will then be a risk that spending commitments will not be reduced to meet the resources available. At some point during the year the money will run out and there will be chaos. The Secretary of State has not yet faced that risk. I am interested to hear how he believes that those who are dependent on local authority services can be protected against it.

A question mark now hangs over the edifice of local government finance erected in the past four years—the complex bureaucratic business of grant-related expenditure, targets, penalties, holdback, clawback and, finally, rate capping. As the Audit Commission pointed out, the complex paraphernalia does not save money. Indeed, there is evidence that it wastes money. The Cambridge university report makes it clear that the Government's aim of reducing rates does not have the impact on employment that they have claimed. The complex operations—the bureaucratic spider's web of controls on democratic local authorities—are not delivering the goods. The sooner we get rid of this complex, ramshackle and wasteful system, the better for local government.

7.34 pm

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I am delighted to follow the reasonable gentleman from the Social Democratic party, the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright). The order shows that, unfortunately, reasonable people do not necessarily exist in all the local authorities. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has vacated his place after making a gesture by attending part of the debate. I have the advantage of having been here at the beginning, having listened to most of it and having remained awake for most of it, despite occasional temptations to the contrary.

The purpose of the debate depresses me. Such a discussion should be taking place in the town halls of Liverpool, Sheffield, Manchester, London and elsewhere. I have always advocated the existence of autonomous local authorities, rightly and proudly independent of whatever party happens to occupy Westminster. Unfortunately, that desire has not yet come to fruition. When I hear the hon. Member for Walton talking about local democracy, I wonder whether he approves of the mandate system in Liverpool whereby Labour councillors are told to vote in a certain way regardless of the arguments. That is not democracy. If the right hon. Gentleman had stayed to listen to the debate he might have been able to clarify his view on the question whether such a practice is democratic.

Under the present method of local government finance the taxpayer, via central Government, has become the major contributor to the expenditure of local authorities. There is an unarguable case for saying, therefore, that central Government should have a not inconsiderable voice in deciding how much local authorities can spend. In happier days I was the chairman of a local authority committee with considerable spending power. Central Government's voice—as it happens, it was a Labour Government — was exercised by persuasion and suggestion, and in the end common sense prevailed. Ultimately, the local authority accepted the right and

indeed the duty of Government to deal with the interests of their overall economic strategy — in which local authority spending plays such a large part—and of the taxpayer. It never entered my mind to question the right and duty of central Government. Over the past few years, the accepted practice has been challenged. That has happened—I hate to say this—not so much for financial as for political reasons. The Act behind the order has become a disagreeable necessity. No Conservative — certainly no Conservative with a local authority background — would have wished that to happen. However, the measures have become clearly necessary and they have my support. No Government of any colour would welcome such a turn of events, but all Governments have a clear duty to ensure that their calculation of a proper total of local authority spending is adhered to.

The authorities with which we are dealing have chosen, first, to ignore their clear constitutional relationship with central Government and, secondly, to spend ratepayers' and taxpayers' money with the gay abandon of the financial alcoholic. None could be worse than the peculiar Socialists who control in their own fairyland the finances of the soon-to-depart, wholly unlamented, Merseyside county council.

The pronouncements of the Merseyside county council are less overtly dramatic than those of the GLC and the London boroughs who continue to astonish the nation. However, they are no less dangerous for that. The principal reason for the high level of spending by the Merseyside county council, which some Opposition Members consider to be a matter for great pride, is the revenue support for bus and rail services. There is an argument for subsidising those activities, but in 1984-85 the council spent £44 per head of population on support for buses and trains, over and above what it paid for free travel for pensioners. Expenditure on those services was 80 per cent. above the average of the metropolitan counties. The council has adopted a policy of taxing the ratepayers, many of whom — including many of my own constituents — are not at all well off, in order to subsidise the users of public transport, who may or may not be well off, and also to provide plenty of jobs for members of the Transport and General Workers Union. In that year, the council also spent £80,000 on propaganda which will, it hopes, prevent its abolition.

Those of us who live on Merseyside have seen the extravagant posters that show the fire service going down a plughole invented by the Government, the police going down a plughole invented by the Government, everything going down a plughole invented by the Government. It is utter nonsense.

Mr. Wareing: There are 50,000 unemployed.

Mr. Porter: That is not the point. I have mentioned the subsidies given to transport and I listened to the figures that the hon. Member for Walton gave. Even he must realise that there can be counter-balancing operations within a legal precept for Merseyside county council which would enable services to be provided at a reasonable cost without local people noticing that there had been any change. I am inspired by the people of Merseyside who treat the publicity campaign of the council with a proper and studied indifference.

Mr. Alton: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that perhaps most disreputable of all is the implication that has been given to pensioners on Merseyside that, as a result of abolition of that council, they will lose their bus passes? Does he agree that that has caused considerable distress and disquiet?

Mr. Porter: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for that reminder. That is fairly typical of the publicity being promoted by the hon. Member for Walton and his friends. It is utterly untrue. Such issues will be a matter for the district councils to deal with when they succeed the county council. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the activities of the county council, how can it be right to spend nearly £1 million on such publicity material? The money should be spent on things that are of much more use to the people whom the council purports to represent.

People who live in the Merseyside county council area will welcome the order, as will Wirral district council. We would also welcome a decision from the Government about the methods of finance for local authorities to make those that spend accountable to local opinion and voting power. I heartily support the order and I hope that it will be only an interim step in progress towards a new and highly desirable local democratic system. In the meantime, I am happy to support the Government putting some form of straitjacket around the politically and financially mentally disturbed who, at present, are a burden on my constituents.

7.42 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I have listened to the whole of the debate and to the exchanges on the statement that preceded it. I am worried that, because of the three-hour limit on the debate, some of my right hon. and hon. Friends will not have an opportunity to put the case for their areas.

I should like to dissociate myself from what the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn) said. He makes his own minority speech and often gets the facts wrong because he is still not aware of what is happening in areas such as Sheffield and south Yorkshire. Unlike me, he has never been on the city council. I have been a member for 15 years and remain one. However, I admit that he has experience of the steel industry, as he was a manager for many years. That company was running down long before the rates issue was thought of.

South Yorkshire county council and Sheffield city council have suffered drastically because of the reduction in grants and because of penalties in the past few years. Such reductions affect everything and even run contrary to many of the projects which the Government have encouraged. Sheffield city council is one of the 23 programme areas and we have six partnership authorities where deprivation is considered to be especially severe. All those authorities get annual allocations of money from the Department of the Environment to fund schemes that have an impact on conditions in their inner areas. The House is probably aware that 75 per cent. of the allocation is met by the Government and the remaining 25 per cent. must be picked up by the local authorities.

The problem is that, because grant has not increased in the past few years, the council is penalised on the 25 per cent. that it must pay. If Sheffield had taken more of the grant from the Government, it would be outside the trap. It is being penalised only because it has used less grant. The same is true of south Yorkshire. It is a pity that the

[Mr. Bill Michie]

hon. Member for Hallam is not here as he is a member of the chamber of commerce in Sheffield and I should like to quote a letter that it wrote. It said:

"It is a matter of continuing concern that expenditure both on the Urban Programme itself and on 'time expired' projects are subject to Block Grant penalties. This appears to us inconsistent with the Government's objectives in promoting the Urban Programme, and we shall again be making representation to the Government to try to have this anomaly ended."

That is not the comment of a rabid Left-wing organisation, but it recognises the discrepancies.

For the county council, the block grant system, complete with expenditure targets and grant penalties, was introduced in 1981-82. In each year since then, the council's block grant entitlement has been cut. The proportion of the council's spending which is supported by the Government has fallen from 58·8 per cent. in 1980-81 —the year when the new system was introduced—to 48·7 per cent. in 1985-86. That represents a reduction of £56 million in the council grant and means an extra 13p on the rate precept for 1985-86. That burden must be carried by the ratepayers, the very people whom the Government claim to be helping.

Opposition Members are proud of and will defend the services provided by local authority work forces. Too much is said about local authorities featherbedding their staff. I have much experience in these matters and believe that the work force does a tremendous job under enormous strain. We defend their right to give their best. We will defend the right of plumbers and joiners to get on with the job instead of having to look over their shoulders to see whether their job will be there at the end of the year. We will defend social workers who should be looking to their clients rather than looking over their shoulders to see whether an old folks' home that they are trying to get somebody in is about to be closed. Teachers should be concentrating on their classes and not worrying about whether expenditure is being cut so much that they must buy their own chalk and their pupils' parents must buy books — one of the recommendations of the hon. Member for Hallam. He said that in five or 10 years' time parents and kids will have to pay for their own books, such is his affection for the bad old days. He got his come-uppance from his supporters in Hallam on that.

I must correct my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) who said that bus fares were subsidised to help poor people. In south Yorkshire, poor and rich people use the bus service and defend the council's policy of subsidising it. They do not regard the council as extravagant but as providing a service that is worth maintaining. It protects the environment and the value of land that can be used for other developments. It is nonsense to suggest that the rich are subsidising the poor. The subsidy is enjoyed and supported by all. It is value for money.

I should like to conclude by quoting not a political party but John Banham, the head of the Audit Commission for local authorities in England and Wales. He said that Sheffield was one of the best-run authorities in the country in terms of providing value for money. He continued:

"There is no question that there is a great deal that other cities have to learn from this place."

He felt so strongly about this point that at a press conference—not behind doors or in any attempt to hide it—he said:

". . . poor distribution of rate support grant meant that industrial northern cities like Sheffield were not getting the contribution from central government that they needed."

The argument is not about whether there should be efficiency drives in local government. I just wish that we had one in central government—that would be a turn-up for the book. We are arguing about the rights of duly elected local authorities to run their cities in the way in which their citizens want them to be run. We are arguing that unless they are given that right, and unless a proper assessment is made of their real needs—that has never been forthcoming from the Government — there will always be problems, the ratepayers will suffer and those in need will suffer even more.

7.50 pm

Mr. Guy Barnett (Greenwich): In opening the debate, the Secretary of State claimed that the order that he was placing before the House was designed to protect the ratepayer. I do not propose to dilate on that for long. It is arguable that that is his main responsibility, particularly when central Government expenditure under this Government is very much open to criticism. Perhaps he should look at his own housekeeping rather than interfere in the housekeeping of local authorities that are also directly elected. If he considers that it is his responsibility to protect the ratepayer, as he clearly does, he has another responsibility that he must take on board and which he never admitted in his speech.

I wish to speak on behalf of the Inner London education authority. In that connection, the Secretary of State never mentioned the responsibility that he must take on board, if he believes that it is his responsibility to protect the ratepayer, to safeguard the education of the children of London. That responsibility he has not admitted in the House.

It is important for the House to recognise, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the severe damage that the Government have done to the relationship between local and central Government. It is interesting to record that at the Conservative party local government conference in 1979 the Prime Minister said:

"Good Government rests on a partnership between Whitehall and Town Hall."

I agree with her. I believe that that is something for which the last Labour Government were attempting to make provision. We worked hard to this end in the Department of the Environment, and I am proud of the relationship that existed between local and central Government. One reason for its success was that in those days the system of multiple regression analysis admitted in the way in which the grant was determined that local government had an authority as well as central Government.

Relationships between local and central Government will always be difficult or in need of careful co-operation, as the Prime Minister remarked in her speech in 1979. It will be difficult, for two reasons. The first is that local and central Government are both directly elected. The second —and this is the important point—is that they both have an authority. Central Government have a general responsibility for the economic policy of the country, but local authorities are responsible for running services.

The only body in inner London that has a responsibility for running education is the Inner London education authority. It is charged by law to do that job and to determine the education needs of London.

My impression in listening to the Secretary of State and to some of the remarks that emanate from the Department of Education and Science is that they do not know or understand the problems with which ILEA has to cope. The grant-related expenditure system that the Government have invented to decide how much local authorities should be allowed to spend does not take account of the factors in inner London which, by any standard, must greatly increase the cost of running education in inner London.

For example, there are no fewer than 147 mother tongues in inner London. That can be described both as a problem for ILEA—and it is a considerable one—and as a great opportunity. If the children in London with their many different backgrounds and languages are educated in their mother tongue and in English, in years to come this might grant to London an enormous advantage. It could be an international city with a considerable proportion of its citizens genuinely billingual. No account is taken of this in the Government's assessment of expenditure.

No account is taken of the fact that London has many old school buildings. Half of London's secondary schools are old buildings which are expensive to heat and to maintain. There are also higher land and building costs of one kind and another. The population density in inner London is another factor that is ignored in the grant-related expenditure assessment. In addition, there are many children in inner London whose parents are on supplementary benefit. Those examples demonstrate the extra costs that are borne by ILEA.

Unless the Government understand the factors that contribute to the relatively high budget that is necessary in inner London, they will be capable of doing serious damage to education in inner London.

There is a good deal of evidence of the cumulative effect of multiple deprivation. Bearing in mind—and this is based on the figures of the Department of the Environment—that seven out of the 10 most deprived local authorities in the country are in inner London, one realises the serious problems faced by ILEA. In some recent research, an examination of the children in schools as opposed to the population of all age groups demonstrated the high measure of deprivation. A single-purpose authority like ILEA is therefore coping with probably greater problems than even it may recognise.

These factors must be taken into account. The Government are going down a dangerous road. If they attempt to impose a rate cap or precept cap on ILEA, they could do immense damage to education in inner London because of their relative measure of ignorance of the extent of the problems with which ILEA has to cope.

Mr. Dobson: Would my hon. Friend agree that it is somewhat ironic, following the publication of the Hargreaves report, which was sponsored by ILEA and commended by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, that the Secretary of State for the Environment should now be making sure that ILEA will not have the resources to implement the report to improve standards in secondary schools in inner London?

Mr. Barnett: I agree with my hon. Friend. I welcome the Secretary of State's reaction to that report. It is one of many examples, including Her Majesty's inspector's report, showing the high regard in which ILEA is held by officials in the Department of Education and Science, although it is charged with extravagance and every possible sin by the Department of the Environment.

For those reasons, I believe that the Government's proposal today is dangerous and irresponsible. I deeply regret the steps being taken and the collapse in relationships between central and local government that has characterised the Government's period of office.

7.59 pm

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I agree very much with the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Barnett) about the change in relationships between central and local government. When I was first elected a councillor in the London borough of Brent 22 years ago I could make an appointment with the town clerk and see him within two or three days if he was free. Every member of the council, irrespective of political persuasion, sought to carry out his duties with a dignity that no longer exists. In those circumstances, it is inevitable that there has been a breakdown in relationships, and it is very much a political breakdown. The Labour party is pleased that it has succeeded and that the relationships that previously existed have broken down. I speak from more than 20 years' experience in many local authorities, having served on a London borough council for 10 years, led a district authority in the south and later served on a shire authority. I now represent an area in the north-east with Labour-controlled county and district authorities. I can thus see very clearly the differences in attitude and in the way in which local government is conducted.

In the north of England rates are comparatively higher than in the south, with the result that job opportunities are far greater in the home counties than in the north-east. The Opposition have argued that there is no correlation between rates and jobs, but the Teesside Small Business Club——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not tempt the House to go beyond the terms of the order, which relates to the Merseyside and South Yorkshire metropolitan councils, the Greater London council and the Inner London education authority. A large number of hon. Members from those areas wish to speak on matters covered by the order.

Mr. Holt: I am fully aware of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My charge against the Government is that the order does not go far enough. The Cleveland business community wants to know why Cleveland has not been rate-capped and included in the order. [HON. MEMBERS: "Wait till next year."] By next year the Conservatives will have taken control of Cleveland. Only this week they put forward a very sensible amendment to the budget to reduce the rate increase from £2·10 to £1·80. That kind of change——

Mr. Dobson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Surely the hon. Gentleman is out of order in discussing rates in Cleveland and inviting rate capping for that authority. That is in no way germane to the matters under discussion. Numerous Opposition Members have left the Chamber because they see little prospect of getting into the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is ingenious of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) to try to argue that his authority should have been included in the order, but if that argument were accepted we should finish up discussing a very large number of authorities. I hope that hon.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

Members will confine their comments to matters covered by the order — the Merseyside and South Yorkshire metropolitan councils, the GLC and ILEA.

Mr. Holt: I accept that, as yet, there is nothing in the order about Cleveland, but the general tenor of the debate so far has concerned the relationship of central Government and local government per se. It therefore seems not unreasonable to draw upon practical examples from Cleveland——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, those matters were fully discussed when we considered the Rates Bill of 1984. The hon. Gentleman's comments would have been most appropriate then, but I very much doubt whether they fit into the subject of today's debate.

Mr. Holt: With great respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the report in *The Guardian* to which the Opposition have referred was not confined to the four local authorities covered by the order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The House is not discussing any newspaper report. It is discussing a statutory instrument — the draft Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Precepts) Order 1985. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will address himself to that or resume his seat.

Mr. Holt: With great respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Speaker himself was here when the Opposition raised the subject of the relationship between jobs and rates and the report that appeared in *The Guardian*. I wish to counter the argument advanced before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, took the Chair. The business community in Cleveland would have liked rate capping to apply in that area so that the imminent loss of jobs could be avoided. It would be wholly irresponsible of me not to speak on behalf of the Cleveland business community while the order is still before the House in case I manage to persuade my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government to consider rate-capping Cleveland. The House will be interested to hear of the situations that have arisen in that Socialist Utopia, but before going off on that I wish to show that the result of this year's rate increases in my county——

Mr. Straw: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that you wish the debate to range as widely as possible and you have been generous to my hon. Friends, but it is surely out of order to speak about the rates in Cleveland.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not want the debate to range as widely as possible. I want it to be about the order before the House. I hope that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh will either address himself to the order or resume his seat and allow an hon. Member who intends to follow the rules of procedure to take part in the debate.

Mr. Holt: The Labour party is obviously frightened to hear what I have to say. I will talk about Brent instead. I hope that I shall not be ruled out of order if I talk about a local authority within the London area. May I have your ruling on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has not yet given me anything on which to rule. I assume that if he discusses Brent in the context of the order his comments will be in order, but I shall have to wait and hear what he has to say.

Mr. Holt: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Brent is very much affected by GLC actions. As a result of the change to Conservative control this year, Brent will not have a rate increase on top of the GLC precept——

Mr. Dobson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The rates levied by the Brent authority, whether Tory, Labour or Bob's your uncle, are not the subject of the order before us today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is right. I hope that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) will address himself to the order or give way and enable another hon. Member to speak.

Mr. Michie: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To help the situation, should we not be kind and give the hon. Gentleman two minutes because he has obviously brought the wrong speech?

Mr. Holt: The ratepayers of Brent, whether they are precepted by the local authority or the GLC, will have to pay the rates. The sum that they will have to pay is less because they are now in a Conservative-controlled borough. The order, which rate-caps the GLC, will assist them, and businesses in the Brent area will be infinitely better off than under the previous authority. That change of political control is without any diminution of services although, I admit, there may be no contribution to the London Lesbian Line or the Women's Police Bus Co-operative. I regret that when the Labour and Liberal parties in Brent got together they produced a poster for a dance, which shows two men dancing together. Perhaps that is what the Labour and Liberal parties want to do with each other.

The order is the first step along what I hope will be a long line of sensible measures introduced by the Government, which will follow the example set in this order, which provides for four local authorities to be rate capped, and rightly so. I look forward to the day when I can speak properly about the fact that Cleveland authority should be rate-capped. However, I shall be denied that pleasure because it will go Conservative in May and as a result will not be rate-capped.

8.11 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The attack now being made on many metropolitan counties, including Merseyside county council, is not based on rational criteria. The Secretary of State's argument that ratepayers on Merseyside need protection is a new one for Secretaries of State for the Environment in this Government. The real reason why ratepayers in Merseyside have suffered during the past few years is because since 1981 the rate support grant to Merseyside county council has been reduced by £74 million. But the council has lost much more than that, because the Government introduced their mystical GRE assessment, which was condemned by the Audit Commission, which the Government appointed. The Government have made targets of a purely hypothetical kind, which have been set by civil servants in Marsham street, whose knowledge of the northern parts of our country, especially of

Merseyside, must be extremely slight—about as minute as the Prime Minister's and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's knowledge of modern economics.

The result of those mythical assessments and hypothetical targets has been penalties to the tune of £76 million being imposed on Merseyside county council since 1981. Under successive Secretaries of State for the Environment since 1981 total grant loss has been £150 million — almost the average total annual budget of Merseyside. Incidentally, 1981 was the year when Labour became the majority party on the county council.

The Secretary of State said that Merseyside county council was spending heavily. Following the Toxteth riots in Liverpool in 1981, one of his predecessors, the present Secretary of State for Defence, addressed the Conservative party conference at Blackpool and pointed out that the problems that gave rise to the riots could be dealt with only by increased public expenditure. That is precisely what Merseyside county council has attempted to do. It has injected millions of pounds into the area to create jobs, and to save and generate small business enterprises.

As a Merseyside county councillor I do not apologise for spending more than £40 million in the years since the Labour party came to office to generate 8,000 new jobs in the local economy. I do not apologise for a penny that was spent in the take-up campaign to ensure that more money was injected into the economy by telling people what their social security rights were. I do not apologise for the campaign being conducted for better pay for the low paid. We should campaign for more money to be injected into the economy. The cost-effectiveness of our policies on Merseyside in creating small business enterprises has been far greater than the regional policy of successive Governments.

The precept for Merseyside for the current year is 65p in the pound. The gauleiters in Marsham street are telling the county council that it should impose 82·8p in the pound. As I pointed out, that is a 27 per cent. increase. The Secretary of State has not addressed himself to the fact that if the artificial target of £219 million, which he set, is adhered to by Merseyside county council, there will be a 10 per cent. cut in the budget. That budget covers only current developments, not new ones. It pays for what is, and not for what many people believe should be. The Secretary of State asks for a 10 per cent. cut but a 27 per cent. increase in the rate precept. Where then is the famous Tory argument about the need for value for money?

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) pointed out that 700 policemen may have to be dismissed to meet that cut. It is ironic that last year the Home Office approved £100 million expenditure by Merseyside police authority and was willing to provide the 50 per cent. grant to maintain and improve policing standards in an area which needs more adequate policing. But the Department of the Environment said, "We approve only £88 million. If you spend £100 million, which the Home Office has approved, and for which it will supply a grant, you will be £12 million overspent." To meet that overspend, it cost the county council an additional £18 million.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), who is no longer present—he has probably returned to finish what he was doing before he strolled into the Chamber — was alarmed at the sums being spent on public transport. He read from the central office brief, which I have — it is not only Labour councillors who allow documents to go astray. The document says that ratepayers are being taxed heavily to subsidise the buses. What the document does not say is that after 1981—the policy was found to be correct in a case before the High Court when the county council was prosecuted by General Universal Stores — for the first time in more than 12 years, there was an increase in passenger usage of the buses on Merseyside. In the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) and in parts of my constituency, 75 per cent. of the population do not have the use of a private motor vehicle. Indeed, many are recipients of DHSS benefits.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Does my hon. Friend recall the way in which the large stores in the city reacted commendably when increased trade was brought about the greater mobility of people caused by the metropolitan county council adopting a "fares fair" policy?

Mr. Wareing: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for that intervention. The stores committee, which opposed our transport policy in 1981, is now our firmest ally on this issue, and it wants the cheap fares policy to continue.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Recently the stores committee made it clear that if there was a heavy increase in rates in Liverpool, many hundreds of jobs would disappear.

Mr. Wareing: That committee is learning the real reason why rates have increased. The blame lies at the door of the gauleiters in Marsham street, not at the door of the councillors of any party that has been in control in Liverpool. I would like to be a fly on the wall when the Secretary of State meets the Conservative group on Merseyside county council next Friday. I am sure that those councillors realise that, despite political differences —there are some politically sensitive areas in LIverpool — the order will not deal with the real problems of Merseyside. The Secretary of State should consider more disregards.

If the council cuts the fire service budget by 10 per cent., four fire stations on Merseyside will have to close. There is the possibility that 3,000 jobs will be lost in an area of great deprivation. There was a time when the Tory party chided the Labour party for believing that the man in Whitehall knew best. But we have gone full circle. Merseyside has many social needs, a great problem with drug abuse—Merseyside police have only eight officers in their drug abuse squad — a declining port industry, and more than 50,000 people who have been out of work for well over a year. Where do the civil servants in Marsham street put those factors when they are making their calculations? They are completely ignored.

The Government believe in public expenditure cuts, and that is the real exercise here. By 1986-87, local authorities will have a shortfall of £2·3 billion if they are to maintain their existing services. The Secretary of State should talk to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who was Secretary of State for the Environment at the time of the Toxteth riots, and ask him how he gets money from the Cabinet. When the Trident programme was introduced, we were told that it would cost £4·3 billion, but last week, taking the exchange rate of June last year, we were told that the cost would be about £10 billion. Everyone knows that it will cost at least £12

[Mr. Wareing]

billion. The Government can find money for Trident, but they cannot find money to deal with the social problems of the area that I represent. But the people of Merseyside will not work with a pistol at their heads. They will defy the Minister, and he will have to negotiate with them, as there will have to be negotiations to solve the problems of other areas.

8.24 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): This rate-capping order is a further step towards centralised and authoritarian Government, and towards the destruction of local government democracy and accountability. Scarcely a week goes by without the House becoming more and more enmeshed in the day-to-day affairs of local government. At present, things are relatively easy for the Government, because they are merely setting up the machinery of control. The real problems will arise when that machinery is operated. In the not-too-distant future, hon. Members on both sides of the House will be so sick of being asked to decide about local government minutiae that there will be a major revolt against the Government.

The Government have clearly abandoned their previous promises to take Whitehall off the back of local government and to replace the domestic rating system. The Government and the Secretary of State stress the economic case for ever-increasing control over local authorities, but their real motivation is a political one, based on party political malice. Rate capping and the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils arise directly from the intolerant, bigoted and dictatorial attitude of the Prime Minister. To her, all opposition is anathema. To her —she said this in her Carlton house speech—there is no difference between Left-wing Labour councillors and international terrorists. That was an insult to all democratically elected local councillors.

The Prime Minister lives in a world of dangerous self-deception and increasing fanaticism. To her, everything is either right or wrong, and she is always right. To strengthen that self-deception, she surrounds herself with political eunuchs who lack principles, honesty and self-respect.

The Secretary of State talked about high spending in Labour-controlled London boroughs, but he should be honest enough to tell the House and the country that about £3,000 million has been removed from London's rate support grant between 1980-81 and 1985-86. The reduction from 60 per cent. to 48·7 per cent. in central Government support for local government since 1978-79 represents a massive switch from national taxation to local taxation. The Government are also using nationalised industries to charge artificially high prices to extract taxation from ordinary people.

Labour-controlled local authorities have tried to defend themselves against the legalised robbery of the withdrawal of rate support grant. But the Government say that those authorities are spendthrifts, and they talk about extravagance. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) hit the nail on the head when he mentioned Trident. Its cost has increased from an estimated £4,500 million in July 1980 to about £11,000 million in January 1985. What would the Secretary of State have said if a local authority had got its capital expenditure programme so wrong that it more than doubled during five years? His hon. Friends would have been jumping up and down blaming incompetent financial management in local government. The incompetent financial management is not there, but in central Government.

The Government say that the local government overspend of about £770 million imperils their economic strategy. That is a bit of a joke, because we do not believe that the Government have any economic strategy. That £770 million represents less than 1 per cent. of total public expenditure. If only the Government could get their central financial programmes accurate to less than 1 per cent. of a margin of error, they would have something on which to applaud themselves. However, they are wildly overspending in terms of their capital and revenue programmes. Then they have the cheek to turn around to Labour-controlled local authorities trying to defend themselves from central cuts and call them extravagant and spendthrift.

Overspend is a matter of opinion rather than an economic tool. The GLC, which has always been described by the Secretary of State as an overspender, found that, because of a sleight of hand in accounting, its target was increased by 63 per cent. from last year to this year. Therefore, at a stroke, a massive amount of so-called overspending was written off by the Government.

The Minister made another point that was echoed by Tory Members, which was that high rates destroy jobs, and Treasury Ministers regularly parrot that. The hacks of Fleet street in Tory rags such as *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* continue to write about it all the time, but the fact is that it is simply not true. The London Chamber of Commerce, for example, in a report that it produced in June 1983, found that rates ranked last of seven costs identified as important by London firms. It found that rates came after labour costs, payroll taxes, bank charges, other taxes, rents and transport.

As the Secretary of State knows, we have now seen a copy of the report commissioned by the Department of the Environment from the University of Cambridge. It is a most exhaustive report examining the correlation between rates and jobs. It examined every district in England and Wales, and found that there was no connection between rates and jobs.

Mr. Holt: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realise that this puts you personally in a difficult position. However, earlier, when I was speaking on this point, your predecessor in the Chair, the Chairman of Ways and Means, ruled that I was out of order in seeking to refer to the report that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is now referring to. If it was out of order for me to do so, it must be out of order for him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The Chair is indivisible in these matters. It is important that we keep within the rules of order.

Mr. Banks: I could not agree more, Sir Paul.

However, the Government gave as their justification for their rate-capping order and the precept limitation order on ILEA and the GLC the impact of high rates, as they see it, on jobs. This report, commissioned by the Department of the Environment, shows that there is no such correlation. Therefore, the report should be made widely available to hon. Members. I want to hear the Secretary of State try to refute the large report that his Department

commissioned, and that destroys one of the major points of the Government's case for rate-capping and this precept order.

The Government's policies are responsible for the gross overspending in the economy and for the destruction of jobs, and not the rates, town halls or county halls. It is about time that the Secretary of State got honest, and started to admit this fact to the House.

The GLC's expenditure limit is to be £785 million, with a precept limit of 36·52p. Will the Secretary of State provide the House with information on how he calculated that precept limit? As far as we can work out, either he or a bunch of his civil servants plucked it out of the air. They assumed GLC reserves of £71 million. Where did the Secretary of State get that figure? That is not a figure that the GLC can recognise. Speaking as a member of the GLC, I do not think that it has reserves like that. The Secretary of State then says that if we tell him what our reserves are he will tell us what he will do about it. The GLC members have said that, before they are prepared to have talks with the Secretary of State, he should tell us how he arrived at the figure of £71 million for the reserves. What does he define as reserves? The answer to that might give us a clue as to how he arrived at the figure.

I ask the Secretary of State to address himself in particular to the issue of non-uniform rates. The GLC's statutory responsibilities vary in different parts of London. For example, it is responsible for magistrates courts only in the outer London area. Accordingly, the precept varies and in practice there are five separate precepting areas within the Greater London area. The Secretary of State has provided no information on the way that the maximum precept of 36·52p in the pound is to be interpreted within the separate accounts of the council, which it is required by statute to maintain for each of the precepting areas.

In a letter of 14 January, the Department of the Environment expressed the view that it would be lawful to levy a precept in excess of the prescribed maximum in some precepting areas. The Rate Limitation (Non-Uniform Rates and Precepts Limits) Order 1985, laid before the House on 23 January, confirms this position. However, the GLC's provisional legal advice, provided by Roger Henderson, QC, suggests that no precept should exceed the maximum, and that the statutory instrument may be ultra vires. I hope that when he replies, the Minister for Local Government will tell us the position of the GLC and the application of non-uniform rates within the Greater London area.

What will happen if ILEA stays within its existing budget? Will the Secretary of State be taking over ILEA? These are the practicalities of the order. The Government are bogging themselves down in a morass of local government finance, and they will live to regret the day.

8.37 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I declare an interest, which I share with some other hon. Members, in that I pay rates to two of the four named authorities—ILEA and the GLC. As the Secretary of State reminded me earlier, under these orders, I stand to benefit personally. I shall have a third benefit if he goes ahead with rate capping for my borough, and Southwark is also prevented from levying the rate it would wish to. However, that does not change my view that rate capping is unprincipled and that redetermination of rate limits would have been the wrong way forward.

What we are witnessing tonight on these four authorities is the second part of a pincer movement. The first part was the reduction of their rate support grant. Having reduced what they received, the second part is reducing what they can require people to pay to them. The authorities are caught from both ends, and the money is not made up in other ways or by money from other sources. They will be short of money.

The Secretary of State knows that I do not hold any brief for the most substantial part of local government finance coming from the taxpayer. I do not believe that, just because the rate support grant was at 60 per cent., that should always be the level. Local government expenditure should, where it can be, be raised and spent locally.

Encapsulated in this order, however, is a tale of arbitrariness, full of assumptions, and of removing accountability. I criticise the arbitrariness, the assumptions and the removal of accountability.

The Secretary of State has never explained the arbitrariness of the choice of the 18 authorities, four precepting and 14 others, that he has chosen to be rate-capped. He has never explained why only those authorities with an expenditure of 4 per cent. above target, itself arbitrary, and 20 per cent. above GREAs, themselves arbitrary, should be the group chosen. There is an artificial cut-off point. We all know that, if he had altered the criteria slightly, more Tory authorities would have been included and there would have been another grouping based on an equally arbitrary basis.

One of the results of this arbitrariness affects ILEA in particular. Its budgetary year runs for 12 months from September. Although it will be rate-capped for the coming financial year, its funds are committed for the current academic year. Therefore, what is now a 6 per cent. cut becomes in reality a 10 per cent. cut for ILEA in the coming year.

There are also many assumptions that the Government can be shown to have got wrong. One is the Government's understanding of the effect of rates on businesses. In terms of the psychology of the business man, high rates do matter, but the reality is that they are not nearly so severe a penalty or imposition as the Government always claim. Another of the Government's assumptions, about waste and about the advantages of their system of financing, was disproved by the report of the Audit Commission last August. That report was much heralded but brushed under the carpet as soon as it came out with the wrong conclusions.

We need to know what assumptions are made about the reserves when the facts have not been made available. Southwark is proposed to be rate-capped. When we debate that proposal before long, will the Secretary of State assume that a reserve is available in Southwark which can be brought into his calculations? The Secretary of State's announcement in December did not make a specific assumption about this authority. We need to know the figures; otherwise I make the same criticism of the Government as I make of the Labour group on Southwark council: that they do not produce options for the opposition or the public to consider to enable them to judge whether or not there are reserves and whether or not they can get to, or near to, the rate-capping limit. We cannot legislate and make orders simply upon assumptions. Departments and Governments work on facts and those facts ought to be before the House.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

It is important to recognise and to proclaim the fact that this order will take away accountability. Under the Rates Act the Government set up a consultation process. The imposition of rate capping is coming before the end of the consultation process, which shows that the consultation process is a sham. Unless the Secretary of State tells the House what the assumptions are, there will be rumours like the one about Haringey repeated earlier today, with certain Members asserting that assumptions of one sort or another have been made while the Secretary of State is saying that that is not the case. The Government have taken the town hall to Whitehall. We are spending much more time debating local government matters because that is what the Government want. Therefore, the Government must make available what they criticise local councils for not making available.

It was a tragedy that when the order was introduced there was no mention of services by the Government. That is what rates are about. The Government seem to ignore arguments about services. That is not to say that the ruling Labour groups in certain councils do not frequently distort them. They do. Liberals believe that it will be impossible, without reducing services, to get down to the proposed limits. If this is the case, I should like to know whether the Minister is prepared to listen to authorities such as mine in Southwark. Southwark should be able to prove to the Secretary of State that it is prepared to make savings, although it cannot reach the Secretary of State's targets.

All the Liberal and alliance groups in rate-capped authorities have said that they want to talk to the Government. We believe that negotiation will be in the interests of our constituents and will provide an opportunity to protect services. Negotiation is better than no talk at all. The Labour party has let down the people in the areas that it represents. If it insists upon spending money upon controversial matters—for instance, upon arts services festivals in London—and does not provide money for home helps and for basic services, it will find that that is not what people are asking for. The people in London, south Yorkshire and Merseyside say that those authorities waste money. If, after cutting out unnecessary expenditure, it can be shown that the money available is insufficient, we can then make a good case to the Government.

The Government have asked us to go down a road that leads ultimately to disaster. Every time the Government impose their will upon local government, local government seeks ways round the law. There will be more abuse. The result of more abuse will be even more Government intervention. The result of more intervention is even more abuse. Local democracy is then demeaned and does not serve the people it is intended to serve. The result is a battle between central Government misusing its position to interfere and Labour authorities often exploiting people simply for political, retaliatory purposes. That is not in the interests of the people of this country. That is not what democracy is about. That is why these orders are bad and unacceptable. We shall vote against them. I hope that the Government will soon be persuaded that to cap rates is to go down a foolish, misguided and, in the end, an economically unjustifiable path, and that they are not serving anybody by going down it.

8.46 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Reference has been made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) to Liverpool. During an inquiry by academics from Liverpool university and elsewhere there was clear evidence that many of the problems facing Liverpool were the result of eight to 10 years of Liberal party control. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill has had the audacity to refer to the confrontation in Liverpool. The hon. Gentleman ought to remember that it was while his party was in office that Liverpool suffered so greatly over housing developments and in many other ways. It was the Labour party in Liverpool that inherited the mess left by the Liberal party, which at the end of the day was acting in concert with the Conservative party.

Figures against the case put forward by the Secretary of State have been mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing). I do not intend to repeat what my hon. Friends have said. However, it is very important to look at what I consider to be the kernel of the problem for local authorities and at the reason why we are debating this order.

Like some other hon. Members, I was a city councillor and a member of Merseyside county council. Indeed, I was a member of both of those bodies during the transitional period. I knew a great deal about what was going on then. But in all truthfulness and honesty I must say that I did not welcome with open arms the reorganisation that was brought about by the Tory Government and which created the second-tier authorities. At the time there was a lot of concern about the overlapping and duplication that would occur between the two tiers. Thus, I do not speak as one who was totally committed then to the metropolitan counties.

The local government reorganisation did not do what was needed. It did not assess the changes taking place in terms of community needs and matters involving the environment, housing and so on. Those changes went virtually unheeded by the reorganisation in the early 1970s. However, the metropolitan counties have been innovative. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Derby pointed out, Merseyside county council recognised that the Government's policies were creating mass unemployment, and as it had resources at its disposal, it created organisations that were capable of training people and that created jobs for the unemployed. Since then, the metropolitan counties have been innovative and have not gone on doing the same thing for decade after decade and generation after generation. They have not acted as if they were caught up in impervious rings that they were unable to get out of, but have recognised the need to tackle the changing problems facing them.

Local authorities did very little about minority groups or about the unemployed. Some of the greatest criticism came from the Liberals in Liverpool, when the metropolitan county accepted the need for it to do something about the unemployed on Merseyside. Despite all the Liberals' criticisms and snide remarks about the unemployed centre, that centre now houses many community groups and is cited as a tremendous example of what can be done by local authorities.

It is wrong to argue that local authorities must be rigid in their activities. Many new problems are emerging and local authorities must adjust themselves to them and must consider whether their expenditure meets the needs of the people. Thus, although the reorganisation was far from perfect and did not relate to the changing conditions of the people, I recognise that a new generation of councillors has tackled many problems that were neglected for too long.

The Secretary of State's arbitrary decision means that authorities such as Merseyside will be unable to continue to help to deal with the deprivation that has resulted directly from the Government's policy. Some argue that authorities such as Merseyside are responsible for the confrontation, but it was the Government who threw down the gauntlet to local authorities and who interfered with their democracy. It is the Government who have created confrontation and not the local authorities. The Government constantly interfere directly. A supposedly non-interventionist Government have done more intervening in the rights of local authorities than any Government before them.

In that sense, local authorities will feel the full effect of the decision that is to be taken tonight. Local authority unions and ratepayers recognise more and more the role that the Government are playing in destroying local democracy. They now understand that to defend it they must join those who were elected to represent them to resist the Government's excesses.

8.55pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I, too, declare an interest in that I am a ratepayer of the GLC, ILEA and of the London borough of Lambeth. Thus, the Secretary of State is about to perform a triple on my rates, having forced them up considerably during the past four years by cutting out most of those authorities' RSG.

The order has been brought to the House with undue and unnecessary haste, and with the House being denied crucial information that is in the Secretary of State's possession about the way in which he has exercised his discretion and judgment. The order should be rejected on those grounds alone.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), in his capacity as Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, pointed out to Mr. Speaker this afternoon that his Committee was deeply concerned about the short notice that it had been given to scrutinise this measure. Those observations are all the more powerful since they come from a Committee which contains a majority of Conservative Members but which has discharged its responsibilities to the House in a non-partisan way.

In his defence, the Secretary of State has pleaded that the maximum rate for the precepting authorities has to come into force by 15 February. He is gravely misleading the House. By his own Act, he gave himself powers under section 5 to set an interim maximum where, in any circumstances, no final maxima had been prescribed by the relevant date. In commending that clause, as it then was, to the Committee, the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), said:

"Clause 5(1) provides that stopgap—an interim maximum which allows an authority to levy a rate while negotiations continue." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 28 February 1984; c. 813.]

Yes, it is unfortunate that negotiations about rate limits have only recently commenced, but the fault for that lies fairly and squarely with the Secretary of State. It was he who forced into the Act conditions attaching to the redetermination procedure so potentially onerous that no authority could conceivably have used that appeal mechanism, as we warned in Committee last year, and as he well knows.

Then there is the crucial question of information that is central to the order but which the Secretary of State has denied to the House. He made a series of assumptions about, among other things, the reserves available to the authorities. He sought repeatedly to reassure the Committee upstairs and the House last year that all his decisions would be subject to the fullest possible scrutiny by Parliament. How can that scrutiny be exercised without the information upon which his decisions are based being made available to the House?

In no way does it lie in the right hon. Gentleman's mouth to complain that the authorities have not provided him with information. Indeed, the Secretary of State said this afternoon that information flowed into the Department thick and fast, and he added that all the authorities had provided a great many figures. It is outrageous and unacceptable that the House, and not just the authorities, should be denied the central information on which the Government are making orders such as this.

The Secretary of State has sought to justify draconian controls over local government by reference to the Government's economic policy. There is no justification for that, as I spelt out in the rate support grant debate on 16 January. Let us be clear that, stripped bare, these provisions are nothing more than a crude attempt to stitch up Labour authorities which are seeking to defend jobs and services against the ravages of unemployment caused by the Government. The order is an abuse of power.

The Secretary of State claims that the authorities were fairly selected by reference to what he has, in the past, described as the "robust" and "objective" tests of GREA, as he told the Standing Committee on 21 February 1983 —*[Interruption.]* I am glad to see the Minister of State blowing in incredulity at the thought that his right hon. Friend would have used such words. If the Secretary of State believes that these measures are robust and objective, he should talk to the Minister of State, for only three weeks ago that Minister made it crystal clear that he thinks no such thing either about GREA or target. Indeed, he described the system as well nigh incomprehensible, as exceptionally difficult to explain and as byzantine in its complexity. Any system that is incomprehensible and byzantine cannot possibly be robust and objective, for to be that it would have to be fair and be seen to be fair.

In the rate support grant debate, many Conservative Members complained bitterly about the nonsense of GREA. The crucial defect in the Secretary of State's case is that GREA is being used for a purpose for which it was never intended, as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) spelt out.

If GREA were an objective test, one must ask why the City of London has not been rate-capped when its expenditure is three times above GREA compared with any other authority, at 263 per cent. The Minister will answer that, although the City of London's expenditure is 263 per cent. above its GREA, the city does not meet the other test for rate capping, that of target. But target is supposed to relate to an authority's cash growth in expenditure, and the City of London's cash growth in

[Mr. Jack Straw]

expenditure has also, since 1978-79, been the highest of any authority in the land, at 274 per cent., way above that of the much abused GLC.

Nothing illustrates better the thoroughly arbitrary and disreputable way in which the Secretary of State has fixed and fitted up these tests than to compare the treatment of the GLC with that of the City of London. The City's target has been fiddled so that it escapes rate capping. The GLC's target has been fiddled so that it is heavily penalised and is now rate-capped.

If the Secretary of State does not accept that, perhaps he will explain how, as one of the many costs that he has had to pay to make rate capping work, he has this year, at a stroke, increased the GLC's target by 64 per cent. over last year.

The four rate-capped authorities we discuss today have increased their expenditure by more than the average for all authorities. It is inherent in any system of local democracy that some authorities will spend more than the average and that some will spend less. No freedom is exercisable without diversity. But of the four authorities, only one, the GLC, has increased its expenditure since 1981-82 by more than central Government have increased their expenditure on, for example, defence.

For the GLC, Merseyside and South Yorkshire, a large part of their expenditure increase has been on public transport. That expenditure has proved overwhelmingly popular, as the Government know now that they have taken control of LRT, and, despite the lunancies, illegalities and irrationalities of the Secretary of State for Transport, have had broadly to maintain the Fares Fair policy. This expenditure has also been efficient in economic terms. The Department of Transport's study showed that, for every £1 in subsidy, the local economies benefited by £1·20.

Part of the increase in expenditure by South Yorkshire and Merseyside has been on the police, at the behest of the Home Office. If these provisions go through, Merseyside may have to cut its expenditure on its police force by over £5 million, to a level that could not be achieved

"without severe emasculation of the police service",

as the chief constable of Merseyside, Mr. Kenneth Oxford, said a few weeks ago. The Merseyside fire service would have to be cut by £2·5 million, despite the fact that Merseyside is one of the most risky fire areas. The ability of the fire service to meet its statutory obligations would be critically impaired.

The other significant part of the increase in expenditure by these three authorities is seen in the employment policies. We applaud those policies. All three of the authorities are working in areas of massive economic deprivation and high levels of unemployment. They have been able, not least through constructive partnership with the private sector, to create and secure jobs and to reduce the terrifying levels of unemployment. If these programmes are cut, jobs will go and unemployment will rise. Is that what the Secretary of State wants? I believe that the answer is certainly yes.

I declare a further interest because I am a parent of a child at an ILEA school. From 1971 to 1974 I was the Islington borough representative on that authority. ILEA has higher unit costs than other authorities, but that is the product of providing a higher level of service and providing many services for people who work in London, but whose homes are in the lower rated shire areas, and is the product of the additional costs, which cannot be avoided, of running a service in a capital city.

The Government recognise those factors when they consider financing the Metropolitan police. Even though there are more police officers in London than in comparable areas outside London—we recognise that—the Government must explain why it costs 40 per cent. more to employ a police officer in London and £800 more for the Metropolitan police to buy a police vehicle than it costs outside London. Why does it cost £5,500 to clear up each crime within London, but only £1,500 to clear up each crime in metropolitan areas outside London?

The Government understand these additional costs in relation to the Metropolitan police, but they are blind to the extra costs of the capital city in relation to ILEA. ILEA has a fine record. It is one of only six authorities regarded by HMI as having a proper standard. If ILEA were required to spend as these rate limits suggest, a great many jobs in the service would be at risk and the quality of the education provided for all our children could well suffer.

The Secretary of State made the preposterous claim that he was doing all this to bring down rate levels and to improve expenditure in the non-rate-capped areas. When will the Secretary of State understand that the system he has created is so barmy that, if rate capping works to bring down expenditure in the rate-capped areas, rates will have to increase in the non-rate-capped areas? How many more times do we have to tell the Secretary of State about this? He has spelt this out in parliamentary answers. Does he not read those answers? Does he not understand that if all the authorities did what he told them and all spent at GREA, rates in Berkshire would have to go up by 20 per cent. and rates in Essex would have to go up by 25 per cent?

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: That is silly.

Mr. Straw: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell me why it is silly? The Secretary of State says that he knows that no authority will do this. I assume that means that GREA is a nonsense of an exercise. Is that the point? Of course that is true.

Mr. Jenkin: It is stupid.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman says that it is stupid. He gave me the answer. It may be true that his policy will not work overnight and do what he wants it to do so that all authorities can spend at GREA. The right hon. Gentleman told the House that the idea was that the policy should work towards all authorities spending at GREA. In that case, at the very least, rates in Essex would not be forced up by 30 per cent. They would be forced up by 15 per cent. The Secretary of State must understand the simple arithmetic of this system — "overspending" by Labour authorities has protected jobs and services and the ratepayers not only in those Labour areas but in the lower-rated Tory areas. Such is the madness and utter lunacy of the system created by the right hon. Gentleman.

I have two concluding points. The first is about the crucial connection between rates and jobs. When will the Secretary of State and the Minister of State have completed their evaluation of the Cambridge report? It is a final report, and they no doubt knew about its contents before it was submitted to them. *[Interruption.]* Do they want a copy?

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): Put it in the Library.

Mr. Straw: I am not allowed to put things in the Library. We have had that problem before. Only Ministers can deposit documents in the Library.

When will the Secretary of State publish the report, which concludes:

"the analyses provide no evidence that either the level of rates or the increase in rates affects the distribution of employment between local authority areas."?

It continues:

"If the failure to detect a widespread and general impact of rates on the location of jobs reflects the absence of such a link, there are important implications for public policy. In particular, the findings suggest that local authorities that have above average levels of rates, or that levy above average rate increases, are probably not damaging their local economies."

It suggests that it is highly probable that additional expenditure out of rates in the higher rated areas is increasing employment.

If the order is carried, it will do nothing for the Government's economic policy; it will severely damage the lives of people in some of our worst-off areas; and it will force up unemployment and replace the democratic will of those communities by centralised dictation. It must be rejected by the House.

9.11 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): The House will be pleased to know that the debate does not have to go on until 10 o'clock. The arrangement is that I speak for about 10 or 15 minutes.

This is the first occasion that the House has had a chance to debate the first order under the Rates Act 1984. I found myself agreeing with the phrase used by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) when he said that he looked upon the order as a disagreeable necessity. No Government go readily into the business of rate capping.

The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) talked about the strained relationship that exists between central and local government and how it has changed over the past four or five years. It has not changed solely because we have been in office. Underlying forces have been at work for a long time. One fundamental change is that we have succeeded in putting the handbrake on local authority expenditure. In the 1960s and 1970s it was growing at about 3 per cent. a year. Since 1979, it has grown at about 1 per cent. per year. I would be the first to recognise that that imposes a great strain upon the relationship between local and central government.

Dr. Cunningham: Even if that were a valid argument in respect of that part of local government expenditure provided by the Exchequer—one can see and concede the arguments for a cash limit on that expenditure at some point — what is the relevance of all that to local government expenditure from its own resources?

Mr. Baker: It arises because successive Governments, not just ours, have been worried by the totality of local government expenditure and the sources from which local government can finance it.

We are bringing in this order today, and we shall be bringing in an order for the lower-tier authorities in about a fortnight, because the overspending of the 18 rate-capped authorities together represents £632 million against target. That is a massive sum of money. Since 1979, those 18 authorities have increased their expenditure from £1·3 billion to £3·1 billion. That is a massive, threefold increase, and infinitely higher than the rate of inflation.

The four authorities covered by the order are overspending against targets some £523 million when we are asking local authorities to exercise restraint, and most of them are doing so. Some 85 per cent. of the local authorities are spending at target or close to it.

I should like to refer to the meeting that took place earlier this week, when a group of rate-capped authorities came to see the Secretary of State and myself. There were not just rate-capped authorities — 26 authorities were there in all, led by Councillor Blunkett. It was a self-appointed caucus. There was nobody in the delegation from those significant authorities controlled by Labour — Birmingham, Newcastle, Coventry or Gateshead — and there were no representatives from the shire counties. One had to ask oneself whom those people represented. They represented just themselves.

The rate-capped authorities were there, plus another nine. If we negotiated with them as a group, we would betray the other 387 authorities that are working broadly or precisely within the system—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why did the Government have the meeting?"] Because we are reasonable people. Those representatives asked to see us and we said that we would meet them. If we had not met them, the Opposition Front Bench would say, "Why are you so pigheaded, obdurate and obstinate in not seeing them?" Of course my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or I are willing to see them, but they cannot be expected to enter into negotiations with the Government as representing the broad mass of local authorities.

We made it clear to Councillor Blunkett, the leader of Sheffield, that we would not be blackmailed into providing more finance. That was the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn) asked me to reconfirm. That meeting on Monday this week was not the first round of a 15-round contest. Uppermost in our minds have been the interests of the domestic and commercial ratepayers who have suffered considerably through a blizzard of increased rate demands over a period of years.

Mr. Heffer: The Minister will agree that the various authorities put forward a series of very important proposals, to which the Secretary of State referred. Why were they just pushed aside without any serious consideration?

Mr. Baker: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why. Councillor Blunkett was asking us whether we would suspend the operation of the rate support grant system, which is separate from the order that we are discussing. He asked us to suspend the Rates Act and to recalculate the entire rate support grant system. He asked for a cooling-off period.

The 18 rate-capped authorities had from 24 July last year — the date on which my right hon. Friend announced the expenditure levels for those 18 authorities — roughly until Christmas to discuss with the Government, if they wanted to, whether those expenditure levels were adequate. They chose not to do so. All right. That was their choice, but by not coming to discuss the matter with my right hon. Friend, they denied themselves the opportunity of discussing whether the expenditure level for their areas was appropriate for next year. When the rate limits were announced——

Mr. Barnett: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: I should like to proceed.

[Mr. Baker]

On 11 December my right hon. Friend announced the rate limits. Again, the authorities had an opportunity to come and see us. When the statement was made, we made it clear that they had until 15 January. We extended the date until the end of January. We have followed an open-door policy. We have said that we would be prepared to meet them, and that the meetings would be only on an individual basis. However, when the authorities asked whether we would see a collective delegation, we said yes. In view of what I have said and in view of the time that the authorities have had since 24 July to discuss the matter with the Government, all that I can say is that they have been warming up for that cooling-off period for 30 weeks.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I hope that the Minister will come to the conclusion that the whole point of the meeting was to cover up the divisions in the Labour party between those who believe that they can make some savings and those who believe that they should not do so. Whatever the merits of the authorities meeting the Secretary of State, that was the reason for the meeting, and those people are to blame for its failure.

Mr. Baker: I could not have put it better. Sometimes the alliance is right, as it is on this occasion. The purpose of the exercise was political brinkmanship and to cover up the clear divisions between the individual authorities. Some wanted to settle and some were prepared to move into illegality.

Mr. Michie: I do not want the House to be misled by the claim that no local authorities have communicated. I do not have the information in front of me, but I remember that the chief executive of Sheffield wrote to the Secretary of State about the anomalies of the block grant as opposed to the urban programme and its problems. The Audit Commission also brought to the Government's attention the anomalies in GREA, and so forth. The problems have been presented to the Government and the Minister is well aware of them without being reminded of them every five minutes.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman is a county councillor in south Yorkshire. We have had one letter from south Yorkshire, virtually declining to give us any information. I believe that we have had a little more information from Sheffield, but I shall have to check. We have told the authorities to provide us with the information which, under the Act, the onus is upon them to provide. Indeed, some of the authorities did. When we met the delegation on Monday we had on the desk in front of us the piles of information that we had received from ILEA and the GLC.

Mr. Barnett: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He says that the authorities have had since last July, and in theory he is correct. But does he not understand that it would be inappropriate for the authorities to make an approach to him until they have made their budgets or their estimates as to their expenditure for 1985-86? Is he not also aware — surely he is — that they now have a statutory responsibility to consult in their areas before setting that budget? Therefore, it is important that they know what they are talking about before they make any approach to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Baker: The timing of consultation is specifically provided for in the Rates Act, although I cannot remember in which section. There was no reason why the authorities should not come to talk about expenditure levels way back in the summer and autumn if they had wanted to. They chose not to for political reasons.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asked me what the effect of rate capping would be upon local communities and their services. I can only say that if authorities had started last year, after the announcement of the expenditure levels, to live within those levels, they would not now be facing some of the problems that they are having to face. He said that he was worried that the authorities had not come in. That means that the decisions that will have to be taken now will be more serious and grave than they would otherwise have been.

Again, it is depressing that, far from trying to live within the expenditure levels that we have set, the 18 rate-capped authorities have subsequently published their own budgets showing an increase of some £424 million over and above the expenditure levels. That is a cumulative act of considerable irresponsibility. Those authorities are building up expectations that no Government could possibly meet. For example, the GLC has just published a budget that increases its revenue expenditure next year by £100 million and its capital expenditure by some £300 million. For an authority that has only 12 months to survive and operate——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Baker: —that is to dance on the deck of the Titanic.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: No, I have given way several times.

Several hon. Members, especially hon. Members from the Merseyside area, have said that services will be slashed. The authorities should have addressed the problem a year ago. We are asking authorities only to cut expenditure according to the cost of inflation, by about 4·5 or 5 per cent. The authorities budget up and then say that they have to cut from the higher budget. There are many examples of authorities that have cut their expenditure effectively.

Mr. Wareing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: Many authorities have been able to make such cuts. My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) mentioned Brent. That authority, which is under mixed control, though led by the Conservatives at the moment, has cut £20 million without cutting a single member of staff.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: With great respect, I have given way many times, and the hon. Gentleman has not spoken in the debate.

I should like to remind the House of the extent to which we are protecting the ratepayers in these proposals. Under the precept limit in the order, the precept for the GLC is 36·5p. The precept in the GLC budget will be 43p—an increase of 18 per cent. The ILEA's precept in the order is 77·25p. The budget that ILEA has issued implies 83p —7 per cent. more.

In Merseyside, the figures are much better—I mean much higher—*[Interruption.]* The figures are better in the sense that they are even more irrational and show that the council is living in a dream world. The precept in the order is 82·86p. If the ratepayers of Merseyside were not protected by the order, they would have to pay 130·5p —57 per cent. more. The ratepayers of south Yorkshire would have to pay some 43 per cent. more.

The precepting authorities have spent extravagantly. The GLC has probably been the most extravagant. In the past 12 months, the GLC has taken on some 1,490 extra members of staff. It has indulged in a huge advertising campaign costing some £10 million.

The hon. Member for Woolwich fears that authorities that will not levy the precept approved by Parliament will be gambling with people's livelihoods and, in some cases, lives. I agree with him. I hope that the Labour councillors in the authorities under discussion will, during the next month, agree a legal precept. That was the advice that they were given by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his courage in giving that advice. It was the advice given by the leader of the Labour party at the Labour local government conference last weekend. That was the right advice. The right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Gentleman want no hand in condoning the illegality that some of the wilder leaders of the extreme Left in Labour councils advocate. I hope that their wise advice will be followed. Having seen the Labour party dragged down by Mr. Scargill, they want to ensure that it is not clubbed to death by Councillor Hatton, Councillor Livingstone and Councillor Knight. I hope that, now that Parliament is about to approve the precepts, the various councils will act and pass them into law during the next few weeks.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 255, Noes 193.

Division No. 94] **[9.28 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
Major, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moynihan, Hon C.
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Onslow, Cranley
Osborn, Sir John
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powley, John
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*

Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McCusker, Harold
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wainwright, R.
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sean Hughes and
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Precepts) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

Orders of the Day

Hong Kong Bill

Considered in Committee

[SIR PAUL DEAN *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

ENDING OF BRITISH SOVEREIGNTY AND JURISDICTION OVER HONG KONG

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

9.43 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): This is the crucial clause as it gives effect to the transfer of sovereignty from 1 July 1997. It is therefore appropriate at this stage to ask the Government a number of questions which have been outstanding since Second Reading.

We had a very long, full and illuminating debate on Second Reading, and I see from the press that many people in Hong Kong have read our proceedings and, through the press and other channels, have offered many views on the subjects with which we dealt on that occasion. Nevertheless, a number of loose ends remain that are not covered in the amendments.

Contrary to some of the views expressed in the colony, this is not a minority subject in the British House of Commons. Throughout the many debates in the past 18 months, the interest in Hong Kong, its people and its future has been outstanding. During that period, 73 Members contributed on at least one occasion in debates and questions on the subject. That is a fair record by any standard. A number of Members have spoken on several occasions while others have sat patiently throughout the debates but failed to catch the eye of the Chair. This has reflected the genuine and continuing interest and concern of the House for the people on the other side of the world whose future we are now debating.

At the outset, I express our gratitude to the Government for the time that has been allowed between the Second Reading and Committee stages. The decision to postpone Second Reading for 10 days was taken in response to a request from the Opposition. It has provided a valuable opportunity for hon. Members and people in Hong Kong to study the issues and come forward with considered views on them. I see from the local press in Hong Kong that the gratitude that we are expressing tonight is reflected in Hong Kong.

I examined the information provided to us about press comment, and must express gratitude to those who provided us with that information, including Mr. Colvin Haye, his assistants and the Hong Kong Government Office. They have provided full background information which allows us to see the views, not all of which are uncritical, of the Hong Kong Government, and to reach better decisions about the views that we have adopted.

9.45 pm

I can also fairly reflect the gratitude of individual Hong Kong people. I single out Mr. and Mrs. Y. W. Fong, who wrote to me on the back of a commemorative postcard—a first day cover of the official signing of the joint declaration. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) has had his attendances at the debate marked in the same way. Many other people have written interesting comments, which will be useful when we debate the technical clauses.

I wish to ask the Government many questions about the transfer of sovereignty. This may be the last chance to ask questions and hear the Government's view for some time. I shall deal with the question of an annual report to Parliament. During the period to 1997, when sovereignty is handed over, detailed discussions will have to take place about the handover. Some of them will take place in the joint liaison group, but many will take place in the Legislative and Executive Council in Hong Kong. There is no adequate way for hon. Members to gain information about what is going on unless it is provided in an ordered form. The best way to provide information would be for the Government to provide Parliament with an annual report of progress.

During the last debate, many hon. Members were disappointed in the attitude of Ministers towards the idea of an annual report and of regular or semi-regular views on the issue. I hope that since then the Minister has had a chance to reflect, and that the Government will realise that we are not making a partisan point, but that it is a genuine desire of all parliamentarians to know precisely what is going on during that important period.

I have consistently said to representatives from Hong Kong, individuals who have written and the media that we believe that party politics should not play a major part in this issue. Obviously the purpose of the Opposition is to question the Government and to ensure that they are on their toes. However, there will be at least three British Governments before Hong Kong finally becomes part of the People's Republic of China, and we are almost certain that they will include Labour Administrations. It is therefore extremely important that all potential Governments are well briefed on what is going on behind the scenes and know how much progress is being made. We must know what progress will be made on the drafting of the basic law, which, although it is a matter for the Government of the People's Republic of China, is crucial to the people of Hong Kong. There will also be questions about the progress towards the new nationality that we shall be debating later this evening.

All those matters will be relevant to the transfer of sovereignty, and hon. Members have a right to know about them. The only alternative to the Government providing the information in an ordered form is to rely on the British and Hong Kong press. They will be the only ones to tell us what is happening and whether the progress is popular in the colony. I hope that the Minister can tell us whether we shall have such systematic feedback in the months ahead.

Secondly, if there is to be an annual report, or even in the absence of one, will Parliament have regular opportunities to debate progress towards the transfer of sovereignty? I hope that the Minister has changed his mind since Second Reading, and that he will say that, for example, a Select Committee will investigate the many issues that arise in the intervening period.

The third point on which I seek illumination is the drafting of the basic law. That will be part of the joint agreement with the People's Republic. Yet, as we know,

[Mr. George Robertson]

the people of Hong Kong have an overwhelming interest in that law, and we are still not clear whether the consultation that the Chinese have promised with the people of Hong Kong will be formal or informal. Will committees be set up that represent directly the people of Hong Kong, or will there be less tangible consultation?

The only agency that can provide such information to the House is the Government. It would be helpful to know this evening whether the Government are in a better position now than they were two weeks ago to tell us whether the consultation will include local people or whether it will mirror the rather vague, albeit important, statements that have been made by the Chinese about the necessity for consulting people in Hong Kong.

Fourthly, in the period until sovereignty is handed over, the future prosperity and stability of Hong Kong will depend upon international acceptance of Hong Kong's unique status. We are still not clear about what will happen with the GATT and MFA agreements. The House will wish to know what progress the Government have made and how they intend to ensure that the enterprise on which Hong Kong's prosperity is based will continue. From press comment in Hong Kong during the past few months, this would appear to be a matter of acute and personal interest there.

We must also ask questions about the progress towards more domestic institutions in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Government have expressed their views, and decisions will soon have to be taken. A review has been fixed for 1987, and major decisions about the pace of change will have to be taken then. But a commentary from the Government, who still have overall responsibility for the structure of institutions in Hong Kong, would help hon. Members who are deeply interested in the introduction of more representative institutions there.

The methods by which the House of Commons debates such a Bill are foreign to many people, not just in Hong Kong but elsewhere outside the House, and some of our procedures seem archaic and bizarre and are easily open to misunderstanding. I hope that people outside the House, especially those who listen so acutely in Hong Kong to every word that we say, will recognise that the scrutiny that we are giving to this Bill reflects a proper concern for the anxieties of the people of Hong Kong for their future, and our continuing concern.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I agree with almost everything that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has said. We have done all we can to serve the people of Hong Kong to the best of our ability. I hope that it is not presumptuous to say to the hon. Gentleman that the fact that the House has been almost unanimous on this issue may not excite comment from those who look to this building only when it is in a state of apparent conflict. However, in terms of doing a serious job to the best of our ability, the way that we have tried to handle this issue is the best way to handle it on behalf of the people of Hong Kong, whose future we are trying to protect as best we can, within the somewhat limited means at our disposal.

I do not wish to break the spirit of bipartisanship, but the hon. Member for Hamilton referred to the possibility of there being another Labour Government before 1997, which is a matter best left to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) to work out. I mention this because it illustrates the impossibility of any Parliament, even if it is not democratic, giving guarantees about the future, because politics and guarantees are bad bedfellows. All that we can do is what we believe to be in the best interests of all concerned.

Clause 1 deals primarily with the sovereignty issue, and there is no point in repeating all that has already been said. At this stage, there is advantage to be had by leaving a certain amount of fluidity in the Bill, certainly in respect of the nationality aspects that we shall be discussing later. I make one point in response to what the hon. Member for Hamilton said about there being some substantial time —I am sure that he is right—before we come to debate Hong Kong again. However, I am sure that he, like the rest of us, did not want to imply that by passing this Bill we wash our hands of Hong Kong and lose interest in it. We should not seek to imply either that the House will not debate, discuss, or even, if necessary, legislate from time to time on the rights of individual citizens in Hong Kong.

In this clause we are dealing with sovereignty, and it is right that this should be settled once and for all, beyond peradventure, which is what the clause does. I support it. I hope that the hon. Member for Hamilton will agree that we should let it be known to all concerned—I am sure that the Government share this view—that if, as time goes by, changes need to be made in detailed aspects of the legislation, nothing that we do tonight will slam the door irrevocably on making changes in detail that may affect the rights of individual Hong Kong citizens.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I shall be brief because we should not try to have another Second Reading debate on each clause stand part debate.

I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), who has given a good deal of time and emotional effort to the problems of Hong Kong for some time, despite the fact that, as he said, this has led to him being criticised somewhat. From the beginning, he was on the right lines, and we should salute the fact that he was so, despite the fact that when he originally expressed his views they were not universally accepted. Secondly, I am very happy to support, as did the hon. Member for Christchurch, what the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said. He will appreciate that the House is no longer simply bipartisan. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) said that it was multipartisan.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Bipartite.

Mr. Johnston: Bipartite?

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): Cinquepartite.

Mr. Johnston: That is far too clever for me.

Mr. Powell: Count up to five—five parties.

Mr. Johnston: It is a great pleasure to have the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) not only agreeing with me but doubling the number.

I have only two points to make. First, I support what the hon. Member for Hamilton said about the annual report——

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report Progress and ask leave to sit again.*

Committee report Progress.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That at this day's sitting, the Hong Kong Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. — *[Mr. Neubert.]*

Hong Kong Bill

Again considered in Committee.

Question again proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Russell Johnston: I support what the hon. Member for Hamilton said about an annual report. The view of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) was not very clear on Second Reading. He spent a little time pooh-poohing the value of annual debates upon the Armed Forces. The Minister, who is sitting looking somewhat delphic on the Front Bench, suggested that this was an artificial exercise and that the Government, being open minded and willing to listen to argument at any time, would be only too delighted, if there were a great problem, to have a debate almost immediately. That suggestion was received by Opposition Members with a certain amount of dubiety. That dubiety has persisted. There is virtue in a regular examination of how matters are proceeding. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will reconsider the matter and will agree that a regular report to the House would be of value. I do not mean that there should be a regular report in written form, but that there should be the opportunity to have a regular debate. This House produces a great deal of material in written form which is never debated, and because it is never debated it is never read.

My second point again supports what was said by the hon. Member for Hamilton. We hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to tell the House, if he can, how he envisages the basic law will evolve. That is of fundamental importance. The clause relates to the transfer of sovereignty. We are willing to transfer sovereignty if certain conditions are met. The agreement related to the meeting of conditions. This will result in a considerable diminution, in one sense, of the outright absorption of Hong Kong by the People's Republic of China. That reflects great credit upon the People's Republic of China. However, it means that we shall have a continuing interest in how the law in Hong Kong evolves over the next 13 years. If the Minister is able to say a little more than he was able to say last time about how this will be possible, the House will be grateful.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I shall not detain the Committee for long on clause 1 stand part, but one major point needs to be made. When we hand over sovereignty in 1997 in accordance with the agreement, we will be handing over not only territory and people but also a system of government. It worries me considerably that, despite the two Green Papers issued by the Hong Kong Government, we have not sufficiently evolved the constitution of Hong Kong. In the true colonial tradition, the governor of Hong Kong has absolute power under the present arrangements there. The great merit of that system is that he is subject to the Foreign Secretary who is, of course, responsible to the House. The governor can be removed, and is removed every so often as appointments lapse and new people are appointed.

When sovereignty is handed over, that situation will no longer obtain. I know that people in Hong Kong have serious misgivings about adopting an entirely democratic or parliamentary system that is based on the British model. There are many reasons why that may not be the most appropriate model for continuing the government of Hong Kong. However, I do not believe that the Government of Hong Kong have begun seriously to consider several fundamental issues, such as the way in which the Executive will be kept under control and ruled by a democratically elected assembly. At present it is proposed that the democracy should depend on a very low level of almost district or tenantry government as the only elected body, which then appoints members to ever more senior bodies until the Legislature is reached. But that is far too narrow a democratic base upon which to work, and from which to constrain the executive power now held by the governor and his officials.

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): Is my hon. Friend saying that the Hong Kong people are worried about the period between now and 1997 or about the period after 1997?

Mr. Wells: The quick answer is both. The problem is how to evolve the new institutions in the period up to 1997, and thereafter to know how they are to work once Parliament's power is removed. The question is how are they to be evolved in a way that suits Hong Kong, the Chinese people and the way in which their traditions suggest that they can be ruled. Over the years, one problem has been the difficulty of arriving at a political settlement within China that was acceptable to its people. Consequently, there have been many disastrous wars and civil wars in China that have held back its development.

Therefore, in the next 13 years we face a difficult problem in trying to evolve Hong Kong's constitution in a way that will preserve the basic liberties that are now enjoyed by the people of Hong Kong. The fundamental division of powers as between the Legislature, the Judiciary and the Executive has not been properly considered, particularly in the case of the Executive. At present, the Executive consists of the governor with his civil servants and officials acting—as we might say—as Ministers in the Legislative Council. But they are now to be retired to the sidelines. Nevertheless, the question of how the Hong Kong people are to control their Executive remains. I would hate to see us hand over the sovereignty of Hong Kong, with absolute power being retained in the hands of a governor and an Executive without proper democratic control which guarantees the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong and which they have enjoyed so far and which will be in stark contrast to the sovereignty to which they are to submit in 1997. Without that constitutional development, the people of Hong Kong will be vulnerable to the different tradition of the sovereignty to which they will be committed.

I urge Her Majesty's Government to work with the Hong Kong Government quickly to develop the Green Paper and White Paper issued by the Hong Kong Government, tailoring it in a sympathetic way to the needs, traditions and customs of the people there. It should not necessarily be a Westminster system, but one which will enable the Executive to be controlled by the people.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) was right to focus attention on the importance of the development of democracy, in an evolutionary sense, as we approach 1997.

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

There is the temptation to think only in terms of 1997 and to forget that there are 12 years to go before we reach that time. I hope that those years will be used, as the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford said, towards achieving a greater degree of democracy than has been the case hitherto.

It seems that we have been too ambivalent in our views about democracy. We must accept that existing laws must be adapted to meet the changing situation, and that situation will change rapidly as 1997 approaches. The basic law—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and others have referred, and to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) devoted much of his speech when we last debated this subject—is vital. I gather that the Legislative Council agrees with that and has reservations only on the question of passports, an issue which concerns, among others, the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell).

We must give close consideration to the way in which the basic law evolves before Hong Kong begins to work, hopefully in harmony, with China in 1997. I hope that tonight we can continue to provide those concerned with an assurance that confidence on their part is not misplaced. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have an interest in encouraging confidence. That confidence is necessary, not just in Hong Kong but in relation to Hong Kong's association with China. In other words, there must be a clear understanding between Hong Kong and China as 1997 approaches.

The Committee will not be surprised to hear me say that a great test of the basic law of democratic development in Hong Kong rests on the way in which we approach the problem of the Vietnamese refugees. I remain disappointed that the Legislative Council has not managed to make that an item of major priority, bringing pressure on the British Government to respond to the Canadian and American debates about the refugees that are taking place. In dealing with this problem in the serious way it merits, we could send a message to China that we believe that it is important to develop in Hong Kong not only laws but a humanitarian approach to problems of that nature which will be an inspiration to China and encourage the Chinese to develop their own views on human rights.

10.15 pm

Sir Paul Bryan: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that China has probably accepted more of those refugees than any other country? I do not believe that the Chinese need any lessons in that direction.

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is correct. None of us wants to score points, especially about China, because we are keen for the agreement to work. Hong Kong has lessons to learn. If those lessons come from China in the context of these negotiations, so much the better. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution.

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): Both sides of the Committee want the agreement to work for the people of Hong Kong. It is a long time between now and 1997. As one of the major signatories to this agreement, Britain must maintain the confidence in Hong Kong not only of business but of the people. There must be close liaison and discussions about what is evolving in Hong Kong. There are few democratic institutions in the region, at the moment but I think that such institutions will take off with the spur of change of sovereignty. The minority communities are deeply worried not only about passports but about the position of their children.

In Hong Kong, as in this country, people want a voice in the democratic system. I believe that hon. Members do not want just a formal debate on these matters that merely goes through the motions. This is a unique development. We are transferring over 13 years' not only sovereignty, but law, ways of life and institutions. If they are to be transferred smoothly and maintained, we need gentle touches on the tiller. Administrations in Britain and attitudes in China may change. Certain attitudes and institutions in Hong Kong will change. To retain the confidence and support of the Hong Kong people we need constant consultations between the British Government and the Hong Kong people. The results of those consultations should be reported at regular intervals of no longer than a year to the House for consideration.

We have heard of the Hong Kong people's worry about passports. At this stage, we cannot dot every "i" and cross every "t". No one challenges the good will with which we enter this agreement.

Members of the House, whatever their political differences, share an interest in the people of Hong Kong. We ask that there should be regular meaningful discussions on the Floor of the House at intervals of no more than a year. Now that we are moving towards the transition in 1997, that would be the way to gain and maintain the support of the people in Hong Kong whom it is our responsibility as Members of the British Parliament to sustain that relationship.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): The clause provides for the withdrawal of our claim to sovereignty over Hong Kong from 1997 provided that the Anglo-Chinese agreement is ratified and the appropriate documents are exchanged.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood) was right when he said that between now and 1997—if the Bill is passed—it is important to ensure that as far as possible the internal Government of Hong Kong is arranged democratically so that power can be dispersed within the community by the time of the transfer of power rather than be concentrated, as it normally is with colonial Governments, in the hands of the governor.

I hope that the Government will bear in mind, as a matter of urgency, the needs of the expatriate Civil Service in Hong Kong. Democracy may be the objective, but there will be a need to transfer and promote indigenous members of the service into various senior civil service posts in Hong Kong. I declare an interest, because I am a former member of Her Majesty's overseas Civil Service now on pension from Nigeria.

The House is taking insufficient notice of the fact that the people to whom I refer, who have had their conditions of service confirmed and who have been assured that their pensions will be guaranteed and that their rights of transfer and promotion will be maintained before and after the transfer in 1997, will have their conditions of service changed from the date upon which the Bill becomes effective, because there will be a deliberate policy to appoint to senior posts on promotion and transfer people

of Chinese ethnic origin in preference to expatriate officers. The rights and conditions of service of serving expatriates will have been prejudiced from the word go.

The Government must arrange for those people to be able to retire with pension rights and conditions of service equivalent to those of officers in a similar position in the past when our colonies achieved independence. Previously, when colonies achieved independence, arrangements for the transfer of power were made rapidly between the final agreement with the parties following a general election and the assumption of power. In this case, there will be over 12 years of preparation. However, that is no excuse for failing to deal with the deterioration in the career prospects of members of the overseas Civil Service now serving in Hong Kong. By the time the Bill becomes an Act, their conditions of service will have changed.

I understand from my hon. Friend the Minister of State that the rights of people in the Overseas Civil Service serving in Hong Kong are under active consideration. That is fine if it means that a public officers' agreement will be concluded and announced fairly soon, on which officers in Hong Kong may depend. However, if it is thought that the decision can wait for years because the transfer is not until 1997, a great injustice will be done. Many officers will leave the service prematurely, being willing to lose such pension rights to which they might have been entitled simply because of the insecurity that faces them.

Therefore, I ask the Government in this intervening period to make a public officers' agreement with the overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong as soon as possible, such as was made in equivalent cases in the colonies when they achieved their independence, so that the officers have security and may continue to serve in Hong Kong to its benefit in whatever post they have.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I heartily agree with clause 1. I speak not in order to criticise it; it is absolutely the right clause. It is short, succinct and easily understandable by everybody. I worry about how much of it is understandable with regard to what will happen in Hong Kong itself. I shall refer to that later.

I should like to say a few words about an annual debate or progress report. At this stage I am not particularly concerned about what form it takes, and as we have 13 years to go it would be premature to say that, willy-nilly, it must be an annual debate or a report presented as a Command Paper. It is important for the Government to say that they would make provision, if necessary, through the usual channels. There should be provision, annually if necessary, for a debate. It may not be necessary, but it is important, if there is pressure from Parliament or a significant part of the House, for this major issue to be debated.

More importantly, from my point of view, we should have a collation of information. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) said that it was not so important, but I believe that it is probably more important. We have information from the press and various publications, but it would be useful if an annual report were compiled and presented to Parliament, although not necessarily debated. It need not even be published by HMSO. It might be published in Hong Kong. I am not particularly fussed about how it is done. We have many things to do, and it would be useful for us to have something like that to take away and look at to see whether progress has been made in Hong Kong or whether there are matters for concern.

I should like to refer to consultation and getting the agreement of the people of Hong Kong to the measures that we are taking. I said this on Second Reading, but it is important to re-state it. I do not believe that all the people in Hong Kong, or anywhere near the majority, really understand what is proposed and what changes will take place, particularly what status they will have and what citizenship they will be entitled to. Such matters will hit Hong Kong as the years go by.

I do not criticise the efforts that have been made so far by the assessment office and the monitoring team, but it is vital that we continue to do our best to inform, persuade, educate and argue with people in Hong Kong about what will happen. There is not necessarily a general acceptance any more than a general non-acceptance. I do not know. I am sure that, although most Hong Kong people are apprehensive and worried, they do not really have all the information that is necessary to take a considered decision. But if the measure is to succeed, it is important that by 1997 there should be a general acceptance by the people of Hong Kong about what will happen to them.

10.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that as times passes various points or issues will undoubtedly arise and that as they do they should be debated? The only way to get general agreement is by general consensus and that can only come from debate. Therefore, debates should take place periodically in the Chamber.

Dr. Marek: I agree that information should be made available, but if there is general agreement I do not see the need for a debate. I am sorry if my hon. Friend disagrees, but I have no love of being in this Chamber when everybody is agreed. We should all go home early. It is important to be here when important principles are at stake. If we agree, we should not be too long, and I shall not be too long now. It is important to be here when we disagree, as we often do, but I would not insist on debates just for the sake of them.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber talked of tripartisanship. There is one Liberal Member present. It would be uncharitable of me to stick to the tenets of bipartisanship when there are other minority parties in the House. It is important that not only the Government and the Opposition but all the minority parties should be brought into the discussions. We should all be on the same side, working for a smooth transition of sovereignty from ourselves to the People's Republic of China. We should disseminate information as much as possible and learn in advance of different thinking on different Benches, so that, if possible, we can arrive at an agreed solution. If that cannot be done, clearly, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) said, we should have a debate to decide matters.

However, I hope that such situations will be infrequent. One of the keys to a successful transition, certainly for the people of Hong Kong, is that we have a policy which has the agreement of all parties in the House. I hope that the Government will bear that in mind. Although we must

[Dr. Marek]

argue about some aspects, such as nationality, in the schedules, I am sure that every hon. Member will welcome clause 1.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): This is a historic and unique occasion and it would be wrong not to contribute to a debate that is of such importance to 5½ million souls in Hong Kong. Listening to the contributions this evening I am prompted to say that over the next 62 years we must be involved in a vigil for those 5½ million souls. That vigil does not end in 12 years. That vigilance, in terms of a moral responsibility, goes on and on. The link between the people of Britain and Hong Kong is far too important to believe that it can be cut off in a short period of 12 years.

Vigilance will have to be expressed through the people of Hong Kong as well as through the British people in the House of Commons and there must be an appropriate mechanism through which that vigilance is exercised. I am not particular whether the mechanism is a Select Committee or a regular debate, but the vigilance must have an expression, and an annual expression would be appropriate. The vigilance of the people of Hong Kong must be maintained and that can best be done if there is steady progress towards more direct control of their affairs over the next 12 years.

I have spoken to people in Hong Kong and I have the impression that there is much support there for a steady movement towards a greater say in their affairs and not overnight democratisation of the processes by which they live. That means a larger say for those in the middle and at the bottom of the Hong Kong social ladder and not for the most privileged. All the people of Hong Kong must have greater identification with the decisions that are made in their name over the next 12 years and we must be vigilant about their future over that period.

There must be monitoring by the British and Hong Kong peoples over the next 12 years and beyond. We shall not have much direct influence over many changes in basic law but we shall have a moral influence. In addition, we shall have a role in monitoring the implementation of the proposed process of nationality. We have seen the way in which nationality provisions often take a turn that is very different from that which was intended. There are the unintended consequences of human actions and legislation and latent Government interpretation of the law. All those who have a large immigrant population in their constituencies know the difference between individual Ministers' interpretation of the law. We must keep a close eye on the spirit of nationality law and the way in which it works through.

There will be minorities in Hong Kong who will be deeply and badly affected by the operation of the proposed nationality law. That is why there must be constant vigilance. Where grievous wrongs are identified, they must be able to be corrected. If that message goes out from the House of Commons this evening, many in Hong Kong will feel better about their future.

Our close friendship, deep interest and central responsibility will continue over the next 12 years and beyond. No people can be severed from the British nation by legislation or the stroke of a pen. The bonds of friendship and unity will continue. I hope that those who are Members of this place and those who will replace us will keep in mind our long duty to and responsibility for the people of Hong Kong far into the future.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): I also should like to welcome clause 1 and to wish the people of Hong Kong well in the process that will take them to their new status in 1997.

Success will be determined by several factors. The first is internal circumstances in Hong Kong and the development of the new system of democracy, which I, like others, welcome. That must not cause upset or disruption or fears that might affect confidence in how Hong Kong is being run. I am confident that it can and will work.

The attitude of the Government in Beijing will have a profound effect on the success of the transitional period. I shall be interested to see how sensitive to the future of Hong Kong the Beijing Government are in drawing up the basic law and in understanding how the system operates. The system is quite different from that which operates over the border and it would not be surprising if the economic life of Hong Kong were not fully understood or appreciated.

I hope that the Government will help Beijing if difficulties such as I have mentioned arise. I am sure that there is good will on both sides and that the Hong Kong Government and the Hong Kong people will be only too pleased to help the People's Republic to enable Hong Kong's economic success to be sustained.

Mr. Adley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is, perhaps, a difference of view between the establishment in Hong Kong and the large number of extremely articulate young people who feel that they have not been enfranchised in any way? Is there not a danger that, by listening to the establishment, the British and Chinese Governments will fail to realise the aspirations of the young people of Hong Kong?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I hope that the British and Chinese Governments will listen to all of the voices. I have met many young people from Hong Kong, had lively discussions with them and thoroughly enjoyed doing so. They give every hope of a dynamic and prosperous future for Hong Kong. I believe that more than 50 per cent. of the population is under 21, so the voice of that generation must be listened to. However, it is important that the more senior voices of those in prominent positions in industry, for example, should also be listened to. I am anxious that the People's Republic should understand Hong Kong's very different system when drawing up the basic law. I do not lack confidence, as China has shown such understanding in the agreement. I thought that the People's Republic would never accept such an agreement. I am therefore confident that it will be sensitive to the different system that it will have within its orbit. Nevertheless, misunderstandings could arise, and there will have to be some sensitivity towards how Hong Kong works if there is to be no damage.

It is important that Hong Kong's economic prosperity be sustained. The people of Hong Kong, especially the young ones, have become used to continuing growth such as we have not seen in Britain in post-war and many pre-war years.

10.45 pm

It is important that the Government should help Hong Kong to sustain its trading relationships and prosperity in the transitional period because nothing would give rise to a flight from the economy and to greater damage to its prospects than a slump in its economic fortunes in that period.

It is important that the Government and Parliament should help Hong Kong to sustain its position in the transitional period. I do not believe that regular reports and debates, as has been suggested by some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), are the best way to do that. That might give rise to all sorts of things building up in Hong Kong. Those of us who know Hong Kong reasonably well realise that if a debate is anticipated on a set date every year and a regular report, this will lead to great build-ups. As the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) commented, if problems arise hon. Members can raise them in many different ways. This has been done in the past and the ingenuity of Members will ensure that a debate is held when problems occur.

However, that does not mean that the Government can be let off the hook and that Hong Kong's affairs should never again be debated by the House. There must be debates, but I do not like the idea of a regular debate and report which would entail discussion of Hong Kong whether or not it was necessary.

Mr. George Robertson: Although there are undoubted dangers involved in the high expectations raised in Hong Kong by parliamentary debates, it would be equally dangerous to allow a number of issues to drift along on the tide of speculation without an opportunity being afforded to raise them in Parliament. It might be preferable to have something that people could observe as an authoritative sounding board rather than reading 70 newspapers juggling round the various factors involved.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I can see that, but it is a balance of judgment. Indeed, I do not wish matters to be brushed under the carpet or misunderstandings to occur because the House has no opportunity to discuss the affairs of Hong Kong, but the press in Hong Kong, of which many hon. Members have had experience, can be very excitable; it may misinterpret what happens in Parliament and, indeed, may expect too much of Parliament. It is not wise therefore to build up expectations unnecessarily. In my judgment, it would not be helpful for Parliament to debate and to produce reports on Hong Kong regularly. Those hon. Members who take a close interest in these matters will ensure that the subject of Hong Kong is raised in Parliament in the period up to 1997 and that its progress will be monitored carefully.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Richard Luce): As the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) said, clause 1 is the central provision of the Bill. It provides for the termination of British sovereignty over the ceded parts of Hong Kong and the termination of British jurisdiction over the whole territory from 1 July 1997. It is therefore appropriate that the Committee should have decided to debate the matter for over an hour, raising issues that go wider than clause 1.

I appreciate the way in which the House has approached the Bill and the future of Hong Kong and, above all, the common strand that comes through of the desire to see confidence in Hong Kong. That was the clear desire on both sides of the House.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hamilton for welcoming the time lag between the Second Reading and Committee stages which we effected after listening carefully to the suggestions that he and other hon. Members made that there should be more time to consider the Bill before the Committee stage. I shall try to answer the points raised as clearly as I can to enable the Committee to proceed to the other issues.

The point that has come through most strongly tonight, as on Second Reading, is the question of accountability to the House. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have given this a great deal of thought. As hon. Members will recall, on Second Reading we had considerable reservations about having an institutionalised system in the form of an annual report and debate. We thought that that would not necessarily accord with the demands of the situation. It is worth recalling, too, that this is the third debate on Hong Kong in two months, although I appreciate that there are special reasons for that which will not apply in future years.

My right hon. and learned Friend and I have responded to the views of Members in all parts of the House in deciding that an annual report on Hong Kong will be produced by the Government and laid before Parliament. The exact form has not yet been decided and the matter is to be discussed further with the Governor of Hong Kong, but it is expected to include a general account of developments in Hong Kong during the preceding year.

The hon. Members for Hamilton, for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) and for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young) have all raised important points. The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs is bound to take a close interest and the Government stand ready to co-operate with it. If it wishes to look into issues from time to time, we shall do our best to co-operate.

As to whether there should be a debate on the annual report, the House may wish to judge whether a debate is desirable or useful in the light of the report. If the House takes that view the matter can then be pursued through the usual channels. Equally, the Government or the House may judge on some other occasion that a debate should take place because something special has arisen.

I hope that my comments will be of some help to the House and will show that it is the Government's desire to co-operate as best we can. I appreciate the importance of the House continuing to take a strong interest in Hong Kong throughout the period in which the Government have a clear responsibility for Hong Kong, certainly until 1 July 1997.

The hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber and for Hamilton referred to the basic law. The situation in that respect has not changed substantially since Second Reading. Drafting the basic law is clearly a matter for the Chinese Government, but they have made it absolutely clear that they will consult Hong Kong opinion on a wide basis. The mechanics of the consultation are not yet clear and this is a matter for the Chinese Government, but we welcome the fact that they have expressed the clear intention to consult Hong Kong opinion.

The hon. Member for Hamilton referred to international trade agreements. As he knows, provision is made for the special administrative region to continue with very

[Mr. Richard Luce]

important agreements such as the GATT, and the provisions for the Joint Liaison Group specifically mention the need to discuss how special arrangements can continue for GATT and other international agreements.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) spoke of the Hong Kong economy, which is doing extremely well in terms of growth and exports. I am sure that continuity of international agreements is an important factor in that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) and the hon. Members for Stockton, South and for Huddersfield talked about democratic institutions and the pace of progress in that respect. As the House knows, the first indirect elections will take place in September this year for part of the Legislative Assembly. Looking back to the debate of 5 December and to Second Reading, I believe that it is the general view of the House that it is best to proceed cautiously towards the fullest degree of democratic accountability by the Executive, and that is what we are doing, taking the views of the people of Hong Kong very much into account. As the House also knows, there will be a further review of the democratic institutions and the constitution in 1987 in the light of the experience of indirect elections in the next two years. Obviously, the House and, above all, the people of Hong Kong will have another opportunity to express their views.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) raised an important point about Vietnamese refugees, of which I am aware. It has a bearing on this legislation because it also affects the confidence of the people in Hong Kong. I did not answer him on Second Reading because of the lack of time. We give the matter high priority. There are still 11,900 Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong. I pay tribute to the people and Government of Hong Kong for the way in which they have tackled this major problem. They have coped with no fewer than 100,000 refugees since 1979, and they have done an admirable job in extremely difficult circumstances. The Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Home Affairs is taking evidence on that. I gave evidence this week. We look forward with great interest to its report.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: On 25 July the Minister gave me an extremely informative analysis of the present population of Hong Kong. One of the sections referred to 4,500 stateless persons of non-Chinese race, most of whom originate from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Does the 100,000 that he mentioned include that figure, or is that figure included in the 95,000 other foreign nationals?

Mr. Luce: Those 4,500 people are quite separate. At present they are stateless people. I think that 11,900 people are classified as refugees, who are foreign nationals. I am subject to correction on that. They are the clear responsibility of both the Hong Kong and British Governments, and it is our objective to find a durable solution to the problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) made an extremely important point about the officers in Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong. He reminded the House that he served in the Overseas Civil Service, as I did. The agreement on the future of Hong Kong provides satisfactorily for the continuity of service by serving officers in the public services in Hong Kong on terms and conditions, including pay and pensions, no less favourable than on the 30 June 1997. Those provisions apply to members of the Overseas Civil Service serving in Hong Kong and other civil servants. The resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong by the People's Republic of China raises similar issues in respect of the Overseas Civil Service, as independence has in other dependent territories. With that in our minds, we address ourselves to questions about their futures. I know that my hon. Friend will retain a close interest.

Mr. Stanbrook: I shall certainly do that. However, with respect, my hon. Friend has not grasped the point, which is that once the documents are exchanged and the Bill is enacted the conditions of service for all expatriate officers serving in Hong Kong will have been changed because from then onwards the policy will naturally be to promote as many people of Chinese origin as possible. That will mean that, if the qualifications of an expatriate and local officer are equal, when they apply for a post, the local officer will almost certainly be promoted. That has an adverse effect on career prospects, with a subsequent loss of morale, unless such staff now receive the sort of guarantees of security which others have had in colonies in the past.

Mr. Luce: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point. The Hong Kong Government are reviewing the number of people in the Overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong, and they will consider the numbers in the years to come. I assure my hon. Friend that we take his points on board and that we are considering those matters urgently.

I have tried to answer the debate as best I can. I hope that I have answered it sufficiently to be able to commend the clause to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule

Supplementary Provisions

11 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 9, leave out paragraph 2.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 2 and the following amendments:

No. 3, in page 2, line 17, leave out
'new form of British nationality'
and insert 'status'.

No. 4, in page 2, line 18, at end insert
'and
(c) a British Dependent Territory citizen who has a connection with Hong Kong may have the option of being given a multiple access visa stamp in any existing British Dependent Territory passport'.

No. 5, in page 2, line 18, at end insert—
'*(c)* persons possessing that status may obtain a travel document.'.

Mr. Powell: I have the honour to move the amendments also on behalf of right hon. and hon. Members of the official Opposition.

Earlier, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) informed the Committee how closely in Hong Kong the proceedings on this subject in the House are followed. I can verify that from some information which the hon. Gentleman gave me, and which I hope he does not mind me quoting. He told me that when, on examining the Order Paper, my name was seen to be not only there but above the name of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), a frisson of alarm ran through the population of that colony. The hon. Gentleman confirms what I say. Therefore, it is incumbent upon me to do my best to damp down those anxieties by explaining that there is a simple reason for this unusual juxtaposition; I got there first.

As you will realise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the group of amendments that you have so wisely recommended the Committee to take together, two separate matters are raised. One is raised by the amendment that I have just moved, and on which I understand it is in order for the entire debate to take place—that the alterations in our law of citizenship, which are authorised by paragraph 2(2) of the Schedule to be made by Order in Council, should be made by substantive legislation. Only substantive legislation can permit the careful examination, clause by clause and detail by detail, of a change in the law on so important a matter. Apart from alterations from time to time in schedules to British nationality legislation, I believe I am right in saying that at no time has an alteration been made in the law of British nationality than by substantive legislation.

Therefore, I was happy to join the official Opposition in urging upon the Government that, instead of proceeding by Order in Council under this paragraph of the schedule, they should proceed by legislation. If they are anxious about time, in recognition of the importance of the subject, no doubt the House would be willing to facilitate the consideration of a Bill, which would be the only proper way to do it.

Perhaps a bargain has been struck between the Government and the Opposition Front Bench. I do not know. Perhaps the Opposition Front Bench——

Mr. George Robertson: No.

Mr. Powell: The hon. Member for Hamilton says no, and of course I accept that immediately. But suspicions keep recurring in one's mind, especially when one realises how difficult it is for an Opposition, in the circumstances of the present Opposition, to provide themselves with sufficient troops to carry a point to a Division and to make a reasonable showing in the Lobby. I realise that I am considering a theoretical possibility, but the Government might make the suggestion that a special procedure might be followed—indeed, this was mentioned in the debate on Second Reading—to facilitate the consideration of the Order in Council which the paragraph envisages. A green-edged, green Green Paper or something of the sort might be considered.

An hon. Member from Northern Ireland is qualified respectfully to advise the Committee on this point of procedure. We have the misfortune, under direct rule, that substantive law is made for the Province under Order in Council. However, the extreme severity of that method is modified by the fact that it is normally, although not invariably, the practice to publish what are called proposals for a draft Order in Council. If the Government were to say that they had something of that kind in mind, it might go some way to assuage the anxieties in the mind of the Opposition, and I would urge caution. The existence of a document that is not itself a draft of an Order in Council makes it possible for that document to be discussed, and for differences to be made in that document and in the eventual draft when it is made, without the Government appearing to lose face as they would do if they had to withdraw a draft and replace it by another.

However, I am afraid that whatever the good will with which this operation is conducted, and however frank and candid the discussions that take place, either in the course of the debate or more informally on such a document as proposals for a draft Order in Council, it is impossible, by the nature of the document, for the House to have the opportunity of considering severally the several aspects of the changes in law that are brought about. Even if the Government, as I hope that they will, go at least as far as to say that they will publish the draft Order in Council in proposal form, and give the House the opportunity to debate those proposals, I would still say, and place on record, that it is an unsatisfactory method of proceeding in legislating for citizenship.

The other topic is the new form of British nationality that is envisaged in paragraph 2 of the schedule, from which amendment 3 results. There is a curious story that lies behind the paradoxical proposal of Her Majesty's Government that, on relinquishing sovereignty over Hong Kong, a new sort of British nationality should be invented to be conferred upon up to 3 million of the present inhabitants of that colony. This is an act so paradoxical and so curious that it naturally provokes a certain conjecture as to how it might have come about. I have done a little careful, microscopic reading of the White Paper, which is one of the few public documents that we have to enable us to reconstruct the processes that may have preceded this extraordinary outcome.

There were such processes, and they were difficult processes. Earlier in these debates, we were told that the

[Mr. Powell]

present proposals are the ninth in the series, there having been eight previous proposals that, for one reason or another, failed to stand up to whatever considerations were brought to bear on them. The Committee would do well to look carefully at the references to this proposal in the White Paper.

As you appreciate, Mr. Walker, the arrangements for a change in British nationality are no part of our agreement with the Government of the People's Republic of China. They are merely dealt with in an associated exchange of memoranda, which is the crosshead to paragraphs 62-65, the last paragraphs of the White Paper. The first three of those four paragraphs describe the position of Her Majesty's Government on the subject. Paragraph 65, the last — of Revelations, one might say — describes the Chinese position, and sheds a little more light upon the story that lies behind the curious and paradoxical proposal that we are considering. May I read it to the Committee, with commentary.

"The Chinese memorandum states the Chinese Government's position that Hong Kong Chinese are Chinese nationals."

Certainly. That is self-evident and follows logically of its own accord. It is in accordance with that that

"British Dependent Territories citizenship cannot be retained or acquired on or after the relevant date by virtue of a connection with Hong Kong."

Since Hong Kong is no longer a dependent territory, no doubt the Chinese pointed out that it would be inappropriate—because they are not entirely insensitive to the nuances even of the English language; they are subtle interpreters of language and its implications—for that status to be retained. Accordingly, and very necessarily and logically, we conceded that point in paragraph 2(1)*(a)* of the schedule. The White Paper continues:

"It"—

that is the Chinese Government—

"indicates, however".

May I pause there for a moment. Why do the Chinese Government indicate when they have stated their position that Hong Kong Chinese are Chinese nationals? I should be glad to hear whether the Minister and his advisers think that there is any difference of emphasis or nuance between the words "state" and "indicate". At least "indicate" is a much more general and a much more stand-offish expression that a statement on the part of a Government. But what is it that the Chinese Government, we are told, indicate?

"It indicates, however, that those Chinese nationals who hold British travel documents may continue to use them after 1 July 1997".

That is all that the Chinese said—rather, indicated. I must not get it wrong. The Chinese indicated that their own nationals who happen to have British travel documents may continue to use them after 1997.

Mr. Adley: The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) refers quite properly to the difference between "indicate" and "state". He used the words "paradoxical" and "curious". Will the right hon. Gentleman agree with me that the Bill does not seek in any way to confer United Kingdom citizenship upon 3 million people but that it is trying to supply the citizens of Hong Kong with some form of legitimate document to enable them to travel outwith Hong Kong but not to reside in the United Kingdom? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that that is a legitimate objective for the Government to try to achieve?

Mr. Powell: The intervention of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) has allowed me to anticipate exactly the next stage of my argument. I have succeeded, I hope, in establishing that the Chinese Government indicated that so far as they were concerned they would have no objection if their nationals who could get hold of them got hold of British travel documents and used them, except in the circumstances that are set out in the remainder of the paragraph. Therefore, one naturally asks what we are doing in implementation of this understanding to provide those persons who have hitherto had a curious sort of citizenship, British dependent territories citizenship, with British travel documents.

Why is it that this Order in Council is not an Order in Council that will create a status of those who can have a British travel document? As the hon. Member for Christchurch said, it does not confer United Kingdom citizenship. There is a reason for that. There is no such thing in our law as United Kingdom citizenship. But it does something perilously close to what the hon. Gentleman was indicating — I have used the word myself! It creates a new form of British nationality. So it confers British nationality. Perhaps the Minister will explain — it would be most interesting, and would be quoted in future textbooks on the law of British nationality, some of which will I hope be written by my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) —that it is impossible for this country to give anyone a travel document that could be described as a British travel document without conferring British nationality on him.

11.15 pm

I have offered the Minister the opportunity to prepare himself to meet that daunting inquisition by placing upon the Order Paper illustrations of how an Order in Council might have been empowered by the schedule to give the Government the power to issue British travel documents conferring certain rights in British consulates and so on to persons of a defined class or status. But that is not what is happening. That is what the Chinese indicated they would put up with. But instead of that we have invented a new form of what, over and over again, we go out of our way to call British nationality, in order to confer it upon up to 3 million of the inhabitants of Hong Kong to be enjoyed by them after the cession of the territory. I do not think that I exaggerate in describing that as a most paradoxical and curious proposal.

I wish to go a little further into what might be the reasons for that proposal. Presumably someone did not think that a British travel document was good enough. Someone was dissatisfied with a British travel document. Who was it? Who said, "No, that won't do. That's not good enough. We want British nationality."? Who insisted on British nationality being conferred on up to 3 million of the Hong Kong people? It was not the People's Republic of China. Indeed, the astonishment is that its national sensibilities were not offended by the Government openly conferring British nationality on up to 3 million of its Chinese nationals. But I shall come shortly to why their offence was not carried to a point of mortal objection, although that objection may after all be concealed. We may one day find that that repugnance is concealed under the very cautious words of the "indication" in paragraph

65 of the White Paper, which does not go to say that the Chinese Government take no objection to our conferring British nationality upon their nationals.

So who was it? There is only one cui bono here, and that is the Hong Kong people themselves—those whom we were anxious to carry along with us in the general agreement, and who were able to persuade us not to rest satisfied with providing them with what the Chinese indicated they might have, but to provide them openly and expressly with British nationality and passports. That is the terminology. From their point of view what was the difference? The Government have explained to the House that there is no difference, and that the new-fangled sort of British nationality will confer no sorts of rights except those that a travel document would confer. Why, then, was it so important to the people of Hong Kong to be given what is described as British passports and British nationality?

The answer is that they believe that, armed with that, in certain circumstances they can mobilise opinion inside and outside this country to enforce on a future Government of this country the concession of rights which do not attach to that status but which, it will be argued, are the natural implications of anything which is called a British passport or British nationality. If that is how it looks from the point of view of the Hong Kong people. I find it a little sinister that as yet it has excited no repugnance on the part of the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is it not equally plausible that the reason why the citizens of Hong Kong sought this additional phraseology is that they believe that the travel document to which they would become entitled would receive more respect from those countries which they might wish to enter carrying that document if it contained that additional phraseology?

Mr. Powell: We know that this form of British nationality will confer no additional rights on them. It is in the power and capabilities of the House to confer on Her Majesty's Government the right and power to produce the most impressive documents, loaded with all sorts of minatory and monitory abjurations to those before whom they might come.

That could be done almost in the style of the old passports which we used to be so proud to carry, in which Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State called upon all kinds of lesser breeds without the law to extend all sorts of courtesies and protection to those who travelled under that illustrious patronage.

There would be no difficulty in doing that. The point is—and the people of whom I speak are by no means lacking in shrewdness—that they perceived that there was an essential difference for certain purposes between having British nationality and just having what the Chinese Government had indicated that they would not object to. Therefore, I return to the question: why did the Chinese Government not object to our going out of our way, beyond what they had conceded, to confer our nationality on their nationals?

I believe that they believed that for them, too, it might be convenient one day. They thought that if one day they found themselves somewhat embarrassed by some of the people in this category, it might be easier, more expeditious and more comfortable to dispose of them under the description — which we could not deny because it would have been our description—of British nationals than if they were merely Chinese nationals who held British travel documents.

A fraud is being perpetrated by three parties in league together. One is the Foreign Office, as usual. I think I see the Minister shaking his head in dissent at that reference to the Foreign Office. I should have thought that he had been there long enough to have found that out by now. The second is the People's Republic of China and the third are the representatives of the Hong Kong people who have been engaged in these negotiations.

They have put their heads together and have cooked this up to deceive the House and the people whom we represent, to deceive the House into supporting that nothing of any importance or significance, nothing that may ever rebound on them in the future, is being done or is being proposed. That is being done, and we should have the opportunity—in the form of considering this matter in legislative terms—to expose it further than I have been able to do in the debate on the schedule. At least, for the record, I have put it in evidence.

Mr. George Robertson: The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) has created a climate of hostility to the cause he has promoted by the very fact that he has promoted it. I believe that, 8,500 miles away, the people of Hong Kong do not treat the matter lightly. We have heard, as ever, an interesting exploration of the logic and illogic that can be demonstrated by a master of the art, building one premise on the other and coming to an inexorable conclusion which we all know instictively to be wrong.

The right hon. Member did the cause of an important principle a grave disservice by the accusation that he flung at the perpetrators of this "fraud". I am glad that I was left out of the catalogue of those who seemed to be involved in this deception of the House of Commons. This is the Committee stage, and the right hon. Gentleman has the right to re-enter the debate any time he chooses. Perhaps, by the end of my speech, I shall be added to the pantheon of those who would perpetrate this historic fraud.

On Wednesday 23 January the press comments collected by the Hong Kong Government for the benefit of hon. Members reported:

> "Sing Pao and Sing Tao Jih Pao reported that five MPs including George Robertson"—

I like the order in which the names are listed—

> "Denis Healey, Enoch Powell and Donald Anderson would seek amendments to the Bill at the committee stage to require a debate in both Houses of Parliament on the nationality of Hong Kong residents. Sing Tao quoted sources close to the House of Commons as saying that the chance of success of these amendments was very remote because experience showed that Bills were normally passed without amendments at the committee stage."

It is interesting to note that the Chinese language newspapers have managed to look carefully at practically all the legislation—

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Not the Representation of the People Act.

Mr. Robertson: —with the exception of the Representation of the People Act, which comes up for later consideration.

The right hon. Member for South Down made the valid point—some of my hon. Friends will make that same point later—that the way in which the Government have chosen to create a new nationality has disturbing

[Mr. Robertson]

implications. It is true that never before has Parliament created a new nationality by means of an Order in Council. There are good precedents in statute law showing that nationality should be created by amendable legislation—legislation which is capable of being scrutinised and which has the safeguard of being difficult to pass through the House of Commons and, therefore, is not lightly undertaken by any Government.

The Bill creates a new nationality and that is a major and serious matter. There is an increasing number of nationalities and they were all enshrined in the British Nationality Act 1981 which received the detailed scrutiny of the House, and which contrary to reports in the *Sing Pao* newspaper was amended substantially in Committee.

11.30 pm

My final objection is that anything that is created by statutory instrument or Order in Council can be easily amended or removed if circumstances change. It provides inadequate long-term security for those people fortunate or unfortunate enough to find themselves under the title designated within the Order in Council.

Those are serious objections to the way in which the Government have chosen to create this new nationality, and it is only right as the right hon. Member for South Down fairly said to place those objections on the record. The official Opposition might be prepared not to divide the Committee on this central issue, but with those words I have no doubt entered the list of those involved in the gigantic fraud.

The first precondition to the Committee accepting that exception to the normal rule has been conceded by the Government in their amendment No. 2 by which it is proposed to include the nomenclature of the new nationality in the Bill. A further assurance must be given by the Government on that exceptional circumstance before the official Opposition will be persuaded that to divide the House might not be in the best interests of those affected by the Bill.

The Government must assure the Committee that the Order in Council will not be dealt with in the conventional way and that a draft of the draft statutory instrument will be available to the House and the people of Hong Kong which should preferably be debated in the House before the final draft statutory instrument is laid before the House. That would provide an opportunity to scrutinise the detailed nationality proposals so that hon. Members and those people who will be affected can express their views. It would also give the House a better opportunity to express strong views on the contents of the statutory instrument than the more limited opportunity available when a draft statutory instrument is laid before the House.

The Government must provide sufficient time between the various stages of the legislation to allow those people who are unaware of Parliament's intricacies to discuss the Government's proposals and to rehearse their arguments of the past 10 days more pointedly as the new passports will be available long before 1997.

The Committee expects an assurance from the Government this evening — I accept the limitations placed on any Government committing themselves and their successors—that any future changes in the Bill will not be effected simply by an Order in Council.

I have no doubt that the forensic skills of the right hon. Member for South Down will be applied to my plea that the limitations are considerable. However, the people of Hong Kong have a right to expect this from the Government who gave them the assurance in the first place and who negotiated the joint agreement and its annexes. They have the right to expect that in the foreseeable future the British Parliament will not indulge in any changes to the nationality based on temporary circumstances.

The other factors that would lead the Opposition not to divide the Committee are largely conditioned by opinion as expressed in Hong Kong. There are no fully democratic institutions in Hong Kong, and we are therefore at a disadvantage in expecting views to come forward with great authority, but inasmuch as opinion has been expressed, it appears to be in favour of the methods adopted by the Government in the Bill. However, I have a suspicion that the enthusiasm for the Order in Council has less to do with the constitutional mechanism put forward by the Government than a faith in the Government who gave the promise and a fear of the Parliament that includes the right hon. Member for South Down.

Mr. Bermingham: A new form of nationality will be created by Order in Council. I agree that the matter should be debated, and primary legislation rather than an Order in Council should be used. Does my hon. Friend agree that the new form of nationality creates a situation analogous to that in east Africa, in respect of those who are not ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong? I understand that there are some 6,000 Indians, for example, who might find themselves in the invidious position in which the Asians found themselves in east Africa, at a future juncture. That, too, should be covered by the orders that we make.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall come to some of the details. I am now dealing with the principle. My hon. Friend made a point about some of the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. In fact, he is referring not to the 6,000 people of Indian origin, but to their children after 1997, but I shall cover that point later. It is extremely important.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): This was a matter that was raised in earlier debates and I think that the figure was 6,000 Indians. It is nothing to do with their children. It is Indians who are living possibly outwith Hong Kong at the moment, but are under the Hong Kong legislation as it presently exists, as the responsibility of the British Government. I understood from a commitment that the Minister gave excellently that those people's interests would be covered—I hope that the Minister will nod his head—by the arrangements that were being made.

Mr. Robertson: I have a faint feeling that that question was directed not to me but to the Minister——

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): He nodded his head.

Mr. Robertson: The Minister nodded his head in reply in the time-honoured fashion of Parliament. We shall come to that matter. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) that I shall be looking for precisely the same assurances that he is seeking.

I return to the reasons, Sir Paul. I apologise for the fact that in my intervention on clause stand part I omitted your knighthood, which is an honour well earned.

For whatever reason, opinion as expressed in Hong Kong has crystallised round the idea of the Order in Council. It is a fact that there would be a misunderstanding that would be difficult to clear up if we were to seek to divide the House on this important issue. In many ways I regret that those misunderstandings have arisen. I regret that different views are now held about a constitutional and procedural issue in that regard, but we must live with it. The general non-partisan view that has been taken of the Bill up to now might conceivably be damaged if we were to seek to divide the House on a point of principle this evening.

The final reason on which I base my case for not contesting the Bill, although placing our reservations on record, is the fact that there are unique circumstances in Hong Kong. This is a unique agreement, a unique joint declaration and a unique situation will apply after 1997. Perhaps it is to expect too much that uniqueness itself will be a protection in future which can be discounted when precedent is quoted against us. It is a reality that we must live with and we should bear it seriously in mind.

A number of detailed questions have been asked in Hong Kong and I am sure that the Minister would want to give some assurances to the House this evening. The Legislative Council had a debate less than 24 hours ago in Hong Kong. It raised a number of points and I see from the telex today from the Hong Kong office that the Hong Kong Chief Secretary gave a number of interesting reassurances in that debate. It is right that some of those matters should be raised here so that the Minister, with whom the buck stops, can authoritatively tell the House and those who are watching us what the position is.

First, there is the question of the acceptability of the new British national overseas passports in third countries. That has arisen on many occasions in the Hong Kong press and was mentioned during the debate in the Legislative Council. The Government are in no position to give absolute guarantees and it would be unrealistic to expect them to do so. On the other hand we have a right to ask the Government what they are doing to ensure that the new passport will be acceptable to immigration officers all over the world. Specifically, what will the Government do as a gesture to show that acceptability should be the norm? Will the Government make entry into the United Kingdom by British national overseas passport holders visa free? Will they give them unrestricted entry and exit? Without that it is difficult to see other countries giving open entry and exit.

The second point is the question of identity cards being required alongside the passport in order to prove that the holder of the British national overseas passport has the right of abode in Hong Kong. That was not cleared up on Second Reading and it has concerned people in Hong Kong newspapers and in the Legislative Council yesterday. There is some confusion which was not cleared up by the Chief Secretary. Yesterday, he drew attention to section 14 of annexe 1 to the Sino-British joint declaration which provides for the holding of permanent identity cards to be stated in the future BNO passports as evidence of right of abode, and said that Her Majesty's Government would be discussing with the Chinese authorities the wording of the statement with a view to ensuring that BNO passport holders would not have to produce their identity cards for immigration clearance.

The confusion is illustrated by a variety of statements that appeared to be emanating from authoritative sources. Some newspapers in Hong Kong on Monday 28 January quoted Principal Assistant Secretary for Security, Regina Ip, who said that local residents would not need to take with them their Hong Kong identity cards when travelling abroad to prove that they had the right of abode in Hong Kong as that would be stated in the new British national overseas passports. She added, interestingly, that the United Kingdom Government would seek an agreement from other countries for the exemption of visas after the new nationality title was approved. It would be interesting to have the Minister's comments on that.

11.45 pm

Mr. Stanbrook: Is the hon. Gentleman not ignoring the fact that after 1997 those to whom he is referring will be entitled to travel with British national overseas passports and will have an entitlement also to carry with them Chinese passports? Would they not be acceptable around the world by then? Why should he be so concerned about the acceptability of a species of British nationality passport which we all know is not 100 per cent. British?

Mr. Robertson: The form of passport that they will hold as Chinese nationals has not yet been resolved. They will have the right to carry a special administrative region identity card. The question whether one document will suffice seems to be taxing the people of Hong Kong. I am expressing anxieties that seem to be the subject of wide expression in Hong Kong. It appears that they wish to know whether they will be able to use one passport or the equivalent of two passports to prove that they have the right of abode in Hong Kong. As this is a source of anxiety and concern in Hong Kong, it is something that can be clarified only by the Minister when he replies rather than by his proxies on the Legislative Council in Hong Kong.

I am sure that the right hon. Member for South Down will find enormous interest in the debate which has taken place in the Chinese press over the Chinese interpretation of the new nomenclature. The translation from the English of "British national overseas", which seems remarkably clumsy in any event, appears to create some bizarre formulation which is not comprehensible in my pronunciation. The Chinese writing apparently creates confusion between the words "nationals", "citizens" and "subjects". We are told the Left-wing lawyer Dorothy Liu has been quoted as saying that it would be more appropriate to translate "British national overseas" as— there then follows a string of Chinese characters. The literal British translation of those characters is "British (overseas) subjects". The commentary of *Wen Wei Po*— that is a pro-Chinese newspaper in Hong Kong—quoted an English/Chinese dictionary and stated that the word "national" means — there then follows a string of hieroglyphics—

"(subject of a country, in particular those living overseas)."

It is said that Miss Liu's proposed translation could reflect the spirit of the proposed declaration more accurately but there is at least some room for confusion. It is conceivable that the title "British national overseas" was devised out of a knowledge of the Chinese language rather than out of a use of the English language.

Mr. Adley: May we not deduce from what the hon. Gentleman has said the very point that I tried to make in the previous debate, which was that we should not make an attempt to write in too much detail at this stage, which would risk the sort of misinterpretation which he has well

[Mr. Adley]

illustrated? We all understand the fears and concerns of those in Hong Kong, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that some of those who have been pressing so hard for so much seem still to fail to realise the difficulties in nuance that could result from pressing for too much too precisely and too quickly in the way that the hon. Gentleman has illustrated?

Mr. Robertson: That is one version. The hon. Gentleman has a long pedigree in terms of Chinese relations. The problem is that the people who are creating the confusion are on his side of the argument. I agree that we must not allow ourselves to get too bogged down or encourage people in Hong Kong to get too bogged down with detail when their futures must be based on trust. Nevertheless, we are dealing with a Bill that concerns nationality, which people in Hong Kong deem important. If there is confusion, the Government should make the matter clear.

The Government have given guarantees for people who, without the agreement, would appear to end up with no form of statehood. We are told that they are to be given British overseas citizenship. The paradox is that, in one respect, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants finds itself in the camp of the right hon. Member for South Down. I am sure that is the first time that that has happened. The council has made it clear that British national overseas and British overseas citizenship are not really nationalities but travel documents. I hope that the Minister is now better able to identify his plans to deal with the 6,000 prominent non-ethnic Chinese British dependent territory citizens who happen to be of Indian origin, and others who will find that they are stateless after 1997. They need reassurance from the Government tonight.

The Minister has said that he seeks a durable solution for the Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong. The sooner we hear what that solution is, the better. I pay tribute to the Government of Hong Kong for its treatment of the 100,000 boat people who fled Vietnam. The residual problems of the 10,000 who remain, however difficult, cannot detract from the huge humanitarian effort that the Hong Kong Government mounted. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and I visited a camp and saw the pitiful conditions. The people there do not benefit from the stability and prosperity of the free enterprise system of Hong Kong. They have little past and a bleak future. The House should give them early assurances about their future.

We must consider those who are able, because of their Government service, to register for full British citizenship. The Government have said that they will be generous with people, especially in the security services, who might have reason to fear the transfer of sovereignty. The Government have not been specific about the numbers who might be involved and the extent of the generosity that might be accorded. We know from what we are told that a number of people are very apprehensive about the future. Given that the generosity of the Government in this regard has not been notable in the past, some further assurances this evening would go a long way to reassure them that their future is guaranteed.

These are a few of the questions and issues that have been raised in Hong Kong to which the Committee deserves answers this evening. I ask them in no controversial or combative way. These matters need to be put on record, and a much wider public outside is waiting for the answers.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and, indeed, the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), because, in the course of their contributions, a number of points were raised which, in a sense, broadened the queries that I seek to pursue in relation to amendment No 4 standing in my name. In tabling the amendment, I had no prior knowledge of amendment No 2. I am in some difficulty in judging precisely the effect of amendment No 2. I am sure that when my hon. Friend the Minister replies he will want to take into account not only some of the questions that have been raised so far, but, I hope, what I am about to put to him. The suggestion encompassed in amendment No 4, in the light of some of the problems about which the right hon. and hon. Gentlemen have spoken, I hope will contribute to overcoming some of those difficulties.

The right hon. Member for South Down in his waspish and witty way was pointing to some unanswerable questions in my view. There are practical issues involved here, on which he touched, and I should like to think that what I am about to outline will provide a practical way out of some of the difficulties.

In my view, we are now in danger of getting slightly confused about which kind of passport and what sort of citizen we are referring to. What I have referred to in amendment No 4 as British dependent territory citizen passport (Hong Kong), to give it its full title, I shall refer to as BDTC for the purpose of my remarks. I recognise, however, that if Government amendment No 2 is agreed to, we shall be talking about BNO passports.

With relation to BDTC passports, and to put that into perspective, on the figures given to me by the Hong Kong Government Office in the helpful briefing that was arranged, I note that that covers current holders of just over one million and, for those eligible but who have not yet applied, two million. It is the largest group of passport holders in Hong Kong and is to be contrasted with the 18,000 British citizen passports of those who have the right of abode in the United Kingdom as opposed to the figure of some three million who have the right of abode currently in Hong Kong but not the right of abode in the United Kingdom, although they have the rights of access. To round off those categories, there are travel documents covering an additional one million people mainly through certificates of identity.

The purpose of amendment No. 4 is to facilitate the entry into the United Kingdom of those Hong Kong Chinese residents who in my judgment have a particular role in the relationship between our two countries. This tends to be a matter of the frequency of visits of many of the people whom I have in mind. Secondly, I seek to help create a system which recognises the needs not only of those who travel backwards and forwards between Hong Kong and this country at present, but, even more important, of those who will do so after 1997. Thirdly, I should like to think that what I suggest would help to begin a process of accreditation which will influence the thinking not only about visitors from Hong Kong but British visitors to Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China in the years after 1997.

My concerns in putting forward the suggestion stemmed from two sources. One was the visit that many hon. Members paid in recent weeks to Hong Kong, courtesy of the Hong Kong Government, during which we learned of some of the practical problems. The second arises — and I declare my interest as parliamentary adviser to Cable and Wireless Ltd—from some of the examples of difficulties which, as I know from my experience, Cable and Wireless and other companies deeply involved with Hong Kong and China have had in the past.

The problem to which I refer relates essentially to BDTC passport holders coming to this country on a regular basis who find themselves constantly subject to quizzing and cross-examination as to the purpose of their visits. They are not included in statistics which merely show those refused entry. It is not just a matter of immigration officers who may have got out of the wrong side of bed. For the perfectly legitimate visitor, a dialogue of misunderstanding may occur that is time-consuming and causes disproportionate offence to many people who have important reasons to visit this country, especially in the pursuit of trade and investment between Hong Kong and the United Kingdom.

12 midnight

The problem is not confined to business visitors. My attention has been drawn to the number of Hong Kong officials who have also been required to explain in considerable detail why they visit this country so regularly and the exact purpose of their visits.

It seems to me that one way out of the problem would be for those who have reason to visit this country regularly to have that acknowledged in their travel document by an unlimited access stamp. I freely admit that I have followed the American example in this. In exchanges with my hon. Friend the Minister, who was kind enough to write to me after Second Reading, a certain amount of misunderstanding seems to have crept in. I may have contributed to that by using the word "visa". The present BDTC passport allows unlimited access. I merely suggest putting a stamp into that passport or its successor passport. That is not a visa system, because the process is voluntary. There has been careful consideration of words in many speeches today, so perhaps I should refer to a "multiple access stamp" and thus avoid any suggestion of a move away from existing rights, which is not my purpose at all.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will also tell us whether in the light of the latest advice from Hong Kong, following the debate there, there is to be an absolutely straightforward transfer as between BDTC and BNO passport holders on the right of access though not the right of residence. The comments that have come out of the message to Mr. Colvin Haye in the recent debate in Hong Kong seems to throw some doubt on that. I think that the only clarification given related to entry certificates. On the assumption that the current BDTC privileges in terms of United Kingdom entry would be transferred to the BNO passport, the procedure that I suggest would apply equally to the latter.

The problem that I have described has wider implications. The hon. Member for Hamilton referred to the acceptance of Hong Kong citizens' rights by third countries. There is an interesting difference in the figures that I gave earlier as between British citizen passports and BDTC passports. Some 104 countries allow entry on the basis of a British citizen passport with visa and 70 allow entry without visa for BDTC Hong Kong passport holders. In other words, some 34 countries will accept a British citizen passport but not a BDTC passport without a visa. Those countries include Austria, Brazil, Denmark, West Germany, Japan, Bermuda, Spain and Sweden. Therefore if my suggestion were to become part of the standard practice, I would expect the Government to seek reciprocity, certainly from other members of the European Community and from the Commonwealth. The people about whom I am especially concerned are involved in international trade, investment and the public service. They are important to the relationship between Hong Kong and the United Kingdom and to the wider relationship implied in the list of countries that I gave.

We may not have addressed our minds to the question of what is to happen about British visitors to Hong Kong, especially those who go in pursuit of trade, industry and the international relationship implicit in the agreement, as 1997 draws nearer. Our difficulty at present is that we have old-fashioned thoughts about the way trade has been done between the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and China. We should take the view that whenever we are concerned with Hong Kong we are also concerned with China.

We have a great opportunity to see the growth of investment in Hong Kong and to recognise that it is a long-term investment in China. I was glad to see that the Governor made that point in a speech to the stock exchange. Some people in the People's Republic of China will look for direct investment in China, but prudent business men, industrialists and those who already have a stake in Hong Kong would do well to consider the opportunity to create a centre of excellence in Hong Kong, which could relate, particularly to the special economic zones, as a natural bridge to the whole of China as its market.

The way to facilitate that process is to ensure the freedom of travel from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom and vice versa, and by extension into China. In other words visa liberalisation would allow wider access to China as a whole.

Those are some of the reasons why I urge my amendment on my hon. Friend the Minister. I hope that it provides him with a way through some of the practical difficulties. I have received support from members of UMELCO and members of the Hong Kong Government for my amendment. In talks about the issue it has become clear that the two classes of citizens—the BCCs and BDTCs — should be tackled in the short term. My proposal would help in that process.

After 1997, a whole new range of relationships will evolve. I hope that my suggestion will facilitate the building of bridges, and the strengthening of links and of a tripartite agreement, to which the Committee has shown its commitment tonight. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will see that the objections he put to me in correspondence were based on a misunderstanding about the rigidity of the visa system. My suggestion is flexible and, I hope, practical.

I recognise that the wording of my amendment would not fit into the terms of the Bill. My hon. Friend may be relieved to hear that I shall not, therefore, seek permission for a separate vote and to divide the Committee. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond in that spirit of good will and co-operation. I appreciate that, having heard the arguments in the light of current events, he may wish

[Mr. Michael Marshall]

to give the matter further consideration. I reserve the right to come back on Report, because I believe this to be an important matter.

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): Unlike many hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I have not had the opportunity to visit Hong Kong. However, having spent many weeks and months in the Standing Committee on the British Nationality Act 1981, may I claim some familiarity with Hong Kong born of those long hours of debate?

I am not sure that I followed the argument of the hon. Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) correctly. He seemed to be implying that British dependent territory citizens have certain rights of entry into the United Kingdom, and that he wanted those rights to be retained when the measures about which we are talking come into force. My understanding is that, in the main, British dependent territory citizens do not have the automatic right of entry into this country. We established that during the passage of the British Nationality Act. Therefore, I had some difficulty following his argument, based as it is on an incorrect premise.

When I re-examined some of our debates on the British Nationality Act, I wondered whether some of the discussions that we are having now were not foreseen——

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Yes.

Mr. Dubs: —yet we seemed to ignore some facts that stared us in the face at that time. Shortly after that Bill becoming law we are forced to change some of its provisions, although we were assured at the time that the Government—the same Minister is sitting on the Front Bench now—had thought through the matters and were ertain that they were anticipating future developments in Hong Kong when they provided for the future citizenship of those in Hong Kong. If hon. Members doubt what I say, they should re-read those Committee debates.

My special concern is with amendments Nos. 1 and 2, and with paragraph 2 of the schedule. I share the views expressed by other right hon. and hon. Members this evening that a matter of such importance as the nationality provisions affecting one territory should not be dealt with by Order in Council. Referring again to our debates on the British Nationality Act, in Committee and on the Floor of the House, the way in which the House dealt in detail with those provisions, and the way in which we were able to develop the arguments, I am even more concerned that the Government believe that Hong Kong will not have the benefit of those procedures. I must admit that we came up with the wrong answer for Hong Kong in the debates on the British Nationality Act——

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: It was not our fault.

Mr. Dubs: I should say that the Government came up with the wrong answer, because we must change the provisions now. But as the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) said, that was not our fault. Many of those points were put to the Government during the Committee stage of that Act.

I shall not address any of my remarks to the ethnic Chinese, because I wish to keep my speech short. They are catered for, or at least there are not too many ambiguities about their position. I am concerned about other people now in Hong Kong who are not protected in the same way. Some of these problems were referred to on Second Reading and earlier today. First and foremost, I am still not happy about what the Government think will happen to the 6,000 people of Indian descent. At the moment, they are British dependent territory citizens. They will become British nationals overseas under the Government's proposals, if amendment No. 2 is passed. However, any children born to those people after 1997 will, I assume, become British overseas citizens.

12.15 am

Although the intention of British overseas citizenship in the Nationality Act is that that status should not be hereditary, I interpret what the Government have said to mean that this group of people will, exceptionally, have a citizenship that can be passed on from generation to generation. The Minister suggested that on Second Reading. He said:

"It is our intention that no British national or any child born on or after 1 July 1997 to a British national should be made stateless as a result of the nationality arrangements, envisaged in the Bill."

He went on to say, when talking about British dependent territory citizens, that the "title announced today"—the transfer from BDTCs to British national overseas—

"does not give a right of abode here. It preserves all but one of the entitlements possessed by those who are at present BDTCs. The one exception is right of transmissibility." — [*Official Report*, 21 January 1985; Vol. 71, c. 809-10.]

British nationals overseas do not have the right of transmissibility, and their children will therefore become British overseas citizens, who will, by implication, have transmissibility, although that was never the intention of the Nationality Act. If I have not got that argument right, I hope that the Minister will clarify the point, but, having studied what he said on Second Reading, I cannot come to any other conclusion. If it were possible to come to any other conclusion, the Minister's undertaking that nobody would remain stateless would not be capable of fulfilment.

I am concerned that we are getting ourselves into somewhat of a tangle, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) said earlier, we are in danger of putting a group of people into similar difficulties as those experienced by the east African Asians. They are still queuing up in Gujarat province in India and waiting six or seven years to come here and establish a right that has been given to them by successive British Governments, but is being handed out in meagre annual doses.

The right hon. Member for South Down anticipated that, and said that the new type of citizenship should not be given, and instead travel documents should be issued. I take the opposite view, that we have a responsibility to see that we do not leave any people high and dry, and stranded with no territory to which they belong, and no place to which they can travel. It is by no means certain that there will be a continuation of rights in Hong Kong when the status of Hong Kong is changed.

Mr. Michael Marshall: I am reverting to an earlier point made by the hon. Gentleman. I was trying to refresh my memory from the notes provided by the Hong Kong Government Office. The hon. Gentleman asked about British dependent territory passports, and I was looking to see what had been said in the debate in Hong Kong in the past few days. I see that no commitment is made as to when that passport will be superseded by the British

national overseas passport. I understand, therefore, that this passport must continue for some indefinite period, and perhaps we shall hear a view on this tonight. While the passport or other travel documents continue, the question of access to this country still remains as previously arranged. My understanding of that is that a stay of between one month and one year is available to BDTC passport holders. For that reason, I am suggesting that a stamp that could go into such a document and could subsequently be transferred into any document that is issued within the SAR after 1997.

Mr. Dubs: No doubt the Minister can answer for himself in explaining the point. My argument was not that BDTC passport holders would lose their passports at a later date but that their children born after the due date in 1997 would become British nationals overseas. There were then difficulties. As to the hon. Gentleman's other point, I am sure that the Minister can answer that himself. My understanding is that at the moment, BDTCs do not have an automatic right of entry into this country. They may be allowed to enter this country for periods ranging from one month to one or two years, but they have to establish that right by seeking to obtain an entry certificate or by being allowed in. But that is by no means automatic. They may well be refused entry when they reach Heathrow.

Mr. Michael Marshall: It may be that the words that are used need to be defined. Entry equals access. It does not mean residence. I understand that there is no difficulty about those with British dependent territories citizenship visiting this country on existing passports, but their entry is for the purpose of making a visit, not for residence.

Mr. Dubs: I have to disagree with the hon. Member for Arundel. It may be that in practice the majority of BDTCs have no difficulty in obtaining entry to this country for the purpose of making a visit. Permanent settlement is not the question, but the fact is that they still do not have an automatic right, any more than do people from most other parts of the world. Therefore they have to be allowed in; they are not entitled to come in. In seeking to ensure that the existing rights of those people are not lost in their change of citizenship the hon. Member is saying that their very limited rights, which do not guarantee entry, should be transferred. I did not really follow the hon. Member's argument, even if I concede that in practice these people do not have too much difficulty in coming in as visitors. That is not the case with people from many other parts of the world, although this is not the occasion to develop that point.

My concern is that we shall leave certain people without the basic rights to which they are entitled. Ought we not to consider allowing those people who wish to become British citizens and who have no other citizenship to become British citizens after a certain date? If they wanted to avail themselves of it, this small group of people would be able to come to this country and exercise the right that I would wish them to enjoy. The alternative is to leave them with no obvious place to which they belong. If they have no citizenship they will be, in effect, stateless.

The other group of people about whom I am concerned are the Vietnamese refugees and any other people who do not come into the categories that we have discussed. I am not clear about the future position of the Vietnamese refugees. They are not ethnic Chinese; they are not BDTCs; and they have no means of becoming BNOs or BOCs. In other words, they will remain stateless. The Minister referred to other groups who, apart from the Vietnamese, are in this position. I should be unhappy if we passed legislation that left a group of people in a territory for which we are still responsible suspended in mid-air, with no citizenship, no rights and no guarantees about their future. I am not saying that every Vietnamese refugee in Hong Kong is directly our responsibility and ought to be allowed to come to this country. However, we ought not to ignore the fact that these refugees exist. We must not just hope that they wil not make a fuss when we pass legislation and that the Chinese will take care of them. That is not good enough. If there is no other alternative, I believe that we have to accept responsibility for these people and possibly share it with other countries. Therefore, I am unhappy about what is intended for the two groups of people I have mentioned. The Government owe us a responsibility, and we owe them a responsibility to say what their long-term intentions are. I have said what my solution would be, and I should like to hear the Government's view.

Mr. Adley: I join the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) in apologising to you, Sir Paul, for inaccurately designating you. I should like to take this belated opportunity to congratulate you on your merited and well-deserved knighthood. We all share in your pleasure.

I am happy to speak after the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs), who has never been to Hong Kong. I think that I first went there in 1955. But I have one thing in common with him, and that is that, like him, I have never travelled to Hong Kong with the benefit of a free ticket from the Government of Hong Kong. Many hon. Members will well understand the reasons for that.

In the past two weeks we have had a further chance to consider the Bill. That rightly enabled the people in Hong Kong to express their views and gave some of us a further chance to consider the point that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary announced on Second Reading about the designation of British National (Overseas) citizenship. I am slightly concerned that the Indian community in Hong Kong, and particularly those of its members who settled there before India achieved independence, will find that their new status is less advantageous than their BDT citizenship, for the very reasons that were outlined by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). I did not necessarily agree with everything that the right hon. Gentleman said, and we may not draw the same conclusion, but it is important to discuss such matters openly and frankly.

There are three things that we should avoid at this stage. First, we should avoid misleading people, deliberately or otherwise. Secondly, we should avoid making promises that we cannot deliver. Thirdly, we should avoid upsetting the delicate balance of the relationship between the British and Chinese Governments, and between both of those Governments and the people of Hong Kong. I am quite clear about what we should and should not be doing in respect of the first two items, but in respect of the third, one must bear in mind that nothing is quite as simple or as black and white as the right hon. Member for South Down might have us believe.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we are discussing the future of several million people

[Mr. Bermingham]

who live thousands of miles away, and that they have a right to expect that whatever we legislate about will not deprive them of security in the future? At present we are putting a number of people in Hong Kong, who are not ethnic Chinese, in a position in which they may well find themselves stateless.

Mr. Adley: The House of Commons is not in a position to give any guarantees to anyone in Hong Kong about their indefinite welfare. To seek to pretend that we can legislate indefinitely for their perpetual welfare falls fairly and squarely under the heading of making promises that we cannot deliver. I take the point about the minority Indian population, who are in a special situation. I think that my right hon. Friend the Minister nodded earlier that the Government are seized of it and intend to do something about it. But it is wrong to give perhaps 99 per cent. of the population of Hong Kong—the Chinese citizens—the impression that, merely by passing legislation here, we can provide them with permanent guarantees about their settled future. That is to make promises that we cannot deliver. I stress again that the people of Hong Kong are dependent on good relations between the British and Chinese Governments, and ultimately on the intentions of the Government of the People's Republic of China.

12.30 am

In a book that I wrote on the subject, I recalled stating on 8 September 1982:

"The future status of Hong Kong depends ultimately on Beijing."

Let us accept, as we debate this issue, that we can only do our best within the limitations of the power that we shall have in the future. The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) was right to point out that we should be failing in our duty if, by this legislation, we misled people into believing that they were being given something entitling them to what we know we are not able to deliver.

The right hon. Member for South Down used the word "fraud" and implied that there was a plot between the Foreign Office, the Chinese Government and the Government of Hong Kong. In fact, the pressure to dot the i's and cross the t's has come not from the British or Chinese Governments but from certain people in Hong Kong, for understandable motives, and that pressure has been led by UMELCO in Hong Kong.

All along we have been urged to provide security and guarantees. We cannot provide such guarantees, and that is why the right hon. Gentleman said that we were in danger of perpetrating a fraud on those people by this legislation. I emphasise that neither the British Government nor the Chinese Government have been behind the move to seek such guarantees, and even at this late stage the British Government are being pressed to make changes to the Bill.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) referred to the press in Hong Kong criticising us for showing a lack of interest in their affairs. They always know best. On 4 November 1983, the *South China Morning Post*, referring to a visit that I was about to make, wrote:

"Hopefully, his forthcoming visit to Hong Kong will impress on him the grave disquiet felt by people in many walks of life here about outsiders interfering in Hong Kong's affairs as negotiations on the future issue continue. Although Mr. Adley has a mandate to speak for the electors of Christchurch and Lymington he holds no such mandate for the people of Hong Kong."

Leaving aside his poor homework in designating my constituency wrongly, I wonder who the deputy editor of the paper, who wrote that, thought was going to settle the future of Hong Kong. That is the task of hon. Members here, and I agree with the hon. Member for Hamilton that we have done our best, within the limitations of the power available to us, to attend to their problems.

Dr. Marek: It will not do to say that we have done our best and can wash our hands of the matter. There is an onus on us to ensure that nobody will be stateless as a result of what will occur in 1997. Although we may not be able to give guarantees here and now, let us hope that in the coming 12 or 13 years we will be able to ensure that nobody is stateless.

Mr. Adley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but we cannot, in legislation tonight, give people guarantees. Certainly we must do what we can. As for people being stateless, presumably the hon. Gentleman was referring to that tiny fraction of people who are not of Chinese race. The hon. Gentleman must do me the credit of recognising that I raised this point on Second Reading and have done so again during this debate. I have made clear beyond peradventure my belief that we have a responsibility for these people, perhaps more than others. It is not practical or sensible to try to write into the Bill precisely how we shall do that. It is better to get these provisions right in the next six or 12 months or two or five years rather than try to identify in this legislation every problem.

It might have been better if we had had two Bills—one dealing specifically and solely with the sovereignty issue, and the other dealing with all the problems of nationality and citizenship.

Mr. Faulds: If the Government do not get this matter right within the next seven or nine months, or whatever, what recourse does the House of Commons have under the Order in Council procedure to put it right?

Mr. Adley: In June I shall have been a Member for 15 years. I cannot recall the House being incapable of doing what it needed to do if that was the will of the House and there was a majority to achieve that objective. I have great faith in the collective determination of hon. Members to act in a particular way if they wish to do so. I see that the right hon. Member for South Down is looking askance at that statement. He is probably thinking of the European Communities Act 1972. Whether hon. Members have the will to undo what we did at that time is a matter for debate—but not tonight.

I respect the right of the right hon. Member for South Down to make the point that he made and I agree with him that it would be improper for us to make promises that we cannot maintain. The right hon. Gentleman did not answer my question whether he believed that it was right for the British Government to evolve a form of status for the Chinese citizens of Hong Kong which applied to their movements when they were travelling outside Hong Kong but did not affect their position in so far as they might wish to come to the United Kingdom. I do not propose to pursue him on that point now.

Membership of GATT is one of the most important considerations for Hong Kong. That issue and others will depend upon finding some form of identity which makes

Hong Kong a separate entity to the People's Republic of China in the eyes and minds of those countries with which Hong Kong will be negotiating to maintain its present commercial status. For that reason, if for no other, I believe that flexibility is the sensible order of the day. That is why I have been concerned about the persistent attempts to try to find detailed answers at one pop to problems that, are only just beginning to emerge.

I finish with these words. I believe that the flexibility I seek will prove to be the test of the sincerity of the Government of the People's Republic of China in their oft-stated intentions, now that sovereignty has been ceded, to maintain the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

I conclude by agreeing with the hon. Members for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) that we must be certain that we receive from the Government a firm and clear undertaking that we shall maintain for those members of non-Chinese minorities in Hong Kong our absolute obligation to find a solution to their problem long before 1997, even if we cannot write that provision into this legislation immediately.

Finally——

Mr. Russell Johnston: The third "finally".

Mr. Adley: That may well have been my third "finally". It will be the last. The success of this legislation will lie not in producing a bolt-hole in the United Kingdom for the people of Hong Kong but in maintaining the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong and maintaining for the Hong Kong people their ability to live in the present form of society in Hong Kong. Let us never lose sight of that aim.

Mr. Bermingham: I wish to draw to the attention of the Committee the fact that, although I have never been to Hong Kong, I have, as a practising lawyer for 15 to 20 years, been dealing with immigration problems. I view with horror any legislation that will again create some of the misery that I have seen in those cases. I feel that I have a duty to point out the legal problems that I see.

I have spent some considerable time studying the subject of the refugees. I am sad at having to take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), but I do not believe that anything good can be said about the closed and open camps in Hong Kong. One solution to the problem would be for the Hong Kong Government to allow the ethnic Chinese in the camps to assimilate into the community in Hong Kong. That would start to breach the logjam that has developed in those camps. I do not propose to develop that issue any further at this stage.

Mr. George Robertson: I remind my hon. Friend that when I referred to the Vietnamese refugees, I paid tribute to the work that the Hong Kong Government had done in resettling almost 100,000 of the Vietnamese boat people. The fact that people are held in closed camps and the circumstances in which they are kept continues to cause anxiety to the Hong Kong Government, and to Members of the House. We long to find a solution which will remove people from those quasi-prison camps.

Mr. Bermingham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for intervening and correcting the record in so far as I may have misheard him. He takes the stance that I do. I have given my views here and elsewhere, and I shall continue to do so until the problem is solved because it is one that we must solve. I do not propose to continue with that point because it is outside the scope of the amendments.

I did not participate in the Second Reading debate, but I have studied the record carefully. I appreciate that nuances can occasionally be read into the written word and I looked for the assurances given to what we might call the "ethnic minority groups" who might find themselves in a difficult position if the legislation is left as it is.

I ask the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) to accept that my intervention in his speech was born out of the frustration of finding no commitment to the solution to the problem. I should not dream to seek to argue with him or any author about their books, but perhaps we could approach the matter in a way which does not leave us talking about BOCs, BNOs and BDTCss. They mean nothing to the man in the street. He wants to know whether he will have a secure status somewhere and somewhere he knows that he can go.

The solution is not beyond the wit of man. For instance, in 1982 we gave the Falkland islanders British citizenship, and under the British Nationality Act 1981 we allowed Gibraltarians to register in the United Kingdom as British citizens. I understand that some 5,000 did so in 1983 and 1984. When we talk about the minority groups in Hong Kong we are talking about relatively small numbers of people. We are not talking about numbers that will compare with the South Africans. As I understand the legislation, nearly 1 million South Africans have the right to come to the United Kingdom as British citizens if and when the majority take control of the state, as will undoubtedly happen one day. In those circumstances, up to 1 million South Africans have the right to come to the United Kingdom, and there is nothing that we can do about it. It is in legislation already.

If we can solve those problems and put forward such solutions, it is not beyond the wit of Parliament to put forward a solution in the years ahead before 1997 that will protect the rights of the Indians and other small minority groups who are not protected just now. There is no way that we can dodge that issue. Those people are not protected.

12.45 am

At this stage, I do not expect the Government to say, "We shall do 1, 2, 3 or 4." However, I ask for a clear and unequivocal statement in the House in respect of citizens of Hong Kong who are not ethnic Chinese, who could find themselves in much the same situation as the Asians in east Africa in the late 1960s. That was an appalling situation, which all of us recognise. Those persons should be told in simple terms that before 1997 we shall arrive at a solution that will create for them a citizenship and a right of abode in the United Kingdom in the event of their "security of tenure"—so to speak—in Hong Kong being jeopardised.

In saying that, I in no way seek to criticise the Peking authorities. I appreciate that times will change between now and 1997. It would be a fool who did not appreciate that. At the moment Peking says, "Fine, everybody in Hong Kong can stay and we welcome them." However, conditions may arise in which those who are non-ethnic Chinese find that they wish to move. The security of knowing that one can go is in itself a deterrent to go. It has been found in the past that where people feel secure and welcome at home, they tend to stay.

[Mr. Bermingham]

The numbers involved are not great. I merely ask the Government to put down a marker, a clear undertaking that steps will be taken to protect those people's interests. I do not like the form of the Bill, in that it provides for those matters to be dealt with by Order in Council. That is not entirely satisfactory. However, I am prepared not to divide the House on the issue. I put the marker on the road for the future that if in the next couple of years clear provisions are not made, I, and I am sure many hon. Members, will seek to bring the matter back before the House.

I should like to mention just one other small point. There has been talk about people who may want to leave Hong Kong because of the nature of their job, which makes them feel that in the transfer of sovereignty they would rather go away. It might be because they have been customs officers in Crown service, and so on. I know that there are provisions for their protection, but I ask the Government to take this point on board, which has been raised with me by people from Hong Kong. I refer to people in sensitive jobs. If we are to have secure government between now and 1997, those who have to carry out sensitive functions, whether they are ethnic Chinese police officers or customs officials, must have the security of knowing that if they wish to come to the United Kingdom in 1997, provision will be made for them and their families to be taken care of.

I see that the Minister nods in acknowledgement of the problem. I concede that it has been raised in the past, but we have a duty to those whom we shall ask to serve us until 1997. They should know that, in the sensitive areas in which they serve, they have added security that will enable them to carry out their functions free from the pressures that would otherwise be upon them. If we are to have good governance in Hong Kong in those years—I am sure that we shall—we must give such security to those whom we ask to serve us.

Mr. Luce: There has been considerable debate for an hour and a half on a series of amendments that are important both to the Committee and the people of Hong Kong.

Let me set the scene with Government amendment No. 2 before I deal with amendment No. 1. The purpose of amendment No. 2 is to incorporate in the Bill the title of the proposed new form of nationality. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary announced on Second Reading, this will be, as we all now know, "British National (Overseas)".

I am glad that we have been able to propose the amendment at this stage. We were pressed to do so by a number of hon. Members on Second Reading.

The people of Hong Kong have now had an opportunity to express their opinions on the title, and I am glad to be able to report that it seems to be generally acceptable in the territory.

It was not easy to devise a title that meets all the necessary requirements. On the one hand, it needs to make clear that we are dealing with a form of British nationality. That was the strongest desire of the people of Hong Kong. On the other hand, it is essential that the title can be used after 1997, and, therefore, that it carries no implication of a continuing constitutional relationship between Britain and Hong Kong after 1997. The title "British National (Overseas)" meets both those criteria.

The benefits of the new status will be set out in the Order in Council and will be subject to parliamentary approval, but the Government's intention is that the new form of nationality will carry broadly the same benefits as British dependent territory citizen except that it will not be transmissible by descent. Holders of the new status will be able to use British passports. They will be eligible for British consular protection in third countries. They will have a right to registration as British citizens under section 4 of the British Nationality Act 1981 on the same terms as the British dependent territory citizen. The detailed provisions will be set out in the Order in Council to be set before the House when they can be discussed in greater detail.

The Committee will be only too aware that the title used to describe the status is itself the subject of great sensitivity in Hong Kong and the title now proposed has the endorsement of the Hong Kong Executive Council. As I have said it seems to have been generally well received by the public in Hong Kong. To put it in the Bill now will help to calm some of the anxiety on that score in Hong Kong. I hope that the Committee will be able to agree to the amendment. As it is a matter of importance to the people of Hong Kong, the amendment will be a reassurance to them.

Putting aside the fantasy world of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) of plots, deceptions and frauds, let me get down to the reality of the other amendments. The effect of amendment No. 1, as the right hon. Gentleman says, would be to remove the nationality provisions from the schedule to the Bill in their entirety. The Government firmly believe that paragraph 2 should remain in the schedule to the Bill. The measures concerned arise directly out of the agreement and the United Kingdom memorandum. They are part of the same package. It is, therefore, appropriate that all such matters should be dealt with in the Bill. In fact, I would go further and say that silence on nationality would cause great uncertainty in Hong Kong and might cast doubt on the Government's willingness to implement the provisions in the United Kingdom memorandum.

Since it was made clear that nationality questions were among the primary concerns of the people of Hong Kong, the Government consider that that would be damaging. In this enabling clause we are endeavouring to provide a clear framework and statement of intent with regard to nationality and to deal with what one hon. Member described as a unique situation. Of course, the details will follow in the form of the order, which on Second Reading my right hon. and learned Friend announced to the House we would undertake to introduce within a year of the passage of this legislation.

In the debate today, several hon. Members have made it clear, as they did on Second Reading, that they were not satisfied that there would be sufficient opportunity to discuss the draft Order in Council in detail under positive resolution procedures.

I acknowledge that the right hon. Member for South Down is saying that he believes that these matters should be dealt with by means of primary legislation. Other hon. Members support the right hon. Gentleman. I acknowledge that point of view but I have sought to explain why we believe that it is necessary to deal with the problem in

the way that we propose. The Order in Council procedure is inevitable because of the timing constraints on the Bill, which I have explained to the Committee.

The Government have moved as far as they can to meet the wishes of the House of Commons. We agree that the House must be given the opportunity to have a preliminary debate on the draft order. In other words, it will be, as some hon. Members have described, an order with green edges. According to the way in which the debate goes, the Government will, if necessary, withdraw the draft order and revise it before laying it again before the House for debate in the normal way under the affirmative resolution procedure. It will be open to the House to express its views without having to oppose or reject the order as a whole. I hope that the House will find that procedure to be of help in enabling its views to be taken fully into account before the draft order is finally submitted for affirmative resolution.

The right hon. Member for Down South anticipated how the Government's mind is working—this is not a plot, fraud or deception—and I know that he will not be satisfied with the procedure that I have outlined. He has made it clear that he will continue to press for a separate Bill. However, for the reasons which I have advanced, I do not share his views on this issue. The creation of a new form of British nationality for those who must lose BDTC in 1997 was essential to securing the acceptability of the agreement in Hong Kong.

Amendment No. 3 seeks to insert "status" in the schedule instead of

"new form of British nationality".

I have already said that the Government are committed to granting a form of British nationality to persons who are BDTCs by virtue of a connection with Hong Kong. I hope that this commitment will enjoy the support of the Committee. It was made clear at the time of the assessment exercise in Hong Kong and at the time of the debate on the agreement in this place that the "appropriate status" referred to in the United Kingdom memorandum would be a form of British nationality. It was on this basis that the people of Hong Kong and the House endorsed the agreement. If we failed to specify that in the order it would cause great dismay and lead to the belief that we were not keeping our word.

Amendment No. 5 is directed to the introduction of travel documents and I urge the Committee not to accept it. Paragraph 2 of the schedule does not cover the provisions in the United Kingdom memorandum relating to the issue of passports. These provisions will be implemented under the Royal Prerogative in the usual way. The United Kingdom memorandum makes the Government's intention absolutely clear. Persons who are BDTCs by virtue of a connection with Hong King will be eligible to acquire a status which will enable them to use passports issued by the Government. United Kingdom consular officials will be able to renew and replace these passports after 1 July 1997. The intention of the right hon. Member for Down South is presumably to deny former BDTCs the right to hold British passports after 1997. Their eligibility to hold passports was part of the package that was found acceptable by the people of Hong Kong and the House. I must urge the Committee to reject the amendment.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Will the Minister make it clear what the people of Hong Kong were told was the advantage to them of having a British passport over having a British travel document?

Mr. Luce: The deep anxiety of the people of Hong Kong, especially the 3 million who are BDTCs, is that they should retain some form of British nationality allied to a British passport, which would provide them, on the responsibility of the British Government, with, for example, consular protection in third countries. The matter has caused great concern in Hong Kong and we thought it right to satisfy that concern.

1 am

In amendment No. 4, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) asks questions that are geared to facilitate for entry to Britain. I appreciate that my hon. Friend has the best interests of the people of Hong Kong in mind. Since Second Reading, we have had correspondence, and I shall think carefully about the additional comments that he made today, to which it would not be possible for me to give a detailed and clear reply until I have considered them. I do not believe that amendment No. 4 would facilitate travel by Hong Kong BDTCs, which is clearly his intention. There is no requirement for BDTCs to have visas, as opposed to entry certificates, for entry to the United Kingdom. I do not think that it would be appropriate, or well received in Hong Kong, to introduce such a requirement, even on an optional basis.

There is a system by which Hong Kong BDTCs may obtain entry certificates, as opposed to visas, before travelling to the United Kingdom. These are not required for ordinary visits of less than six months, although they may be obtained if the traveller wishes. In addition, BDTCs who are bona fide frequent travellers may already obtain entry certificates that are valid for two years and allow multiple entry to the United Kingdom. I believe that this practice already substantially meets the requirement suggested by my hon. Friend.

On the wider point of the international recognition of British National (Overseas) passports, I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government will do all that they can to ensure the same access to other countries as that enjoyed at present by BDTC passport holders. We intend to negotiate visa abolition agreements.

Mr. Michael Marshall: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as what he has said is helpful. I confess that I had not appreciated the significance of the entry certificate for two years. Could that entry certificate be shown in a travel document and be carried over after 1997? If such a transfer of documentation were possible, that would go some way to meet the bridging process that was behind my amendment.

Mr. Luce: If I may, I shall respond to my hon. Friend as soon as I have had time to consider the matter.

I should not do justice to the Committee if I did not pick up some of the other important issues that have been raised, such as statelessness and other matters relating to passports. I was asked whether the British national (overseas) passports will state the right of abode in Hong Kong. A statement to that effect wil be entered by the Government with respect to the period before 1997, as laid down in s ection XIV of annex 1 to the joint declaration.

[Mr. Luce]

After 1997, we shall be able to state that the holder of the passport holds a permanent SAR identity card which is evidence of his right of abode in the SAR. The Government will discuss with the Chinese authorities the wording of a statement to be included in the BN(O) passport. The aim is to ensure that an individual need use his passport—and not have to supply an identity card—only to satisfy immigration officials in third countries that he has the right of abode in Hong Kong.

The Government have undertaken to make every effort to explain arrangements to Third countries, as I have said. This will be done between the enactment of the Order in Council and the issue of BN(O) passports. Given a clear indication of the right of abode, I se no reason for third countries to introduce new restrictions on entry of BN(O) pasaport holders.

I deal next with statelessness. It is only right that the hon. Members for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) and for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) brought this up. I should therefore restate the position and clarify it. The hon. Member for Battersea raised an additional question that I should answer.

The Government have clearly stated their intention in this area. It is our intention that no former Hong Kong BDTC, nor any child born on or after 1 July 1997 to such a person, should be made stateless as a result of the arrangements envisaged in the Bill. All former Hong Kong BDTCs will be able to acquire BN(O) status if they wish before 1 July 1997. If they do this, they will retain that status for the rest of their lives. Any BDTCs who do not acquire BN(O) status and would otherwise be stateless —for example, if they are not Chinese nationals and hold no other nationality—will become British overseas citizens on 1 July 1997. The children born on or after 1 July 1997 to former Hong Kong BDTCs who are Chinese nationals will, of course, have Chinese nationality. Children born to non-Chinese former BDTCs will acquire British overseas citizen status at birth if they would otherwise be stateless.

Here I answer the question of the hon. Member for Battersea. The proposal that children born after 30 June 1997 to non-Chinese former BDTCs should acquire BOC status automatically at birth if they would otherwise be stateless is intended to apply to the first post-1997 generation. However, we appreciate that there may be concern about potential statelessness arising among subsequent generations of non-Chinese Hong Kongers. It would not be appropriate as a general principle to grant British nationality indefinitely and without restrictions to the descendants of British nationals. However, problems of further generations and potential statelessness—and we are looking here into the next century—are being urgently examined in response to representations made by the non-Chinese community in Hong Kong. In this category we include some 5,000 Indian citizens.

I therefore hope that what I have said answers the position as the Government see it. I reaffirm the position of non-Chinese BDTCs resident abroad which I outlined on Second Reading. Residence outside Hong Kong is not a bar to the acquisition of the new British national (overseas) status. Thus non-Chinese persons who are BDTCs by virtue of a connection with Hong Kong will be eligible to apply for the new status whether or not they are currently resident in Hong Kong.

Mr. Adley: My hon. Friend referred to "Indian citizens". However, the people who have lived in Hong Kong of Indian descent, and who were never citizens of India before they moved to Hong Kong, because it was not an independent country, are in a separate category. From what my hon. Friend said, it seems to me that these people of Indian race in Hong Kong who are being offered British overseas citizenship will be at a distinct disadvantage as against the overwhelming majority of the Chinese citizens of Hong Kong, who have the option of a BOC passport or Chinese citizenship. Is it not fair that in due course we should make sure that these Indian people in Hong Kong have an alternative, namely, British citizenship, over and above the proposals that my hon. Friend has made?

Mr. Luce: If I referred to them as Indian citizens, I must correct that. I am talking about people of Indian origin who are part of the community in Hong Kong—all of whom, incidentally, will have the right of abode in Hong Kong. They come into the category of non-Chinese citizens on which I have given a fairly long answer. I do not think that it would be right or proper to grant them a right of abode and British citizenship. I have tried to explain how we propose to deal with the problem of non-Chinese citizens. In any event, there will be further opportunities to debate this. There will be a preliminary debate on the draft order when we shall be able to take the views of the House. I may also be able to say something further on that occasion which I hope will be helpful.

Mr. Faulds: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and for the generosity of his assurances about Indian people living outside Hong Kong, but do those assurances cover the next generation?

Mr. Luce: I have explained the position very carefully. I ask the hon. Gentleman to read *Hansard* with care. Clearly there will be a problem with subsequent generations going well into the next century and we are considering that urgently. I would rather not add anything to what I have said at this stage.

Mr. Faulds: I appreciate the Minister's position and I do not wish to push him, but if he cannot give that assurance about the first generation after Hong Kong's subsumption by China what will be the position of those people? If they are refused British citizenship and abode, where will they be left?

Mr. Luce: I am sorry. I think that there is a misunderstanding. The people to whom the hon. Gentleman refers, if they have no other citizenship and would otherwise be stateless, will be British overseas citizens. I am sorry if I misunderstood the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Faulds: I am grateful to the Minister.

Mr. Luce: The hon. Member for St. Helens, South referred to the admission to this country of people whom he described as "at risk". In certain very limited cases rights of admission will exist at the discretion of the Home Secretary, but this will be on a very limited basis for people who have been exposed to special factors and considerations. It would be inappropriate to disclose the categories and numbers of people involved or the special

considerations or factors concerned. I should add that that point has already been covered in previous statements and debates.

Mr. Bermingham: I am grateful to the Minister for that assurance. Perhaps I may press him just a little further. I do not expect him to go into details about the categories. I appreciate the reasons for not doing that. Will the Minister confirm that the right of admission will apply not just to those people but to their families and dependants surrounding them? One accepts that there are varying degrees of family, but I hope that this will be considered in the Chinese context rather than the narrow English context.

Mr. Luce: Our policy is that the assurances extend to spouses and dependent children under the age of 18, as we have stated on previous occasions.

I have tried to answer all the main points raised in relation to the amendments. I hope that the Committee will find Government amendment No. 2 acceptable but for the reasons that I have given I do not think that it would be right to accept the other amendments.

Amendment negatived.

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 2, line 17, leave out from 'acquire' to end of line 18 and insert

'a new form of British nationality the holders of which shall be known as British Nationals (Overseas)'.—*[Mr. Luce.]*

Question proposed, That the schedule, as amended, be the schedule to the Bill.

Dr. Marek: I tabled an amendment which replaced the word "may" with "shall", but it was not selected because in the House of Commons we are allowed not to instruct, but to ask Her Majesty to do things. The amendment sought to put strength into the argument that no one should be left stateless. This is not the time to consider constitutional questions. Although some people say that Orders in Council are archaic, they nevertheless allow the Government to do things that they could not do if they had to introduce legislation.

The arguments about statelessness were well put in the previous debate. I am satisfied with the Government's comments except for one matter that arose in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham). I am not happy that the relatives of some people who may be allowed to come to this country would be limited to spouses and children up to the age of 18. We should perhaps reconsider that and allow wider discussion. These cases, by their very nature being special, could also involve other close relatives.

We should now wait to see what the order provides. When we have it in front of us, we can debate it, and then it can be laid before the House. The Committee can do no more at this stage, and I am happy with the schedule as it stands.

1.15 am

Mr. Bermingham: I ask the Minister to reconsider his answer to me regarding the children and the spouse, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) referred. It worries me that a senior official in his middle years could be "at risk" and have a group of children with an age span from 10 to 25 years. I make this point because I acknowledge the sensitivity of the Minister's job.

It is important to accept that some people will be in that position, if we are to provide good Government up to 1997. We must seek to protect them. Does the Minister propose that we protect such an official and his children who are under 18 years of age, but leave behind his children who are over the age of 18? If so, we are inhumane, unseeing and unthinking. Everyone will retire promptly before their children reach the age of 18, and we shall not have the continuity of service that we need.

Will the Minister reconsider the family definition in a broader context than in the past? Realism and experience show me and, I hope, the Minister, that a family must be taken as a unit, and that one must not draw an arbitrary line. In cases of immigration, arbitrary lines have caused a great deal of sadness. we can avoid that on this occasion. We are not considering a large number of people. If the Minister will consider the matter in a broader context, we could save a great deal of trouble in the future.

Mr. Faulds: The comment, perhaps, ought to be made before we finish that the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), as is his custom, issued some frightening prognostications tonight. He portrayed the preparation of a great plot between the Foreign Office, the People's Republic of China and the Government of Hong Kong. God help the Foreign Office. It normally does rather well, and I have the highest regard for it. However, that great plot was to pass a fraud on the people of Hong Kong and to fool them into thinking that their futures were safe when they were not. It ought to be known in those distant islands by the people whose future we are discussing that the right hon. Gentleman makes a practice of such frightening prognostications.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I make a practice of being right.

Mr. Faulds: Invariably, as the House will know, the right hon. Gentleman's forecasts prove utterly wrong.

Mr. Powell: When?

Mr. Faulds: On many occasions, for example, his forecast of the terrible dangers of immigration and rivers running with blood. They were all wrong. He will also be wrong about this. It is only fair to tell those people to sleep easy. The right hon. Gentleman is incorrect. The House, the Foreign Office and the people and Government of China are concerned about the future of the people of Hong Kong. They should be assured that, although we have the greatest regard for the right hon. Gentleman as a parliamentary performer, we know that he is given to these strange frenzies and fevers. They should be disregarded, because, of course, politically, he is a busted flush.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule, as amended, agreed to.

Bill reported, with an amendment.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

1.20 am

Mr. George Robertson: At this late hour, we have completed consideration of an important Bill. Our consideration has not been without event, because although the amendment to the Bill is important, the prophecies of the Chinese language newspapers were probably right yet again. However, the Government have made some concessions during our considerations, and it is wise to put our gratitude on record. The Government conceded more time between the Second Reading and

[Mr. George Robertson]

Committee stage. They agreed to have annual reports on the progress being made in the transition, and they have agreed to two debates on the Order in Council on British national overseas status. They have also included the name of that nationality in the Bill. They conceded that the Order in Council will have green edges. These are important concessions. The Government have listened to the will of the House and, in doing so, have done a great service to Parliament.

This Third Reading is not the end of the story. The book is not closing on Hong Kong, and there are 12 more years until the handing-over of sovereignty. The House must be conscious of its continuing obligations to monitor and to be vigilant about progress right up to 1997. On the evening of 30 June 1997, we shall make the transfer, and the House's direct influence will have gone. Until then, however, we shall not stop the scrutiny which, in the long transitional period, is imperative.

1.23 am

Mr. Johnston: It has been a privilege and a responsibility to have taken part in these debates on our acceptance, following negotiations, of the transfer back to China of the island of Hong Kong and its related territories. I include not just the land, but 5.25 million people—as many people as live in Scotland. It is a very different island that we hand back from the rocky pirates' base that we secured in the last century in circumstances in which we cannot take pride. It is also a very different China, though many traditions pulse unchecked through different political structures.

I said during our first debate, and repeated on Second Reading, that it is difficult for a Liberal to give an uncritical welcome to a Bill which surrenders sovereignty over a people without giving them an open, free choice. Nations, both large and small, continue, sadly, to be over insistent on their national pride and not sufficiently relaxed over the natural, individual and community urge to be independent that people have.

The enclaves that remain here and there across the globe are the leftovers of empires, and do not fit into tidy patterns, but why must we always have tidy patterns? Freedom and tolerance are more important than tidy patterns and historic rights. However, there is no doubt that the remarkable, indeed unique, agreement reached between the Government and the People's Republic of China can provide a framework which, while assuaging Chinese national pride, can equally facilitate the continuing evolution of the vibrant, yet controlled, free enterprise community that is Hong Kong.

The formulation of the basic law will continue to be central to setting the ground rules and to establishing whether or not the agreement will work. I hope that it will. I believe that at this moment, every responsible person in China, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom believes that it will work. We all pray that we are right, and that Hong Kong will have the future that we all want for it.

1.26 am

Mr. Luce: I think that hon. Members will agree that we have had full discussions in Committee and on Second Reading, and I hope that this will be a source of great reassurance to the people of Hong Kong. We hope that the Bill will proceed to the other place, and that the House will continue to show strong support for it. I have tried to accommodate as much as I could the anxieties and views of the House. I believe that the people of Hong Kong have every right to be pleased to know that it has been the strong desire of the House, on both sides, to retain the closest possible interest in Hong Kong in the years up to 1997. That, too should be a source of reassurance.

It is partly for that reason that the British Government felt it right to make concessions on annual reports and due debate on the draft order, so that the accountability of the House is fully demonstrated. As the House knows, ratification of the agreement has to take place before 30 June 1997. Strong views have been expressed about Hong Kong and its future, which, like the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) I believe should give a renewed sense of confidence. In the meantime, I repeat that Her Majesty's Government remain firmly responsible for Hong Kong until 1 July 1998. Against that background, I warmly commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft Specialized Agencies of the United Nations (Immunities and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Human Embryos

1.28 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): As one born and bred in the constituency of Belfast, West, I beg leave to present a petition signed by 13,906 constituents of Belfast, West. It is entitled "Petition for the Protection of the Human Embryo". Unfortunately in one way, perhaps thankfully in another, the constituents are represented by a person who has won a seat in this place that he will not take. Therefore, I am delighted that they have asked me to present this petition to the House.

The petitioners affirm their belief that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real, living individual human being. They oppose all practices that discriminate against the embryo and violate his or her human dignity and right to life. The petition continues:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves the purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment.

Your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the table.

M1 (Driving Conditions)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

1.30 am

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): This Adjournment debate was sought because of increasing concern about driving conditions and standards on the M1 motorway. Recent accidents on the M1, some in adverse weather conditions, have reinforced that concern. The problems to which I shall refer are undoubtedly experienced on other motorways throughout the country, but my familiarity and love-hate relationship with that road, having travelled up and down it between London and Yorkshire most weeks since June 1983, lead me to be specific about the M1.

Since I initially sought this Adjournment debate, the Select Committee on Transport has published its report on road safety. It covers in much more detail many issues of motorway safety and other related matters. I hope that at a later stage the House will have an opportunity to debate them in greater detail.

Observation during the last 18 months of travelling up and down the M1 suggests that traffic volume has increased and that driving standards have deteriorated. Coming southwards from Yorkshire, the difficulties become acute after the M69, the M6 and the M45 merge into the M1. At peak times—that phrase now seems to encompass most of the week except late at night and on Saturday afternoons—the stretch of the M1 from the Leicestershire-Northamptonshire border at least to the intersection with the M10 is, frankly, hell on earth.

There is an enormous volume of traffic driving too fast, very often filling all three lanes. We are plagued by drivers who fail to adjust their driving speed and style to changing conditions, be it of weather or traffic volume. Too much traffic stays in the middle and fast lanes, even when there is room in the nearside lane. People, perhaps understandably, refuse to move over into the slow lane or the middle lane for fear of being boxed in. They are tending now to treat the middle lane as a normal progress lane rather than as an overtaking lane. This contributes to sudden traffic build-up and little room for manoeuvre if a dangerous situation arises. It leads to the even worse sin of drivers overtaking on the nearside, which is becoming an even more prevalent practice. Another major problem is that drivers move too rapidly from lane to lane, very often without indication. This can be particularly horrific if, as is sometimes the case, an enormous lorry is involved.

Great efforts have been made in recent years to cope with the problems of the M1 and other motorways. While traffic virtually doubled on motorways between 1973 and 1983, a further 1,000 kilometres of motorway have been constructed. That has not quite doubled the amount of motorway but it has gone some way towards doing so. The number of fatal and serious accidents on motorways per 100 million vehicle kilometres has been reduced and, overall, accident rates on motorways compare well with those on other types of road.

Accidents on the M1 specifically have been reduced since 1979. Yet the accident rates for Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire—the two areas with which I am most concerned—have not fallen so significantly. They have varied considerably, but they are still bad. As my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware, the key factor about a motorway accident is that it is much more horrific than a

[Mr. Roy Galley]

trunk road accident because of the domino effect. However, it must be said that motorway accidents occur less frequently than trunk road accidents.

I know that my hon. Friend has taken considerable steps to improve the M1, and I fully acknowledge the achievements of recent years. However, I fear that we shall have to run much harder to avoid a serious build-up of future problems. I should like to make some suggestions for future policy. Improvements to adjacent roads and motorways, such as the A1, have been made and I understand that further steps are planned. For example, the extension to the M40 is under consideration, and I urge that that is undertaken at the earliest opportunity. It may siphon off some traffic from the M1, but I doubt whether it will be sufficient. Although the southern sections of the M1 have only recently been extended to three lanes, we should start giving serious consideration now to widening them to four lanes as soon as possible. We should also consider the development of other alternative routes. Considerable progress is also being made in lighting stretches of the M1. However, I urge that a further impetus be given to that programme. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) will seek to comment on that point.

Television advertising campaigns can be very effective in reinforcing road safety messages and in influencing driver behaviour. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to undertake such a campaign relating to the specific dangers that I have outlined. Such campaigns have been successful in the past when mounted by the Department and aimed at motor cyclists and cyclists. The police do a marvellous job on the motorway, but more policemen would be welcome. It is remarkable what a sobering effect of the fact that a police car is parked by the side of the motorway has on us.

In adverse conditions advisory speed limits are often ignored. There is surely a good case for making them mandatory, although for that to be effective, the authorities should not be over-cautious and start the restriction too distant from the point of danger. In order to make that effective, means also need to be found for a quicker feedback of information about changing conditions on the motorway.

I come to a relatively minor point that is nevertheless worthy of consideration. Strictly speaking, it is illegal to use hazard warning lights while the vehicle is moving. Nevertheless it is enormously helpful to slowing traffic in difficult situations if such a warning is given. While the police are unlikely to prosecute if people commit such a technical offence, it seems sensible to remove the illegality and to encourage the practice.

There is also the hoary old chestnut about sections of the motorway being cordoned off when little work is going on. One appreciates that cones may well be living entities in their own right, and that they need fresh air in order to breath and breed, so we need to keep them out in the fresh air for fairly long periods. However, there have been great improvements in the past two or three years in taking them back to the cone house at night, or as frequently as possible. But as recently as last Friday, I found a stretch near the Rothersthorpe service station where the motorway was coned off for more than two miles with no sign whatever of any activity. If there has been activity earlier in the day, it would seem sensible to remove the cones at peak times, even if they have to be returned later.

There is another area in which we are improving a little. I refer to giving more advance notice at the 800-yard rather than at the 600-yard mark of when lanes are to be taken out of action.

I plead with the Minister not to raise the motorway speed limit for cars. For many vehicles, 80 mph on motorways is the de facto speed limit. With improving vehicle performance, an official 80 mph limit would mean a de facto limit of 90 moh. Indeed, raising the speed limit for lorries has had some adverse effects on road safety, although one apreciates the arguments which led the Department to agree to that increase.

I urge the Minister to give serious consideration to a noticeably deteriorating situation, to the need for a television advertsing campaign and to the need — I appreciate that it must be a long-term task—to extend that motorway to four lanes along its southern section at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East) *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I understand that the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) has the agreement of the hon. Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) and the Minister to intervene.

1.41 am

Mr. Bruinvels: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) for allowing me to take part in this important debate and, as he hinted that I might, to raise the question of lighting up the entire length of the M1, a motorway that I use every weekend and sometimes more often.

I must at the outset declare an interest in that I am the joint chairman—with the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson)—of the British parliamentary lighting group. Together, in May 1984 we wrote a book entitled, "Light up the Roads", a copy of which is in the Minister's possession and in which we advocated lighting up all the motorways of Britain.

Since being elected in June 1983, I have sought to make motorways, including the M1, safer. At present, we have 1,100 miles of motorway unlit, and only 68 miles of the M1 are currently lit. On 12 December 1984, the Minister told me in a parliamentary answer in column *526* that it would cost £9 million to light up the M1 and £81 million to light up the rest of the motorway system, with maintenance for the whole system costing £9 million a year.

I highlighted the facts in a letter to *The Times* on 24 December last, but the problems has not gone away. We have had a rough time with the weather recently, with fog and mist, rain and heavy snow. The Minister said on 21 November 1983 that motorway lighting could be expected to reduce the night time accident rate. That is an important point, bearing in mind that each night time fatality is now costing the nation £205,460.

Lives could, therefore, be saved by bringing light to the motorways. In recent years, an average of 206 people a year have died on the motorways. On the M1 in particular there are regular contraflows and lane closures. It is vital that such areas, and junctions, are properly illuminated. As my hon. Friend said, cones get in the way, and at night they may not be seen clearly.

When the M25 junction is functioning at the M1, lighting will be necessary. The road will be narrow at that point and lights will be required. Lights there and throughout the motorway system are necessary to keep motorists fully aware of all road conditions.

I am pleased to learn, following lobbying, that the M1 is to be lit between Newport Pagnell service station and junction 16. This news was well received in the *Daily Telegraph* and motoring journals, and the move has been encouraging for those campaigning for more lights on motorways. In a parliamentary answer, my hon. Friend the Minister told me:

"I am keeping under review the need to provide additional lighting on the remaining unlit stretches of the M1."

—[*Official Report* 12 December 1984; Vol 69, c. *52*.]

Not surprisingly, that has given me great hope. It is good news, and I hope that we shall receive some more news —if not tonight, then in the not-too-far-distant future.

Lighting can reduce accidents by 60 per cent., as has been proved. As recently as Tuesday this week, a man from Leicester was killed on the M1. So there is still a problem.

The first report of the Transport Select Committee said:

"we recommend the gradual installation of overhead lighting on existing motorways."

I am especially encouraged to know that the Transport Select Committee is in favour of lighting the motorways. The Committee recommended also that all new motorways should have overhead lights. That is marvellous. We should encourage moves to light the rest of the M1. The Department of Transport made a submission stating:

"If . . . there is a serious night accident problem which cannot be solved by other measures then lighting should be considered."

The evidence that the accident rate during the hours of darkness is worse than the rate in daylight cannot be disputed. Is not the time right and is it not worth spending the money now to make the M1 a safer place on which to drive?

1.45 am

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) on securing this debate. I know that the subject is of great importance to him. Many of us travel up and down the M1 and some other motorways with great regularity. This is a useful opportunity for me to hear hon. Members' views on the M1.

The M1 has had to carry much more and much heavier traffic than was expected when work started on it in the early 1950s under my predecessor the former Member for Wallasey, the late Ernest Marples. This has required successive Administrations to monitor the M1's capacity. Work has been necessary to deal with wear and tear. Roads, like houses, need to be maintained, renovated and extended. It is no good thinking that we shall find some wonder product which means that we shall never have to resurface or repair.

Steps have been taken to increase the capacity of the length of the M1 between junctions 5 and 8 in Hertfordshire, which was the first part of the motorway to be opened in 1959. Under a scheme completed in November 1983 — between these two junctions — the motorway was widened to at least three lanes in each direction. Some surplus land enabled us to provide four lanes northbound between the site of the new M1-M25 junctions, now under construction north of M1 junction 6, and junction 7. Some new overbridges were built of sufficient width to accommodate a fourth lane if this became warranted in the future.

We are seeking to deal in the short term with some capacity problems at junctions. At junction 9 in Hertfordshire and junctions 12 and 13 in Bedfordshire northbound traffic has at times queued back on to the motorway in peak hours. A new roundabout junction is now in operation at junction 13 and, to ease traffic flows from the motorway, we shall be installing peak hour traffic signals at junction 12 this year. At junction 9 we are investigating the use of peak hour signals. Hertfordshire county council is also carrying out junction improvements to ease traffic flows from the motorway on to local roads.

My hon. Friend has suggested that the southern end of the M1 should be wider. While I have sympathy with the difficulties he and other hon. Members encounter, I have to say to him that here, as in relation to the rest of our motorway and trunk road system, we must use our limited resources carefully and build to the standard justified by the traffic volumes. I want to make it quite clear that we do not provide a particular standard of motorway or trunk road just because the route has a particular status.

Public funds for that work are not unlimited. It is important that we get the best value for money. If we were to build four-lane carriageways in places where they cannot be justified in terms of the traffic likely to use them other much-needed schemes would be postponed or forgone. As I have said on many occasions, I am not prepared to do that, but I shall do all that is necessary to try to make our roads safer.

Having said that, I am aware that traffic volumes on some of the southern sections of the M1 are beginning to build up, and we are monitoring that matter carefully. This is particularly true between junctions 7, the M10, and junction 10, Luton South. We hope that the M40 will be able to provide some relief.

There are several good reasons for completing the M40. It will bring relief to the M1 and the choice of an alternative route. There will be operational benefits from that choice during periods of maintenance or other disruptions to traffic, and I am sure that many people will seek to use the alternative route on their way to the north-west.

At the M40 public inquiry, my Department predicted that the M40 will, in normal conditions, attract between 13,000 and 16,000 vehicles per day from the M1 from the date of its opening. Even modest estimates suggest that these figures would rise to a range of 16,000 to 20,000 vehicles per day by the M40's design year of 2004.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and Transport announced their decision on 14 December last to accept the recommendation of the inspector, who held the public inquiry into the proposals, that the new M40 motorway extension should be built.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax will agree that the relief we are seeking to provide by building the M40 will play a significant part in tackling the problems of congestion on the M1 which he has discussed today. The House should, however, be aware that since my right hon. Friends' decision there has been an application to the High Court seeking to have the made scheme quashed. It remains the Government's underlying policy to complete the M40 motorway.

[Mrs. Lynda Chalker]

In the corridor to the east of the M1, the A1 already provides a high standard dual carriageway alternative. With the completion of the scheme currently in progress at Hatfield in early 1987, the A1 will be of motorway standard all the way from its junction with M25 at South Mimms to the Bedfordshire border, and may offer a more attractive alternative than the A1 does at present for certain journeys. That too should help with the traffic on M1.

I agree with what my hon. Friends have said about driver behaviour. I am worried about the deteriorating standards of motorway driving. Most motorway accidents are caused by a minority of drivers who fail to react sensibly to changing road, traffic and weather conditions. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that, in terms of accidents, motorway travel is much safer than travel on other main roads. The accident rate for the M1 is not out of line with the average rate for motorways nationally, but I understand the anxiety about accidents in Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire which my hon. Friend mentioned.

Although the overall performance on motorways is the best of any roads, I accept that any accident is one too many. Offering advice and guidance is straightforward, but it is less easy to persuade road users to act on it responsibly. Our existing media coverage by press, radio and TV fillers is designed to do just that. We are currently running a campaign on motorway lane discipline and 23 million leaflets are being sent out by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre at Swansea with vehicle tax renewal reminders over the 12-month period from May 1984 to April 1985.

My hon. Friend mentioned that he felt that we should have a full scale national publicity campaign on motorway driving. It would be very expensive and not necessarily cost effective. It is vital that we continue to direct our efforts towards road user groups known to be most vulnerable to traffic accidents. Our current campaigns on child pedestrian safety, cyclist safety and against driving after drinking are most important. I am afraid that generalised messages such as "Drive carefully" regrettably tend to be less effective. I assure the House that the Department will continue to co-operate with local initiatives to encourage safe driving. Much good work has been done in that respect, and it continues to be done, mainly by the police. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be glad to know that the police are considering a nationwide motorway safety campaign this year. One of the main points that we keep on trying to press home is that it is only by keeping an adequate distance behind the vehicle in front, sufficient to stop under all weather conditions, that one can be sure of not going into the back of another vehicle when an unexpected hazard arises.

Motorists who are concerned to remain safe on our roads would be well advised to take an advanced driving course and the Institute of Advanced Motorists or ROSPA advanced test, and to keep those qualifications up to date.

My hon. Friend spoke about the motorway speed limit. The raising of the 70 mph limit to 80 mph on motorways was rejected last year because of the likelihood of increased casualties. However, the possibility has been raised again by the Select Committee's report, which we are considering, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will look carefully at what it says.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax also said that he hoped we would consider making mandatory the temporary speed limit signs on motorways, which are currently advisory. I have already said in answer to questions in the House that we are considering that matter at present.

I should like to refer to lighting the M1, which is of such concern to both my hon. Friends, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels), who has been unrelenting in his pressure on behalf of safety through lighting on motorways. I think that he knows that we already constantly monitor accident rates on our motorways, and if a serious night-time problem develops on a particular length of road, lighting is automatically considered. A study is made, taking account of the possible accident savings, and capital running costs. I should remind my hon. Friend that I am reviewing road lighting policy following the serious multiple accident on the M25 in December, and in view of the recommendations of the House of Commons Committee on Road Safety in its recent report.

As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax in answer to his question on 14 December, 68 miles of the M1 is lit out of a total length up to junction 43 of 194 miles. A further 16 miles of lighting is to be installed between the Newport Pagnell service area and junction 16, and we hope to complete that work by the end of 1986. The decision to light that stretch was taken in view of the night accident problem. It will fill a gap between stretches already lit and mean that the motorway will be lit from its start to junction 17, which is the junction with the M45, at junctions 19 and 21, and from junctions 24 to 26. The possibility of further lighting will be studied, but we can do the lighting only bit by bit because of the maintenance and cone problem to which my hon. Friend referred.

I have given the go-ahead recently for the installation of closer-spaced matrix signalling at 1 km intervals on 50 miles of the M1 in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. We are getting on with that, and I hope that a start can be made on installation early next year. We shall monitor what happens. We hope that that will help to reduce the number of accidents, and we shall be able to evaluate the techniques that we are using for potential future use on other inter-urban motorways.

I should like to refer to reconstruction and maintenance. I was grateful for what my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax said about the improvements. Because of changing the crossovers and various other technical matters where we have to have contraflow systems, travelling has improved. But drivers still drive far too close together, and still ignore the speed advice signs.

I know how annoying it can be sometimes when, having been held up, one sees a length of cones, and apparently no work going on inside the cones. We do not leave cones out to get the sunshine or the moonlight. They are there only when necessary — sometimes for the drying out of the road surface, which, according to the time of year, can take varying times. That is sometimes annoying to the travelling motorist who has been delayed.

This has been a useful and helpful debate. I have taken careful note of what has been said. I hope that I have been able to reassure my hon. Friends—at least partially—and the House that the Government hae an active concern for the needs of travellers on the M1, and will take their needs fully into account when developing the future strategy for the motorways and, indeed, for greater safety upon them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 7 February 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

DARTMOOR COMMONS BILL
Read the Third time, and passed.

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 14 February.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 21 February.

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

C-POULTRY COMPANY LIMITED BILL *(By Order)*

FELIXSTOWE DOCK AND RAILWAY BILL *(By Order)*

GOSPORT BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

GREATER LONDON COUNCIL (GENERAL POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*

HARROGATE STRAY BILL *(By Order)*

LINCOLN CITY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 14 February.

LLOYDS BANK (MERGER) BILL *(By Order)*

NATIONAL BANK OF NEW ZEALAND LIMITED BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Tuesday 12 February.

PLYMOUTH MARINE EVENTS BASE BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 14 February.

ROYAL BANK OF SCOTLAND BILL *(By Order)*
Read a Second time and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills

SCARBOROUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

STREATHAM PARK CEMETERY BILL *(By Order)*

YORKSHIRE WATER AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 14 February.

HIGHLAND REGION (KINLOCHBERVIE) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL
Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Junior Ministers (Portfolios)

1. **Mr. J. Enoch Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will re-allocate the portfolios among the junior Ministers of the Northern Ireland Office so as to avoid the same Minister being responsible for both environment and health and social services.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Douglas Hurd): The two portfolios have been carried with distinction by my hon. Friend since June 1983. I have no plans to re-allocate them.

Mr. Powell: Is the Secretary of State aware that this question carries no sort of imputation or criticism of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), but does not the Secretary of State recognise that the detailed part of these duties could be much more effectively carried out if it were administered by locally elected representatives?

Mr. Hurd: I accept what the right hon. Gentleman says in the first part of his supplementary questions. He is really criticising the system under which it is I who have too wide powers which in his view ought to be in the hands of an elected authority. I have a great deal of sympathy for that point of view. If it were possible to reach agreement in the Province on arrangements that would pass some of those powers out of my hands into the hands of an elected authority or authorities, and if they gained widespread acceptance in so doing, both I and the House would wish to look at them very carefully.

Terrorism (Damage Claims)

2. **Mr. William Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he is satisfied with the procedures followed by his Department in the processing of claims for damage due to terrorist activity.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Yes, Sir. The present procedures enable claims to be dealt with quickly and efficiently within the framework provided by the criminal damage legislation.

Mr. Ross: But surely the Minister is aware of many cases where further information is requested from the applicant at a fairly late stage in the proceedings. Would it not be helpful to all concerned if the Government were to prepare and issue to every applicant a detailed list of the information that would be needed before the application for compensation was completed? Surely that would benefit everybody in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Scott: Almost invariably in these cases, those with any substantial claims have legal advisers to help them. Guidance is issued by the Northern Ireland Office for the assistance of claimants. Many of the delays occurring at a late stage are those related to consequential loss which requires detailed accounting information. This can take some time both to produce and then to assess.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Secretary of State inform the House of the time that certain cases have been outstanding? Is it not a fact that many claimants have been waiting an extremely long time for final payment?

Mr. Scott: That is right in terms of final payment, but it is the practice of the branch concerned in the Northern Ireland Office always to issue interim payments so as to reduce the hardship suffered by individual claimants.

Mr. McCusker: I accept that interim payments are useful, but how can the Minister describe the system as speedy and efficient when it takes up to and over two years for the final settlement to be made? Surely the Minister should re-examine the entire procedure.

Mr. Scott: Final settlement has still not been completed in the Droppin' Well Inn case, but well over £500,000 has been paid out in criminal damage and criminal injury claims in that case. We want to tidy up the final details as quickly as possible.

Security

3. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in the Province.

8. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the security situation in the Province.

18. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hurd: Since I last answered questions in the House on 10 January, one member of the Ulster Defence Regiment and one civilian have died in incidents arising from the security situation in the Province.

The security forces continue to combat terrorism with courage and determination. Since the beinning of this year a total of 57 people have been charged with serious offences including two with murder and five with attempted murder; and 14 weapons, 691 rounds of ammunition and 1·5lbs of explosives have been recovered.

Mr. Parry: Will the Secretary of State consider reviewing the use of weapons by these security forces, bearing in mind the killing of Mrs. Norah McCabe by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the killing recently of a young joyrider by the Ulster Defence Regiment? Both these innocent people lost their lives unnecessarily. Will the right hon. Gentleman consider disbanding the UDR, which is a sectarian organisation with fewer than 2,000 Catholic members? Will he make a statement on the recent protests made by the Irish Foreign Secretary to his Department?

Mr. Hurd: Every soldier and police officer in Northern Ireland who goes out on an operation knows that he is subject to the law. The courts take a serious view if they find that the force used went beyond that which was reasonable. That is a serious constraint that is not always properly appreciated. I do not believe that it would be compatible with the security of Northern Ireland or with the safety of its citizens to disband the UDR. We have had various exchanges of a courteous kind with the Irish Government on several recent incidents and I am not sure to which one the hon. Gentleman is referring especially.

Mr. Latham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that on the Conservative Benches and, I suspect, on others in this place there is the hope that we shall hear no more talk of disbanding the UDR? It has been doing excellent work and it is regrettable that deaths have occurred recently.

Mr. Hurd: Yes, Sir. Talk of disbanding the UDR ignores the crucial role that it plays in many parts of the Province. It is important that by its methods of recruitment, training and deployment it is made clear that it is a force whose aim and purpose is to defend all citizens of the Province and that it is not, as has been alleged, a sectarian force.

Mr. Proctor: In the light of the proposed talks between the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and the so-called Army Council of the IRA and the statement of Dr. FitzGerald that if the meeting takes place in the Republic he will take measures to ensure that it is broken up, will my right hon. Friend take similar measures if the talks take place within the United Kingdom? Will he give an assurance that the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act will apply to all those who participate in the talks and condemn all those who take part in the talks, which are treasonous talks?

Mr. Hurd: I have expressed my view that the proposal that such a meeting should be held is not wise. Under our system it is not for me to decide or direct how the law in Northern Ireland, let alone any other part of the United Kingdom, should be upheld. That is the responsibility of the chief constables. It is clear that if members of the IRA Army Council were to meet in Northern Ireland, avowedly in that capacity, they would be committing an offence under section 21 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisons) Act 1978 of belonging or professing to belong to a proscribed organisation.

Mr. Hume: In the light of the obvious controversy that surrounds the UDR, has the Secretary of State yet apprised himself of the numbers of members of that regiment who have been charged with or been found guilty of serious offences? Does he not think that he should have apprised himself of such figures?

Mr. Hurd: Of course I am aware of the serious cases that have occurred over the years and which have involved different members of the security forces, not solely the UDR. Those cases have been taken very seriously by the judiciary and the courts. I am also aware, because I have met them and, in some cases, their widows, of the large numbers of people in Northern Ireland who have joined the UDR at great personal risk. Under continuing tension and risk over many years they have given a great deal of selfless service to their fellow citizens. That must also be taken into account.

Mr. Peter Robinson: In view of the great controversy involved in the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) meeting murderers, and in view of the Secretary of State's statement at the Dispatch Box today that such a meeting would be illegal, does he agree that under the Criminal Law Act 1967 anyone who refused to give information about such a meeting would commit an offence that is punishable by imprisonment? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the golden principle that no-one —politician or pauper—should be seen to be above the law?

Mr. Hurd: No one is above the law. I am advised that under section 5 of the Criminal Law Act 1967 a person who has information likely to secure the arrest of someone who has committed an arrestable offence commits an offence if he fails within a reasonable time and without reasonable excuse to give that information to the police. That is probably the section to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Molyneaux: Will the Secretary of State consider the use of additional units of the SAS to counter the IRA's campaign of genocide in the frontier regions—genocide which, unfortunately, has involved many members of the Ulster Defence Regiment?

Mr. Hurd: That is not directly a matter for me, but units of the Regular Army are available to the General Officer Commanding when, in consultation with the Chief Constable, he believes that they are needed.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: I welcome my right hon. Friend's denunciation of the campaign of character assassination as well as physical assassination of the UDR, but is not the reason why some people are able to misrepresent the Regiment as sectarian the systematic murder of so many Catholic members of the UDR and the systematic intimidation of their families? Was not the first fatal casualty in the UDR a Roman Catholic living in the Falls road?

Mr. Hurd: I believe that that is right. It is certainly true, regrettable and understandable that the proportion of Catholics in the UDR has declined. I have no doubt that intimidation has played an important part in that. It is essential that the UDR's role is understood and defended by those who recognise the realities of terrorism in Northern Ireland. The regiment itself, by its recruitment, training and deployment, should show to the world that it is not a sectarian force.

Mr. Duffy: What specific action has the Secretary of State taken about the partiality of the UDR revealed at the recent trial of one of its privates, Mr. Geoffrey Edwards, for the murder of a Sinn Fein election agent, Mr. Peter Corrigan? What incentive is there to abandon the bullet for the ballot if one puts one's self at risk from, of all people, men in British Army uniform?

Mr. Hurd: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should take that line. Under our system, it is for the courts to take a view of offences of that kind. As he knows, the courts took a serious view of the case to which he referred. There are plenty of opportunities for members of the minority community to take part in the public life of Northern Ireland, and I wish that they would increasingly do so.

Rev. Ian Paisley: May we have an assurance that every step will be taken in the Lisnaskea area to see that UDR men who are serving valiantly the cause of peace in the area get the adequate cover that they need? Will the right hon. Gentleman order an inquiry into the circumstances of the tragic murder of Mr. Jimmy Graham, who, in going to Derrylin without any cover, might as well, from the security point of view, have beeen going to Crossmaglen?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman has told me of his concerns about that case, and they are being looked into.

Mr. John David Taylor: Will the Secretary of State confirm that about 35,000 people in Northern Ireland are

serving or have served in the UDR and that, on the basis of those figures, it is wholly irresponsible for the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) to call for the disbandment of the UDR? Will he remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the disbandment of that force could result only in the transfer of many thousands of regular soldiers from the British Army back into Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hurd: I have said that what the UDR does in the Province is indispensable for the protection of its citizens. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is wrong and misleading for generalised accusations to be built on the basis of particular cases. I am surprised that people with experience, particularly those with experience in the legal profession, should fall into that trap.

Mr. Spencer: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the security situation in Northern Ireland is not helped by actions such as those of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who, on a day when marches had been banned in the city of Leicester, came to the city and spoke publicly in favour of the actions of Sinn Fein and spoke in an inflammatory manner?

Mr. Hurd: I am hardly surprised. I am even less surprised at my hon. and learned Friend's reaction, which I share.

Mr. Archer: Has the right hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to study the poll carried out by the Northern Ireland consumer panel, and published in the *Belfast Telegraph*, demonstrating that 89 per cent. of Protestants in Northern Ireland believe that the system of justice is fair, while only 36 per cent. of Catholics have a similar belief? Reverting to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliff (Mr. Duffy), will the right hon. Gentleman try to identify those aspects of the system which cause such anxiety among Catholics? Does he propose to make a beginning by introducing legislation to implement the Baker recommendations?

Mr. Hurd: I read the interesting poll which was published in the *Belfast Telegraph* yesterday. Although one should take such surveys with some scepticism, it showed the truth of something that I have been trying to say for some months, namely, that it is misleading to generalise about such matters as the attitude of members of the minority community to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and such generalisations are not borne out by those findings. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is entitled to prod me from time to time about legislation to reflect decisions on the Baker review. I hope that we shall be able to make an announcement about that before long and that legislation will follow as soon as we can find a slot for it.

Nuclear Burst (Damage)

4. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what effect a 1 megaton nuclear burst at a height of 300 miles would have on the equipment and resources in his charge.

5. **Mr. Malins** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he is taking to harden vulnerable equipment in his charge against the effects of nuclear electromagnetic pulse.

Mr. Scott: The principal effect of a high level nuclear blast of 1 megaton would be an electromagnetic pulse. This could cause very widespread damage to telecommunications, electronic equipment, and electricity supply and appliances if they were not protected. Much work and research is presently going on throughout the world on the question of protection against the effects of such a pulse, and we in Northern Ireland will make full use of all available information to protect essential equipment such as that designated for civil defence purposes.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful for that answer. Will my hon. Friend ensure that technical advice on those matters is available for those who need to know?

Mr. Scott: A great deal of work is going on and we shall ensure, for example, that the new purpose-built buildings in Northern Ireland, which are planned for completion by 1988, will be fully protected up to the most modern standards.

Mr. John David Taylor: In view of the serious nature of the Minister's reply, will he assure the House that the Government have no such intentions in Northern Ireland?

Community Relations

6. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any new plans to try to bring together the two communities in Northern Ireland to discuss their fundamental differences.

Mr. Hurd: I have recently had further talks with the constitutional parties during which I urged them to seek practical arrangements for a system of government which they can agree to operate.

Mr. Flannery: Has not the killing and maiming—not just from one side—been going on for 16 years? If no initiative is taken, 16 years from now people will be sitting here still trying to solve the same problems. Are we going to bring the two sides together? I do not mean have discussions with them privately; I mean to bring them together in a proper conference to have them air their differences so that we can all share them, discover precisely what they are, and take it from there, otherwise when will there ever be an end to it?

Mr. Hurd: A public conference of the kind that the hon. Gentleman advocates would not do much good, because public positions are frequently proclaimed. It is necessary for the party leaders to find an occasion to meet, two by two, or collectively, to see whether some of the more hopeful things that have been written and said in recent months can be turned into practical proposals. That is what I am trying to encourage.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Secretary of State accept that further polarisation of the communities is undesirable, and that to date the housing needs of the Northern Ireland communities have been well satisfied and good progress has been made on that front? It is now the appropriate time for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to maintain mixed communities where there have been good community relations and where Roman Catholics and Protestants have lived side by side, but where, because of the executive's present allocation there is a real possibility that further single community ghettos will develop, which will hinder progress and reconciliation.

Mr. Hurd: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's first point. On his main point, it is difficult for the Housing

Executive or anyone else to generalise too broadly about what is best in each case. If the hon. Gentleman has particular instances in mind which he has not yet drawn to the attention of my hon. Friend, I hope that he will do so.

Mr. Latham: Is it not clear that sectarian differences are likely to be worsened if representatives of one constitutional party in Northern Ireland decide to meet terrorist representatives?

Mr. Hurd: I have given my view on that several times recently. I do not believe that such a meeting would be wise, not least because of the setback which I believe it would constitute to the edging forward and the progress which I believe has been made towards the leaders of the constitutional parties having serious discussions.

Mr. Hume: Leaving aside the background to that affair, which requires a little more time than that provided by Question Time, does the Secretary of State agree that the reaction of members of the Unionist party and the Democratic Unionist party, who have said that they will call off the proposed talks with the SDLP because I have decided to confront a violent organisation about its violence, is dishonest and hypocritical, given that they have been openly sitting down, not to confront violent organisations, but to collaborate with them with the objective of bringing down the power-sharing executive? They were members of the council of a murderous organisation which murdered more than 500 innocent people in Northern Ireland. They did that not to stop violence but to collaborate with such organisations. It is hypocrisy to criticise me for confronting a violent organisation to get it to stop. Further, will he tell me whether he agrees with the statement that the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) made yesterday? He described an organisation which has murdered more than 500 innocent civilians as a counter-terrorist organisation and therefore not really a terrorist organisation. Does the Secretary of State agree with that statement? Will the right hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That will be plenty.

Mr. Hurd: It is for Unionist Members to explain their views about that meeting. I have explained mine. The courage of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) in denouncing and resisting violence is, I believe, unmatched in the House. I hope that he will think again about this, as I believe that he and the other elected Members of constitutional parties in Northern Ireland had reached the stage at which definite practical discussions between them were possible and might be fruitful. I should very much regret it if that prospect were put at risk.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the Secretary of State aware that the leaders of Unionism in Northern Ireland have made it perfectly clear that the door is open for the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) to come and talk to them provided that he does not talk to the IRA, so it is he who is closing the door, not the Unionist leaders in Northern Ireland? Is the Secretary of State further aware that the hon. Gentleman's accusations today are totally false and that at no time did Unionist leaders sit down with murderers or the Army Council of either the UDA or the UVF, and well he knows it.

Mr. Hume: Practise what you preach.

Mr. Hurd: In my view, it is precisely that kind of exchange, taking place in the earshot of members of the British public throughout the country, from which we must get away if there is to be any real progress in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archer: Does the Secretary of State agree that whether something might be gained for the cause of peace and reconciliation by speaking to a particular group is a matter of judgment which each of us has to make in good faith and on which we may disagree? Will he try to persuade the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) that if we refuse to speak to those with whose judgment we disagree the cause of reconciliation and the prospects of finding a solution will move further away?

Mr. Hurd: I agree that it is a matter of judgment, and we are all entitled to make our own judgments.

Local Government

7. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what new proposals he has to strengthen the structure of local government in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hurd: The Government will consider any new proposals for regional or local administration that command widespread acceptance throughout the community.

Sir John Farr: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. May I draw his attention to the recent Assembly report, which shows that a strengthening of local government responsibility would be welcomed? As it is widely felt that certain central Government responsibilities could now be transferred to local government, will my right hon. Friend consider initiating a conference on the subject in the spring in the Province?

Mr. Hurd: I am not very enthusiastic about transferring powers to the existing district councils in Northern Ireland, for reasons which should be apparent to anyone who studies that scene at the moment. My hon. Friend is right, however, in saying that the Assembly Committee has made a preliminary report, although it did not attempt to discuss the basic matters which he rightly raises. I hope that in the coming weeks a further report, although not necessarily a final report, will be produced. The Committee is handicapped in that the SDLP is not represented on it or giving evidence to it, but a further report could examine on behalf of the parties represented on the Committee various options which they believe are worth carrying forward.

Mr. McNamara: Can the Secretary of State tell us whether, when he met the IRA, and when his noble Friend Lord Whitelaw and his hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry met the IRA, they confronted the IRA on the question of violence, or did they merely talk about local government?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That question would more appropriately have been asked on the preceding question, although I did not manage to call the hon. Gentleman then.

Mr. McNamara: With respect, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the question relate to strengthening the structure of local government?

Mr. McNamara: With respect, Mr. Speaker, I asked whether the Secretary of State discussed those matters or whether he discussed local government.

Mr. Hurd: I never discussed local government on that occasion.

Rev. William McCrea: Could not the Secretary of State's failure to proscribe Sinn Fein destroy the present local government set-up rather than strengthen it?

Mr. Hurd: No, Sir. That is a separate question, but I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's conclusion.

Mr. Molyneaux: Would not some suggestion of an enhanced role for councillors encourage many people of real ability to come forward as candidates for all the political parties in Northern Ireland at the coming elections?

Mr. Hurd: I understand that argument. If the party leaders, of whom the right hon. Gentleman is one, or the Devolution Report Committee of the Assembly, were able to bring forward proposals that I could commend to the Cabinet and the House as commanding widespread acceptance, that would be a step forward.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is there not a role for the Assembly in serving as the upper tier of local government in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hurd: That role would be rather different from the one given to the Assembly by the House. The Assembly is doing a good job in the scrutinising role that is its immediate responsibility. However, if the elected representatives of constitutional parties in the Province came forward with a proposal on the lines that my hon. Friend has suggested and could show that the proposal was widely accepted across the communities, it should certainly be considered.

Ancillary Medical Staff

9. **Rev. Martin Smyth** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the target norms for community doctors, nurses, psychiatric nurses, social workers and therapists set for the various health and social service boards; and whether he is satisfied that they have been met.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Chris Patten): Target norms are generally not used by the Department of Health and Social Services as a basis for determining priorities for service development, largely because they are not sensitive to local variation in service needs. The Department's existing regional guidelines for determining priorities are set out in circular HSS(P)1/80, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is the Minister satisfied that there are enough people in post, in the western board area in particular, to serve the needs of the people? Should not more attention be paid to raising the level of provision of community doctors and workers in that area and others?

Mr. Patten: We have been attempting to do so. The Department has consistently increased funds to community services at a faster rate than those to institutional services over the past decade. We shall continue to do so, whatever the occasional difficulties.

Mr. Bell: Has not the number of unemployed nurses in Northern Ireland spiralled from about 350 when the Government took office to between 1,450 and 1,500? That is the number of qualified nursing personnel who are available for work but cannot be employed by any of the four area health boards because of insufficient funding. Is it not also true that there is a major psychiatric hospital in Antrim which is understaffed to the extent of 100 trained nursing personnel?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that the number of qualified nurses in Northern Ireland has spiralled over the past five years. There are 2,000 more of them now than there were when the hon. Gentleman's party left office. More nurses are unemployed because more qualified nurses are staying on than was once the case.

Short Brothers

10. **Mr. John David Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will pay an official visit to the aircraft manufacturing factories of Short Brothers in Belfast.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): My right hon. Friend and I visited Shorts' headquarters at Queens Island last November and were shown its aircraft, aerostructures and missile manufacturing activities. I keep in regular contact with the chairman and expect to make further visits to the company in due course.

Mr. Taylor: Will the Minister join me in congratulating Shorts on its success in selling eight commuter aircraft to China, as announced earlier this week? Does he agree that that underlines the marketing strength of Shorts, which could also be used to sell the Tucano trainer aeroplane abroad on its own or with the British Aerospace model?

Dr. Boyson: I rang the chairman the following morning to congratulate him on the sale of eight aircraft to China, other sales that it has recently achieved and the option on seven more aeroplanes. I know that many people in the Province hope that the Tucano aircraft will be chosen, bearing in mind what it will do for Shorts and employment in the Province.

Mr. Stephen Ross: Is the Minister aware that there are other contenders for the RAF basic trainer? Will he convey to the Secretary of State, who I am sure will want to make the right decision, that the right aeroplane to choose is that which the RAF wants most and which can be acquired at the most sensible price? Does he agree that that is probably the PC9, which is linked with British Aerospace?

Dr. Boyson: I am well aware that there are other contenders. The fact that Shorts has done so well in the past is at least a recommendation for future contracts.

Mr. Bell: When the Minister pays his next visit to Shorts, will he take with him the appropriate copy of the American business magazine "Industry Week", which last year forecast that Shorts might be on course to becoming one of the United Kingdom's biggest industrial success stories? If that is so, why does the Minister want to inflict on Shorts the dogma of privatisation?

Dr. Boyson: I welcome the achievements of Shorts to which the hon. Gentleman referred. There are no

immediate plans for privatisation, but we are taking advice on the problems, advantages and costs of privatisation. As with other denationalised industries, employees would be able to become shareholders, but it is essential that Shorts remains in Northern Ireland.

Aldergrove and Belfast Harbour Airports

11. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of Aldergrove and Belfast Harbour airports.

Mr. Chris Patten: Algergrove will continue to be the main airport serving the demands for air transport in Northern Ireland. However, additional services are provided from other airports in Northern Ireland, including Belfast Harbour airport, where scheduled services recommenced in February 1983.

Mr. Atkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Civil Aviation Authority proposal to include Harbour airport but to exclude Aldergrove within the area operating facility list is a slap in the face for competition in the Province, which has so far forced Aldergrove to reduce its charges and then to keep them steady for the past two years? Will the Minister ensure that Harbour airport maintains its place in the interests of non-jet airlines, passengers and Shorts?

Mr. Patten: I do not recognise any slaps in the face. As my hon. Friend knows, the matter is principally one for the CAA and therefore in this House for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Northern Ireland Assembly

12. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to devolve more power to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr. Hurd: I hope that the Assembly will produce proposals as soon as it can for devolved arrangements which would be likely to command widespread acceptance throughout the community and which I could therefore recommend to this House.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, unless all parties take their place in the Assembly, it cannot fulfil its proposed role? Does he agree also that it would make sense to set a date by which all of the parties should have participated and that, if they have not, we should reconsider the Assembly's future?

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure that it would be sensible now to act on my hon. Friend's advice. I hope that the Devolution Report Committee on the Assembly can produce proposals, mainly in a further interim report, which could help us to work something out that would command widespread acceptance.

Mr. Flannery: Is not the Northern Ireland Assembly a farce? The minority communities distrust it so much that they do not attend it, and it is therefore completely one-sided and talks to itself.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The Assembly does a good deal of practical and useful work, which has improved the quality of administration in the Province.

Job Creation

13. **Mr. Couchman** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current rate of job creation in Northern Ireland; and how this compares with Great Britain.

Dr. Boyson: An analysis of employment returns in Northern Ireland shows that at least 732 employers, employing 25 or more staff, increased their employment by a total of 11,151 jobs in the 12 months ending September 1984.

Mr. Couchman: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that this impressive rate of progress will lead to a significant diminution in the tragic rate of unemployment in the Province?

Mr. Boyson: I hope, as my hon. Friend does, that that will be the case. Similarly, we hope that there will be an increase in job creation this year, even against last year's figures.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Dixon: Will the Prime Minister find time today to apologise to the Archbishop of Canterbury for trying to steal the credit for the release of the four Britons from Libya? Now that she has seen that the Church has shown more initiative, wisdom and diplomacy about foreign affairs than her Government, will she accept its advice on domestic affairs and get the National Coal Board to negotiate a speedy and honourable settlement of this dispute?

The Prime Minister: I gladly pay tribute to the Archbishop of Canterbury and Mr. Waite, as I did on Tuesday. The hon. Gentleman will find that in *Hansard*. All the praise is theirs for having secured a successful outcome to the Libyan hostages problem.

Q2. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Howarth: My right hon. Friend will have heard today that more miners going to work have again been stoned by pickets. In view of the critical part played by violence and intimidation in prolonging the coal dispute, will she set up an inquiry to examine the organisation and the financing of organised picketing and violence in the dispute?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has been undertaking a review of the Public Order Act, which will take account of experiences on the picket line. I agree that

the strike has been prolonged by violence and intimidation. The Home Secretary's review is nearing completion, and I hope that we shall soon be in a position to make an announcement about it.

Mr. Kinnock: Throughout the miners' strike the Prime Minister has repeatedly demanded that the National Union of Mineworkers accepts the NACOD agreement. In the light of today's joint statement from the unions, which says that

"the conditions being demanded of the NUM by the NCB effectively negate the agreement reached between NACOD and the NCB"

will she strongly advise the board to return to full negotiations, so that the strike can be settled?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the board met NACODS early this week and made it clear that it would honour the agreement with NACODS in full. The board reaffirmed that position to NACODS. It is perhaps a greaty pity that this morning NACODS was unable to persuade the NUM to accept the NACODS agreement and the spirit of it, or, alternatively, to accept the single compromise that was previously negotiated through the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister is either grossly misinterpreting or grossly misrepresenting this morning's events and the discussion and agreement between the NUM executive and NACODS. She has before her the joint statement issued by those unions. Now that there is a serious effort to restart negotiations for settlement, will she start to act like a responsible Prime Minister instead of seeking further to impede negotiations and being a wrecker who wants conquest at any cost?

The Prime Minister: That is absolute nonsense. The board will honour the agreement with NACODS in full. May I stress that again and again. It is not in doubt. If the NUM would also accept the NACODS agreement and the spirit of it, the coal strike could be over. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to urge the NUM to accept the NACODS agreement.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister has used exactly the words that she used last week. I urge her, because the circumstances are significantly changed by this morning's discussion and agreement between the two unions, to use the power that she knows she has to advise the board to resume negotiatioes. The National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers has said:

"It is agreed that the conditions being demanded of the NUM by the NCB would effectively negate the agreement reached between NACODS and the NCB in October 1984."

Does the right hon. Lady not understand that the whole basis of agreement is in jeopardy because of her interference and the way in which she has sought to prolong the dispute? She has a chance to secure negotiation and settlement now. Why does she not take it?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is trying to make out that an agreement freely negotiated between the NCB and NACODS is in jeopardy. It is not, and nothing that he says can put a freely negotiated agreement between two sides in jeopardy. That agreement with NACODS is not in jeopardy. The National Coal Board met NACODS earlier this week to re-affirm, yet again, that the agreement will be honoured in full. Why does not the right hon. Gentleman urge the NUM to accept that agreement? It will be honoured by the NCB in full, regardless of the impression that the right hon. Gentleman is trying to give to prolong the strike.

Mr. Sackville: In view of what many pensioners and chronically ill people are being told by their doctors about the future availability of medicines, will my right hon. Friend confirm that no limited list will be issued which, of itself, compels NHS patients to pay for or do without medicines for which they have a clear clinical need?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has gone into this matter in great detail. The proposals that he has put forward are in the interests of NHS patients and will release money for the care of more patients.

Dr. Owen: Will the Prime Minister clarify the NACODS settlement? Is it not true that the settlement allows for an independent reviw procedure, but that it also allows the NCB to close pits against the advice of the independent review procedure? Equally, there is no commitment on NACODS' part to accept the independent review procedure, and it can take strike action. The same would apply to the NUM if it signed the NACODS agreement. The unions are not bound to accept the advice of the independent review procedure. Does the Prime Minister accept that it is vital that the NCB's right to manage should not be interfered with?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. The last paragraph of the NACODS agreement states:

"If, at the end of this process"—

that is the colliery review procedure—

"the matter was still in conflict and might lead to a foreshortening of a colliery's life expectancy, this question, as has already happened in the past, can be referred for national consideration and, indeed, would then be subject to the Independent Review Body and full weight given to its findings, just as would be the case in any question of a distinct closure proposal."

The NACODS approach was given in evidence to the Select Committee. It was different from the NUM approach given in evidence to that same Select Committee. On 25 November 1982 NACODS made it clear that it would, as the right hon. Gentleman said, oppose closures. Its representatives made it clear that the association would normally agree to closures only when reserves of coal had been absolutely worked out. It went on then to make the right hon. Gentleman's other point:

"In other circumstances, the decision to close will be made by the National Coal Board."

The right hon. Gentleman is correct. NACODS may oppose all the way, but in the end it will accept the National Coal Board's right to manage, and of course it is perfectly free to use the strike weapon should it choose. *[Interruption.]* Right hon. and hon. Gentlemen do not want to hear the agreement or the evidence that was given. An agreement cannot be negated by things said outside the room in which it was reached.

Q3. **Mr. Wilson** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wilson: With the renewed onset of severe winter weather, will the Prime Minister read the letter sent to her by her own Solicitor-General for Scotland criticising the unfair and unjustifiable fuel allowances system that caused so much concern three weeks ago? Is she not aware that

there are rumours circulating that, instead of conducting a review intended to bring in fairer allowances, the intention of the DHSS and the Cabinet is to abolish heating allowances altogether? Since the average electricity heating bill in the north of Scotland is £290, compared with £204 in the south of England, will she take action to deny the rumours that the DHSS does not intend to reach a fairer fuel allowance system and pledge that the Government will introduce one as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have already announced a review of these provisions, and that is being undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. I have in front of me the letter to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It says:

"Although every Scottish MP knows that more than four hundred million pounds is spent on heating allowances throughout the United Kingdom each year, that fact is being conveniently overlooked."

It also says that I should

"be aware that the SNP as well as the Labour Party have been outspoken in their support for this very damaging, costly and violent strike. They ignore the fact that the potential effect of this industrial action on pensioners' fuel bills is far greater than anything this additional heating allowance could ever cover."

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appeal for shorter questions, please. [HON. MEMBERS: "And shorter answers."]

Q.4 **Mr. Stokes** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stokes: Has my right hon. Friend noticed in yesterday's and today's newspapers the great success story of a firm in the north-east of England, Tyne Shiprepairers, which, since privatisation only a year ago, has turned a loss of £13 million into a profit, has gained new orders of £19 million and has doubled its labour force—all in the space of one year? Is there not a moral here?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate the Tyne Shiprepair company on an excellent first year. It took 500 people on to its payroll. It has done extremely well under the spur of privatisation and has now 1,200 on its payroll. Success and privatisation — *[Interruption.]* — create genuine jobs—and how the Opposition hate that.

Mr. Foot: Reverting to the mining dispute, does the Prime Minister appreciate that what changed the situation last week was the issue, by the Coal Board with her approval, of a demand that the National Union of Mineworkers should sign a document before it came to the negotiating table? Does she not understand that it was that demand that also wrecked the position with NACODS? Does she not understand this, and will she say why she and her Ministers did not consult NACODS before they gave approval to the document that injured the negotiations? As she has played such a prominent part in injuring those negotiations, will she at last make some effort to get decent negotiations going?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is, I believe, under a fundamental misconception. An agreement negotiated between two bodies holds and is reaffirmed and can never be upset, except by further agreement between those two bodies. The NCB met NACODS earlier this week and reaffirmed that the agreement that they had previously negotiated still stands. It cannot be upset by what is said elsewhere.

Mr. Flannery: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it arise from questions?

Mr. Flannery: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Prime Minister to adopt a completely new habit of reading from the pamphlets that she brings with her, so much so that Back Benchers now have less time available to ask questions because of the amount of endless and boring reading in which the Prime Minister engages?

Mr. Speaker: As the House knows, I take a particular interest in ensuring the protection of Back Benchers. My view is that at Prime Minister's Question Time a little too much time is now taken up by the Front Benches, thereby denying time to Back Benchers.

Mr. Kinnock: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) was referring to a very recent habit — repeated again today — of reading from a lengthy statement of Government policy, on this occasion in response to a question from an Opposition Member. However, on Tuesday the Prime Minister did so in response to a vital question on Gibraltar from a Conservative Member.

As you are concerned about the time taken by the Front Benches, I invite you to go through *Hansard* for the last few months and to compare my subscriptions with the responses of the Prime Minister. I am sure you will discover that the House has been preoccupied much more with the right hon. Lady's long answers than with any of my questions.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a busy day ahead of us and I do not think we should get into any dispute on this matter. I simply say to the Leader of the Opposition that I leave him wide discretion to rise more than twice — mostly on three occasions — for that very reason. I realise that a very important issue was discussed today.

Mr. Loyden: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not an abuse of the House and of the protection afforded Back Benchers who are entitled to question the Prime Minister — who is already under considerable protection, given that she answers questions for only half an hour each week — for the right hon. Lady to use Back Benchers' time to avoid responding to questions?

Mr. Speaker: It is a question of balance, and in the past we have done rather well. On one occasion we got through 15 questions to the Prime Minister.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would not some of these points be met, and would not we all get on much better, if the Opposition abandoned their consistent attempts, Tuesday after Tuesday, Thursday after Thursday, to prevent the Prime Minister from being heard, thus adding to the time it takes for my right hon. Friend to inform the House of her views?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that it is generally acknowledged — and I say this with sadness — that the noise during Prime Minister's Question Time has increased. I have mentioned this in recent weeks. I hope that the House will take that very much to heart.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is not only a matter for the Front Benches of the Labour party and a question of the Prime Minister taking up more time than my right hon. Friend. You should also take into account, Mr. Speaker, that whenever the Leader of the Social Democratic party is called he speaks with the same voice as the Prime Minister, so, in effect, you should subtract his time and add it on to the Government's.

Mr. Speaker: I do take that into account, and I did so today.

Business of the House

3.35 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 11 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Motions until seven o'clock.

Afterwards, timetable motion on the Local Government Bill.

Motion relating to the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984.

TUESDAY 12 FEBRUARY — Second Reading of the Transport Bill.

Motion relating to the Housing Benefits (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 1984.

WEDNESDAY 13 FEBRUARY AND THURSDAY 14 FEBRUARY—Committee stage of the Representation of the People Bill.

FRIDAY 15 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 18 FEBRUARY — Second Reading of the London Regional Transport (Amendment) Bill.

Mr. Kinnock: First, I understand that all Governments have to introduce guillotines, but the timetable motion for next Monday is an outrage because it concerns a Bill which will deprive 13 million electors of democratic rights over an important tier of local government. I express the hope that Conservative Members who are opposed to the measure will join us in our efforts to prevent the guillotine falling on this Bill.

Will the Leader of the House clear up the matter of when the House will debate the White Paper on public expenditure? On 17 January the right hon. Gentleman told me during business questions that he hoped that the House could proceed to debate it in the normal manner. Will he confirm that the debate will take place therefore in the normal manner well before the Budget on 19 March?

Finally, I ask the Leader of the House whether the Government will provide time as soon as possible for a debate on the proposed closure of one third of Britain's network of skillcentres. We know now that the Manpower Services Commission came to its decision to recommend the closures by the narrowest of margins. It is therefore vital that hon. Members whose constituencies will be seriously disadvantaged by closures should have the opportunity to express their views in the House before a final decision is made.

Mr. Biffen: On the first of the three points that the right hon. Gentleman has raised, I hope that, when he appreciates the time that has been taken on the legislation, the care that has been given to opposing viewpoints and the fact that 80 clauses remain to be debated, he will realise that what is proposed on Monday in no sense can be regarded as converting the House of Commons into a Reichstag.

I notice also that the right hon. Gentleman intends to pit his charm and appeal against that of my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary in recruiting the loyalties of the Conservative Back Benches; we shall see who will be the winner of that glamour contest.

As to the White Paper on public expenditure, I am as ever anxious that we proceed to a debate which should take place before the Budget, but preferably with the benefit of the report of the appropriate departmental Select Committee.

Finally, I note the points that are made upon skillcentres. This is a matter that we might consider through the usual channels.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): My right hon. Friend will know that this week marks the 40th anniversary of Yalta. Has his attention yet been drawn to early-day motion 320?

[That this House recalls that Mr. Winston Churchill, when Prime Minister, was a signatory, together with President Franklin Roosevelt and Marshal Joseph Stalin, to the Yalta protocols in February 1945 which guaranteed self-determination, sovereignty and democracy for the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe; notes that Marshal Stalin, despite being a co-signatory, used his military power and political influence to frustrate those intentions; deplores the resultant widespread and systematic abuse of human rights which still continues to this day; supports peaceful endeavours by the peoples concerned to regain their rights; and urges Her Majesty's Government, on the fortieth anniversay of the Yalta Protocols, to declare its refusal to accept the division of Europe into spheres of influence and to reaffirm the right of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe to genuine self-determination.]

This has been signed by no fewer than 227 hon. Members of all parties, and condemns the denial of self-government, independence and democracy to 125 million of our fellow Europeans. Can my right hon. Friend give us some sign that this massive demonstration of feeling, which is shared in the country, can be expressed in a debate on foreign affairs dealing primarily with European security matters?

Mr. Biffen: I take account of the interest in having a foreign affairs debate, and am only sorry that there is no time for one next week. When it occurs, it would be appropriate for the House, if it is to engage in reminiscence, to place on record the foresight of that handful of Members that voted against the Yalta agreement.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Does the Leader of the House recall that last week, on the day that the university of Oxford refused to honour its most distinguished daughter, the Prime Minister, I drew the attention of the House to the fact that the Droylsden Littlemoss boys county secondary modern school had not honoured its most distinguished son, my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts). Will the Leader of the House take note of early-day motion 367?

[That this House congratulates the Droylsden Littlemoss Boys High School, formerly Droylsden Littlemoss Boys County Secondary Modern School, on its decision to honour its favourite son, the honourable Member for Bootle, following the attempt of the honourable Member for Houghton and Washington to raise their failure to do so in the House; notes that the presentation ceremony is to be held at the school on 15th March; hopes that this event will be used to recognise and publicise the valuable role in the education system of the nation that over the years has been carried out by secondary modern and comprehensive schools; and

[Mr. Roland Boyes]

further fails to understand why so much importance is attached to honours handed out by less important, status-ridden educational establishments.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman also note that the university of Oxford has not changed its mind about the Prime Minister but that the Droylsden Littlemoss boys school has changed its mind about my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle? Will he join me in my appreciation of the services that secondary modern schools and comprehensive schools have done for hon. Members and in congratulating the school on changing its mind?

Mr. Biffen: The Droylsden Littlemoss secondary school better deserves the esteem of this House than to be constantly compared with Oxford university. That said, I think that nothing more should occur next week.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are many questions hanging over the nationalised industries these days? Is it sufficient for hon. Members to have to consult documents in the Library on this question and to resort to the negative procedure ? Has not the time come to give serious consideration to the reconstitution of a Select Committee on the nationalised industries, so that we can give full consideration to these problems?

Mr. Biffen: I have no doubt that the working composition and responsibilities of a Departmental Select Committee are matters that the House would wish to consider from time to time. However, what my hon. Friend proposes constitutes a fundamental change, and I do not think that it should be contemplated in isolation.

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): In view of the Government's confusion over the problem of limited lists for prescribing, and of the change in their attitude since 1981 and 1983, when Ministers expressed their view on the Greenfield report, is it not time that the House had an opportunity to debate the Department's proposals so that we could put forward views to help the Government out of this mess?

Mr. Biffen: I take account of all that the hon. Lady says. I am happy that the Greenfield recommendations are brought into the debate. She will appreciate that what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services proposes will be the subject of regulations that will be the subject of regulations that will have to be confirmed by the House by means of a debate.

Sir. Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): My right hon. Friend mentioned regulations on the limited list of prescribed drugs. As the constituents of all hon. Members are seriously concerned, will he give earnest consideration to a much longer debate than is usual on these kinds of regulations, to enable all views to be reflected?

Mr. Biffen: Without making a commitment, I can say that I shall look into this point with some sympathy.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does the Leader of the House accept that, in normal circumstances, I would agree that the request I am about to make is unreasonable? However, will he not accept that at Question Time the Prime Minister displayed a serious lack of adequate understanding of the coal dispute and of the position of the association with which I am involved? Would not the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Prime Minister's misunderstanding is so great that it almost certainly causes further peril and protracted difficulty?

Would not the right hon. Gentleman accept that the dispute has gone on long enough to justify urgent and positive steps to achieve a negotiated settlement and that that settlement is now being blocked by no other person than the Prime Minister? If the right hon. Lady allowed the National Coal Board to open the door, a settlement could be achieved and peace could reign in the coalfields of Britain, as it certainly needs to reign. Will not the right hon. Gentleman accept that the House should be given a further opportunity next week to debate this matter?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman warned me that I might just conceivably find his proposition unreasonable. I have to confirm at once that from such a reasonable source the proposition is eminently unreasonable. I believe that the words spoken by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister were well chosen. My right hon. Friend, like every other Member of this House, wishes that there should be a speedy resolution of this dispute. Last-minute attempts to try to fluff it will not be conducive to that end.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): One of the most important items of the age is the progress being made by the European Space Agency, the European co-operation on the Columbus space laboratory, the latest announcement that we are to co-operate with the United States on a space platform and the very important announcement in the American budget of the strategic defence initiative in the United States. Surely all this must mean that it is about time that we got into the 20th century and started to talk about this very important matter.

Mr. Biffen: Alas, the only, rather narrow-minded, advice that I can give to my hon. Friend is that in his early essay or attempt to get into the 20th century he should look for an Adjournment debate, when he will be able to make this very important point.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On limited list prescribing, is it not essential that we should have a full debate before any regulations are brought forward, because the regulations will be incapable of amendment by the House? On the Local Government Bill guillotine, what evidence does the right hon. Gentleman have that the Bill has been unduly delayed in the discussions so far? Would he not in his younger days, had he been on this side of the House, have complained that the guillotine was being brought forward only because of the overloading of the Government's legislative timetable by an indigestible Bill?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman has overlooked a very signal and important factor: that I am no longer on that side of the House. As for limited list prescribing, I shall look at that point.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): May I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 104 on the possible taxation of lump sums?

[That this House would find unacceptable any change in the tax system which devalued the 'lump sum' which members of occupational pension schemes can now anticipate receiving on retirement; notes that, over many years, pay has been negotiated, contributions have been paid and, sometimes, financial obligations have been

assumed on the good faith of receiving such payments in due course; and would regard it as totally inconsistent with the declared principles of Her Majesty's Government to change the present procedure which makes a real and useful contribution to a more widespread capital earning democracy.]

Since the number of signatures has now risen to 210 and in view of the continuing concern that is expressed in our postbags, would it be possible to have a debate on the subject before the Budget?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes a very fair point. There is no doubt that the early-day motion reflects widespread concern about this topic. However, there will be every opportunity to discuss it in the Budget debate, and even, possibly, subsequently.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Reverting to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) about the mining dispute, in view of what many of us consider to be the grievous misunderstanding of the present situation which the Prime Minister revealed at Question Time in response to questions from my right hon. Friend and other hon. Members, if the right hon. Gentleman cannot arrange a debate on the matter, can he ensure that the Prime Minister shall come to this House on Monday and answer questions on this subject? We wish to make absolutely certain that what the Prime Minister said today does not block an agreement, just as what the right hon. Lady said a week ago blocked an agreement. Therefore I urge the right hon. Gentleman to ask the right hon. Lady to come to the House of Commons on Monday and make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: There is never a more touching moment than when the right hon. Gentleman is anxious to disabuse my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister of some misunderstanding under which she labours. I shall convey to her the matters that he has requested should be drawn to her attention.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Would my right hon. Friend like to register his place in history in the House by being the Leader of the House who brings in timetable motions for all major and controversial Bills, so that the House is able to discuss such Bills clause by clause from beginning to end? It is ridiculous that half these Bills are never properly discussed without the introduction of a timetable motion.

Mr. Biffen: I am the Leader of the House who does not even want to appear in a footnote in "Erskine May", let alone have a place in history. My hon. Friend must await the report of the Procedure Committee, which has been considering Public Bill procedure. Perhaps the printing of the report will be the occasion when he can take his arguments further.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): In view of the appalling and damaging implications of the Arts Council grants which are to run at 1·9 per cent. against an inflation rate of 4·6 per cent., will the House have an opportunity to debate this very important matter in the near future?

Mr. Biffen: I do not disparage for one moment the importance of the topic, but no provision has been made for such a debate in the immediate future.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): In view of the continuing difficulties facing Members of the European Parliament in seeking to attend meetings in this building, will my right hon. Friend re-examine the matter on the ground that the Labour party, which has hitherto blocked all such suggestions, is likely now to modify its views in its anxiety to make contact with, among others, Mr. Les Huckfield?

Mr. Biffen: This is too serious a matter to be trivialised by the inclusion of Mr. Les Huckfield. The issue is considered from time to time.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Leader of the House read early-day motion 345 on the Government's intention to publish new advice on food production in the aftermath of a nuclear war?

[That this House notes the findings of the study of Messrs, Turco, Toon, Ackerman, Pollack and Sagan concerning the likelihood of a prolonged period of darkness and severe cold as a result of the obstruction of sunlight by smoke in the atmosphere following a nuclear conflict; further notes that the Minister of State for Agriculture told the House on 24th January that the Government would not wish to dismiss the nuclear winter out of hand; considers that it would be absurd for the Government to publish a new booklet on home defence and the farmer without referring to the fact that food production could be prevented by the climatic consequences of nuclear war in addition to the devastation caused by blast and radiation; and calls on the Government to postpone further consideration of this issue until the findings of the International Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment have been debated in the House.]

The motion has been signed by over 100 Members of virtually every party which is represented in the House. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the House will have an opportunity to debate the SCOPE report on the nuclear winter theory before the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food publishes any further advice on the subject?

Mr. Biffen: I understand that the matter is the subject of a study which is awaited by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I shall convey the hon. Gentleman's comments to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): My right hon. Friend will be aware that during the passage of the Hong Kong Bill it has been suggested that there should be an annual debate on Hong Kong. As we almost never discuss any other part of our dependent territories, will my right hon. Friend consider allocating a day annually for the discussion of all the United Kingdom's dependent territories as well as Hong Kong?

Mr. Biffen: From my standpoint I see already a great deal of parliamentary time pre-empted for specialised topics. I would be reluctant to see that trend accentuated, but I shall consider what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House review the answer that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) about the Prime Minister making a statement on Monday on the coal dispute or the allocation of a day's debate on that issue? It was put to me the other day that, although an archbishop's envoy can go to the hard-faced Colonel Gaddafi and manage to release four prisoners and arrange negotiations without preconditions with that regime, it

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

seems that every archbishop, bishop and leader of a church of all denominations has been banging on the doors of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Energy, only to be met with the response, "Get lost." One is bound to come to the conclusion that the Prime Minister is more hard faced that Colonel Gaddafi.

Mr. Biffen: In certain circumstances that would be proffered as a compliment. However, I shall ensure that that comment is passed to the Prime Minister, like all the others about the coal dispute which the House wishes to be referred to her.

Mr. Nell Thorne (Ilford, South): Has my right hon. Friend yet had the opportunity to read the *Hansard* report of the debate on civil defence in another place yesterday which was introduced by Lord Renton? Will he please note that the contributions from all sides of that Chamber were extremely supportive? Does he have any plans for such a debate in this House in the near future?

Mr. Biffen: I must confess that I have no plans for that, but I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's particularly perceptive comments.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): Since one of the functions of the House is to address its mind to matters of great public concern, and in view of the early-day motion signed by hon. Members of all parties and from all parts of the United Kingdom about the need for a comprehensive fuel allowance, will the Leader of the House promise an early debate on the subject, so that opinions can be ventilated before the social security review comes to an end?

[That this House believes that the present system of exceptional heating allowances which is supposed to ameliorate the effects of severe weather conditions is completely ineffective in its application; and requests the Secretary of State for Social Services to replace this inadequate provision with a comprehensive scheme which takes into account the general climatic differences within the United Kingdom and associated heating costs so that all those in receipt of supplementary benefit can afford to heat their homes adequately regardless of which part of the United Kingdom they live in.]

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there is to be an Adjournment debate initiated by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on 13 February. We had better see how we go from there.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): May I refer my right hon. Friend to notice of motion No. 24 on the Order Paper, and to early-day motion 358, which between them were signed by every available member of the Select Committee on Transport yesterday and which express concern that the House is to proceed on Tuesday with the Second Reading of the Transport Bill without awaiting the Select Committee report which is imminent?

[That this House should commit the Transport Bill to a Special Standing Committee so that the members of that Committee may have the opportunity of jointly studying the imminent report of the Transport Committee and the evidence submitted to it on what is the most fundamental upheaval in the bus industry for over 50 years.]

Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is possible that hon. Members selected to sit on the Standing Committee will not be in possession of the Select Committee report or of all the evidence which is relevant to the most major change in the bus industry for over 50 years? Does he agree that the House and the Standing Committee should have that evidence before they begin their deliberations on the Bill?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be fair-minded enough to acknowledge that a balance of factors has to be assessed when choosing the time for the Second Reading of a Bill. My hon. Friend might be able to make his point at greater length during the Second Reading debate.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will the Leader of the House find time for us to discuss the wearing of Her Majesty's uniform by persons not entitled to do so, especially in view of the limited military experience of the Secretary of State for Defence?

Mr. Biffen: I am not in a position to do a comparative assessment of the military experience of my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), but I have noted his intriguing proposition.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that today marks the start of the electrification of the east coast line—the biggest British Rail development in 25 years, involving an expenditure of £300 million and the employment, mainly in the private sector, of about 3,000 people, including many from my constituency? Since this clearly shows that, despite their critics this Government do invest in and are interested in the infrastructure, can we please have another debate on the subject soon?

Mr. Biffen: I note with great approbation the record related by my hon. Friend. I cannot be forthcoming in promising additional parliamentary time for debating the topic, but with a modicum of ingenuity my hon. Friend might be able to comment further during the Second Reading of the Transport Bill.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Since the right hon. Gentleman seems to be blaming the Select Committee for the delay in arranging a debate on the public expenditure White Paper, will he have a word with the Chairman and ask him to get a move on?

Mr. Biffen: It is not true to assert that I implied that any blame should attach to the Select Committee.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Before we have the debate, which my right hon. Friend half promised, on the regulations limiting the list of NHS drugs, may we have a statement explaining what will be on that list and, more seriously, what will not be on that list?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly convey that request to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State so that he may consider it when assessing how best to proceed with the parliamentary handling of the matter.

Mr. Sidney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): May I refer the right hon. Gentleman again to the attitude taken by his two predecessors in relation to Select Committee work and again refer to the early-day motion on the Order Paper signed by members of the Select Committee asking for the presentation of the Transport Bill to be delayed until the Select Committee's report is completed? I raise the matter with the right hon. Gentleman as a matter of principle and

so that he can ensure that this does not happen again—that is, if he attaches any importance to Select Committee work at all.

Will the right hon. Gentleman take on board the growing feeling that, when the Bill proceeds to Committee it should be dealt with under the new Special Standing Committee procedure? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the widespread concern about the Bill, which will cause the biggest upheaval in the bus industry for 50 years? Since there is anxiety across the political boundaries, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Bill should be considered under the new procedure so that evidence can be taken from interested parties?

Mr. Biffen: I recognise the desirability—when, from all viewpoints, it is practical—of having the views of the Select Committee ahead of the Second Reading debate. That is why I have been particularly anxious to establish that in no sense was I implying that there were any faults with the Select Committee in this matter. As I say, a number of factors help to weigh with the timing of a Second Reading debate, although I take the point that is made to me. The point made by the hon. Gentleman in the second part of his question will be considered, although at first sight it does not seem to be a Bill which falls within the original criteria which were appropriate for legislation. We will see how we go.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Although I readily recognise my right hon. Friend's reluctance to grant time for a further debate on the coal mining strike, does he agree that an aspect of it that deserves the attention of the House is the way in which NUM members were denied a ballot and are now voting in increasing numbers with their feet?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point, but I hope that he will excuse me when I say that we do not need a day's debate to demonstrate it.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Is the Leader of the House aware that this is International Youth Year? If so, will he find time for the House to discuss unemployment among the youth of the nation? Does he agree that we should be considering ways of developing employment, particularly for the long-term unemployed, and that we should be crushing unemployment and poverty rather than people?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw the attention of the House yet again to the significance of unemployment in the totality of economic policy. As we approach the period of the Budget and all the debates that flow from that, I am sure that many of the points that he has in mind can be made in that context. I note what he says and I underline the importance of it.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As the majority of hon. Members on both sides of the House, privately if not publicly, share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir K. Lewis) that it is better to put a timetable to any controversial measure at the beginning, rather than part way through its progress through the House, is he surprised that the Leader of the Opposition should be spouting the old gobbledegook about outrage against democracy? Is it not rather sad that tomorrow's man should still be trying to purvey yesterday's myths?

Mr. Biffen: The matter does not quite have that clean simplicity. I must ask my hon. Friend to show the proper sense of deference to the Select Committee on Procedure, the observations of which will, I am certain, form part of an interesting debate which awaits the House.

Mr. Allen Adams (Paisley, North): It is said that last year the Secretary of State for Scotland authorised more than 70 phone tappings in Scotland. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate on the subject of interference with private communications? This is clearly a matter of grave national concern, on which a White Paper has been presented?

Mr. Biffen: Perhaps we should proceed one step at a time in these matters. As the hon. Gentleman will realise, once I sit down, I am but John the Baptist for a much more significant statement that will shortly come from the Home Secretary.

Mr. Kinnock: John the Baptist?

Mr. Biffen: Yes—we know what happened to him!

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): May I press my right hon. Friend for an early debate on the Royal Air Force? The debate that we were to have had was delayed for reasons which were really the fault of the Opposition. Urgent and early decisions relating to the RAF need to be taken. We had debates on the Army and Navy in the latter part of last year. The need for a debate on the RAF is now pressing.

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend was the first to make the point to me when I announced the alteration in business, and I am happy to give him now the answer that I gave on that occasion—that arrangements will be made for such a debate in the reasonably near future.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): In view of the great concern of the National Union of Public Employees and other Health Service unions about the contact that some of their members may have had with people suffering from acquired immune deficiency syndrome, and in view of the worries of nurses, ancillary staff and ambulance personnel, will the Leader of the House urge the Secretary of State for Health and Social Services to make an early statement to the House about the action that the Government intend to take to allay the fears that exist?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman raises what I believe to be an immensely important and deeply disturbing problem. I shall at once report his question and observation to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Services.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): In view of the splendid efforts of the Royal Engineers, particularly the sappers of the Royal School of Military Engineering, yesterday at RAF Molesworth, which contrasted starkly with the shambles at Greenham common, will my right hon. Friend grant time to the House to debate the security for the perimeters of our defence establishments against marauding bands of anarchists and apologists from Moscow?

Mr. Biffen: After such a demonstration, why such a debate?

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman find time next week for a statement to be made about how the Prime Minister comes to be so muddled

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

about the settlement applying to the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers in relation to the National Union of Mineworkers? There seems to be a clear contradiction, with the Prime Minister saying that the situation is still open, and NACODS this afternoon condemning what it regards as nothing short of a ripping up of that agreement by the National Coal Board, and everybody knows that the NCB is supported by the Government.

Mr. Biffen: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is doing his best to salvage what he can from a difficult afternoon—*[Interruption.]* I shall of course see that his anxieties are represented to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend accept that I speak as a confirmed non-smoker when I explain that this week I met a number of the 718 constituents of mine who work in the tobacco industry and who are concerned about the pressure that is being placed on people as they choose whether to smoke? While they accept that smoking should be taxed and that there should be a reasonable degree of propaganda explaining the dangers connected with smoking, they are concerned lest they suffer unreasonable pressure in their jobs as might come from the removal of the royal warrant which has been applied to some companies. Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early statement to be made on the subject so that it may be discussed in a balanced and fair way? People's jobs are at stake.

Mr. Biffen: I am not sure whether the House has authority in the matter; therefore, I cannot be forthcoming in my reply to my hon. Friend, except to say that I will look into the point that he raises.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): May I impress on the Leader of the House the seriousness of the decision that has been taken by the executive committees of the NUM and NACODS today? Is he aware that, if the Prime Minister does not now allow the NCB to negotiate an honourable settlement to the mining dispute, there could be a complete closure of the mining industry? Is he aware that the best possible answer would be for the Prime Minister to take the reins of the NCB and that, if she does not do that, she should tell the House why?

Mr. Biffen: I have told several Opposition Members, not least the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), that I would pass their anxieties to the Prime Minister. I shall add to those the anxieties now expressed by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Michael McGuire (Makerfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman endeavour to get the Minister responsible for the mining industry—the Secretary of State for Energy—to make a statement to the House next week? Will he impress on him the fact that NACODS is now joining the NUM in demanding open negotiations without preconditions? It is to be hoped that that demand will not be—as it has been in the past—contemptuously spurned by the Prime Minister, remembering that NACODS has a statutory duty for maintenance and for the safety of men underground.

Is the Leader of the House aware that, if the NACODS men withdraw their Labour—this was pointed out in the debate on Monday — the consequences will be disastrous? I urge the right hon. Gentleman to see that a statement is made by the Secretary of State for Energy to the effect that the Government welcome with open arms the resumption of talks without preconditions. Is anybody seriously suggesting that if NACODS and the NUM withdrew their labour, the Government would still insist that negotiations could be resumed only with preconditions? In such a situation, they would welcome with open arms any offer of talks. They should be giving such a welcome to the resumption of talks now.

Mr. Biffen: Everyone in the House — on the Conservative Benches as well as the Opposition—is anxious to see a settlement to that dispute. I do not believe that it would be a proper use of next week's business for me to engage in a debate on the various and somewhat contentious points raised in the hon. Gentleman's preamble, but as it was attendant upon the proposition that I should refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to secure a statement next week, I shall, of course, make that request.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Will the Prime Minister arrange for a statement next week from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about the way that the Association of British Travel Agents works, in the light of the fact that the people who liquidated Budget Holidays only a few weeks ago are now floating a new travel company that will operate out of Scotland and which has obviously been bonded by ABTA? Will he get the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to explain also how Buckingham palace has an ABTA number? It seems that "Her Majesty's bucket shop" is being run from Buckingham palace without any bonding or high street shops. I am not suggesting that the royal family books cheap flights to Mustique, but the staff are avoiding the rules and regulations, and ABTA must be involved in that. I am proud to be receiving an honour from my school, because after this I do not think that I will get one from Buckingham palace.

Mr. Biffen: It is nice to know that that deprivation causes grief. I shall of course refer those points to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Government have now guillotined in Standing Committee more Bills in five years than previous Governments guillotined in 20 years? Given the fact that good progress has been made in Committee—there has been no filibustering from the Opposition; the longest speech has come from Ministers and his hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow)—and that this is a major constitutional measure which would on current progress get through within this parliamentary Session, how can he justify curtailing discussion at this stage?

Mr. Biffen: It is kind of the hon. Gentleman to reinforce his article in *The Times* with yet another preview of the speech that he hopes to make on Monday. I am afraid that I cannot extend a similar courtesy.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Social Services to make a statement to the House on why he has directed that the south Cumbria district health authority gives the cleaning contract for south Cumbria to a private

Blackpool cleaning operator when the in-house tender by the Roose hospital authorities in Barrow-in-Furness was cheaper? As the Government are supposed to be pursuing the cheapest course, why does not the district health authority take the cheapest tender and allocate the contract to the National Health Service in-house contractor? Is that not an abuse of the rules and of the Secretary of State's position?

Mr. Biffen: I am in no sense in a position to comment upon the merits of the case raised by the hon. Gentleman, but I shall refer the point that he makes to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does the Leader of the House agree that if the allegation is true that a Minister in the Department of Employment referred to black Britons as people from Bongo Bongo Land, he is unfit to serve in even this Government? Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to confirm or deny that allegation? If it is true, will he tell the House that the Minister's letter of resignation is now on the Prime Minister's desk?

Mr. Biffen: Everything that has been associated with that incident, including that question, persuades me that the silly season is starting somewhat earlier than usual.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): May I endorse the calls made by my right hon. and hon. Friends for a statement on the miners' strike on Monday next week, as that is the day when hundreds of thousands of workers in Humberside, Yorkshire and the south-east will be taking industrial action in support of the miners? Secondly, the Leader of the House replied to an earlier question on International Youth Year. If he is thinking of a statement or debate on youth issues, will he arrange it for Thursday the 28 of this month—three weeks today—on the subject of the disgraceful proposals coming out of the Department of Health and Social Security to remove 234,000 16 and 17-year-olds from the right to supplementary benefit? I can promise him something—there will be over 5,000 youngsters outside the House on that day to show that young people will not take that suggestion easily.

Mr. Biffen: On the second point, we had a good-natured exchange last week, and I have nothing to add to what I then said. On the first point, I shall, of course, add the hon. Member's voice to the others when making the observations that I will to my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Since the Government's policies are increasingly driving new sections of industry, as well as the miners, to desperation and into industrial action—a vote for the Tories now seems to be a vote for industrial action—and since the teachers, who are normally well-behaved people, have been driven to the point of desperation—their industrial action is developing and will develop on a grand scale—will the Government consider making a statement on that industrial action as well as on the others that they have caused, so that we can discuss the matter properly?

Mr. Biffen: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is neither encouraging nor exhorting industrial action. I shall, of course, draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science to the points that have been raised.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Will the Leader of the House consider providing time for a debate upon the closure of the DHSS resettlement centres, which was announced a day or two ago? Will he take it from me that many of us are dismayed, to say the least, that such an important announcement was made through the device of a written question?

Mr. Biffen: As the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, next Tuesday the Department of Health and Social Security is first for questions in the House, but I shall of course draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services to the point that has been made.

Interception of Communications

4.16 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Leon Brittan): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the interception of communications on which the Government have undertaken to introduce legislation in this Session.

I am today presenting a White Paper on the interception of communications in the United Kingdom. Copies are available in the Vote Office. The White Paper sets out the present position on interception authorised by all the Secretaries of State concerned. It outlines the main features of the Bill which the Government will introduce next week in fulfilment of their undertaking, and it describes how effect will be given to the legislation. It supplements the White Paper published in 1980 and gives the figures for the number of warrants issued by the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in recent years.

I should stress at the outset that the Government are not through the proposed legislation in any way either seeking or permitting the extension of the present scope of interception. The Bill will, however, establish a comprehensive statutory framework for the interception of communications, which are defined for these purposes as all forms of telecommunications in the public networks and also the post. It will incorporate into the law the existing stringent controls and limitations. It will define the grounds on which a Secretary of State will be empowered to authorise interception. These are in line with existing practice and are narrower than those specified in the European convention. They will be national security, the prevention and detection of serious crime, and the safeguarding of the economic well-being of the United Kingdom. In the latter case interception will be permissible only when it is for the purpose of obtaining information about events outside the country. Unauthorised interception will be made a criminal offence.

The legislation will also greatly increase the existing safeguards, not only by creating the new criminal offence, but also by providing a means of redress for those wishing to complain that interception has been improperly authorised. An independent tribunal will be established to adjudicate on complaints. It will be able to get at all the facts, and if it concludes that the issue of a warrant does not come within the statutory criteria it will be able to quash the warrant and award compensation. The post of the existing monitor of interception arrangements will be replaced by a statutory commissioner. He will be given the task of keeping under continuing review the exercise of the Secretary of State's powers and all the arrangements to do with the issue and execution of warrants. The Bill will lay down requirements to secure the proper handling of intercepted material.

Communications of the kind covered by the Bill merit special protection because they are committed by somebody into the custody of a carrier over whom he has no control. Legislation to deal with other aspects of privacy, such as surveillance, gives rise to quite different and so far unresolved issues.

Parliament will shortly have the opportunity to consider the provisions of the proposed Bill in detail, though hon. Members will appreciate the constraints which must inevitably apply to what can be said about some aspects of these matters. The interception of communications is always distasteful but sometimes essential if serious crime is to be thwarted, terrorism effectively combated and our national security adequately safeguarded. But it is right that the extent of interception should be strictly limited and a means of redress provided where it has wrongfully taken place.

I commend the Government's proposals to the House. I believe that they strike the right balance and that they will ensure that that balance is effectively maintained.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I thank the Home Secretary for letting me see an advance copy of the White Paper published today. In view of the issues involved, I suggest that when the legislation comes before Parliament the use of the Special Standing Committee procedure should be considered.

I pay tribute to Mr. James Malone, without whose court action and application to the European Court of Human Rights the Government would not have felt obliged to introduce the legislation foreshadowed in the Home Secretary's statement.

The White Paper refers to the backstop safeguard to be built into the Bill in the form of the tribunal. Who will appoint that tribunal, and how will its essential independence be safeguarded?

I suggest that the Government's proposals should be judged in accordance with the statement of Mr. Justice Megarry in the Malone case. He said that

"telephone tapping is a subject which cries out for legislation . . . in any civilised system of law the claims of liberty and justice would require that telephone users should have effective and independent safeguards against possible abuses."

In the light of those words, the Government's proposals arouse some profound misgivings rather than allaying them. As the White Paper makes clear, telephonic interception is carried out by

"British Telecommunications and any other public telecommunications operators licensed under the Telecommunications Act 1984".

Any form of surveillance gives rise to anxiety, but there has been a change since the 1980 White Paper. BT is no longer a public corporation, and under the legislation privately owned licensed operators will be able to tap telephones. We have the gravest misgivings about authorising private agencies to intercept the communications of private citizens or democratic organisations.

The White Paper also does not cover providing access to the results of telephone metering. Yet the European Court in its judgment six months ago specifically said:

"Metering amounts to interference with the exercise of a right guaranteed by Article 8"

of the convention. How does the Home Secretary intend to deal with that aspect?

Above all, we are extremely worried by paragraphs 21 and 22 of the White Paper. Referring to the issue of warrants

"in support of the Government's defence and foreign policies", paragraph 21 uses phraseology not previously used in any White Paper or public document on this matter. The incorporation of such a provision into legislation would open the way to surveillance for almost any purpose. For instance, it could be used in connection with the grotesque and ominous operation at Molesworth, in which the Secretary of State for Defence has been disporting himself as a bargain basement version of John Wayne.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He bought himself out of the Army for that.

Mr. Kaufman: He has the funds.

Paragraph 22 also arouses great concern. It states:

"The legislation will empower the Secretary of State to issue warrants where they are necessary for safeguarding the economic well-being of the United Kingdom, but only if they are for the purpose of acquiring information about matters outside the country. It is an important part of the Government's foreign policy to protect the country insofar as it can from adverse developments overseas affecting the well-being of the economy. Foreign intelligence which may be necessary in support of the Government's foreign policy will on occasions include foreign intelligence which is necessary for the protection of the economic well-being of the country."

I appreciate that the phrase "economic well-being" is covered by the European convention, but how far will that be expanded in the legislation and in the exercise of the powers? Will it be used, for example, for the surveillance of communications by currency dealers as the level of the pound is a matter of economic well-being? Will it be used for the surveillance of international trade union links in connection with, say, the miners' strike? It could be used for partisan political purposes disguised as the national interest.

What the legislation contains and omits is fundamental to civil liberties and human rights. We shall scrutinise the legislation minutely to ensure that it does not open the door to the expansion of Big Brother State.

Mr. Brittan: On the last point, far from expanding Big Brother State, the legislation will for the first time put on a statutory footing the exercise of a power which has very properly been exercised by Governments of all political complexions for many years. The addition is not a broadening of the exercise of power but the provision of safeguards—effective safeguards, in my view—which did not previously exist. It is therefore in a spirit of readiness to have the legislation measured against the kind of test described by Mr. Justice Megarry that I present the Government's proposals to the House.

I am not sure that this legislation is best suited to the Special Standing Committee treatment, but I shall discuss the matter with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. My only comment on the Malone case is that the Government were committed to legislate in this area before the European Court made its judgment. The case for legislation did not arise merely as a result of the litigation before that court.

The Bill will provide that the tribunal should be appointed in the same way as the Ombudsman. The Crown, on the advice of the Prime Minister, will make the appointment by letters patent. Members of the tribunal will be distinguished legally qualified people chosen because they will command the confidence of both the House and the country.

British Telecom will be merely the agent of the interception ordered by the Secretary of State. The operations of British Telecom will be controlled and regulated by law in a very firm way. I do not believe that the change in commercial status will make any difference to that regulation.

I draw the attention of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and the House to paragraph 17 of the White Paper, which deals with access to metering in a reasonable way.

The right hon. Gentleman expressed anxiety that paragraph 21 would permit surveillance for any purposes. He made an number of hypothetical suggestions. I do not think that he is right. The requirement of national security, for example, has appeared in no fewer than 50 different statutes without definition and has been regarded as acceptable by Governments of both political parties. Several of the statutes were introduced by Labour Governments.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the criterion of safeguarding the economic well-being of the country and asked how much that would be expanded in the Bill. The answer is that it will not be expanded at all. That will be the criterion. What is more, the Secretary of State will have to judge that information relating to events and information overseas must necessarily be intercepted for the purpose of the economic well-being of the country. There will be further protection. If it is felt that interception has taken place that is not necessary for that purpose, the tribunal will have full power to look at the facts, quash the interception and award damages.

Sir Edward Gardner (Fylde): Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that any legislation restricting the use of telephone tapping will apply to the police special branch? Further, is he satisfied that the operations of the special branch are effectively co-ordinated and properly controlled?

Mr. Brittan: Yes, I can confirm that the special branches will be subject to the legislation. They operate under the guidelines that I issued last December. Under the previous guidelines, the terms of reference of the special branch were not made public. The Government decided to make the guidelines public, and also decided that they should involve a considerable tidying up of the operations of the special branch in that area.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): As someone who has had to authorise interceptions, I welcome the introduction of this legislative framework. It is long overdue that administrative discretion should in some way be checked and safeguarded.

I am concerned about the appointment of the independent tribunal. The tribunal is the most crucial safeguard in the legislation. The tribunal is unlike an ombudsman, in that it will in effect investigate the judgment of the Secretary of State. There is a strong case for saying that the House should authorise the appointment of the members of the tribunal. At the very least, there should be a mechanism for consultation among the parties so that the appointments are not seen as an aspect of Government patronage when it is the Government themselves and their decisions that are to be scrutinised. These important appointments should be made objectively.

Mr. Brittan: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman, with his experience of such matters, welcomes the proposed legislation.

I shall, of course, consider what the right hon. Gentleman said about the tribunal, but I do not think that in practice that aspect of the matter will cause any great difficulty. We are talking about the appointment of a body which will essentially exercise judicial functions, deciding whether or not an interception which has been authorised falls within the statute.

The courts of this country scrutinise the operations of the Government and, as Ministers of all Governments have

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found, do not hesitate to strike them down, although the appointments are made in the normal way. It will not be difficult to find a way of appointing people who will command general confidence. There would be no point in any appointments which did not have that effect.

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on introducing proposals that are important from the point of view of civil liberties. However, can he confirm that the important decisions to be made in connection with these issues will be made by him personally and not by officials?

Mr. Brittan: I can give my hon. Friend that confirmation. That has always been the case, and will continue to be the case. I scrutinise each application made to me to make sure that it meets the relevant criteria. The procedure is the same for the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. Such applications are prepared at a high level and scrutinised personally by the relevant Secretary of State—not even by any other Minister in the Department.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): I welcome the Government's intention to put the whole business on a statutory basis. However, the criterion of the economic well-being of the country is new. It has not been necessary before. Why is it necessary now?

Secondly, someone who may have legitimate cause for complaint may not be aware that his telephone is being tapped, so the case will never come before the tribunal. Is the tribunal to investigate only authorised interception, or will it be able to inquire into possible unauthorised interceptions by, for example, the police or the security services? It is in that area that many of us feel the greatest disquiet. There is a feeling that a good deal of unauthorised interception takes place, regardless of the authority of any Secretary of State.

Mr. Brittan: The economic criteria have not been publicly stated in this way before, but they are not new. Right hon. Members on both sides of the House who have exercised such responsibilities will be aware of that and will be able to confirm that that is true. Such power has not been exercised by the Secretary of State for Scotland but, as the White Paper makes clear, the power has been exercised by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The Bill will not extend in any way the area in which those powers are exercised.

It may well be that someone will not know whether or not his telephone calls, for example, have been intercepted. It has been the practice of Governments of both political parties never to confirm or deny whether an individual interception has taken place. Whichever answer was given, the consequences would be obvious to people who might be involved in drug trafficking or terrorism. That would be very dangerous. Anyone who has suspicions will be able to refer them to the tribunal, which will have access to the relevant information and will be able to establish whether there had been interception—authorised or not—and whether, if the interception was authorised, that authorisation was properly given.

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on a commonsense approach to a sensitive problem. To what extent will the provisions of his statement affect the strict guidelines already issued to the police on the issue of surveillance equipment? Does not telephone tapping frequently play an effective part in the detection of criminals?

Mr. Brittan: It does indeed. The legislation and the proposed scheme fit in entirely with the tightened-up guidelines on surveillance. The guidelines on the use of equipment in police surveillance operations were issued on 19 December 1984, and a copy was placed in the Library of the House. The guidelines laid down detailed criteria and procedures for the authorisation of the use of surveillance devices. Further, the guidelines are especially designed to ensure that police surveillance is not used as a back-door method of securing interception of telephone communications without a warrant from the Home Secretary.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Home Secretary agree that the citizens of Britain ought to have more confidence than they now have, or can now have, that their communications will not be intercepted unless their activities, on overwhelming evidence, represent a great threat to their fellow citizens? Ought not the ultimate determination of what constitutes such a threat lie in the hands of other than those of politicians? Is the Home Secretary satisfied that, within the Bill and existing provisions, there is sufficient safeguard against the interception of communications by other countries operating in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Brittan: Safeguards against improper interceptions which are not in any way authorised by any agency of the Government cannot be guaranteed by legislation. That might be a matter of concern, but any interception that takes place outside the authorisation procedures of this legislation will, from now, be a criminal offence. That is new. Until now, a criminal offence has been committed only, for example, if it has been done improperly by British Telecom employees. There has not been a general criminal offence of unauthorised interception. This is a major step forward in the interests of protecting citizens.

I fear that politicians have to act in these matters, but those who have exercised such a responsibility agree that there is no exercise of ministerial responsibility which is looked into with greater care, and which is exercised in a less partisan way. This legislation provides, for the first time, an opportunity for an independent tribunal to express its view on whether the interception has been proper, and to quash the interception and award damages if something has gone wrong.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend recall that, on April Fool's Day 1981, his predecessor, Lord Whitelaw, as he now is, told me before I voted against the Government on this matter that statutory provisions would be unworkable? His reason was that interception must be secret and that the judicial process must be open. On those grounds he rejected the amendment which I and a couple of my hon. Friends tabled to achieve what my right hon. and learned Friend has now advanced. What has changed since then to make statutory provisions workable? Will it now be possible for an individual to take the Home Secretary, or the relevant Secretary of State, to the tribunal to discover whether his telephone is being tapped?

Mr. Brittan: An individual will be able to complain to the tribunal if he thinks that his telephone calls have been improperly intercepted and the tribunal will tell him whether the telephone calls have been intercepted improperly. It is important that individuals should not be told whether their telephone calls have been intercepted. Indeed, there are many circumstances in which it would be quite wrong for them to be told. The tribunal will consider whether there has been interception, whether it has been authorised and whether the authorisation was proper. If there has been improper interception, that will be made clear, compensation can be given, and the order can be quashed. If there has been authorised interception, the tribunal will merely say that there has been no breach of the Act.

As to what my hon. Friend said about my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord President of the Council in 1981, producing a legislative framework has not been easy. The difficulties to which my right hon. and noble Friend referred were real and should not be underestimated. I hope that, now that my hon. Friend has got the legislation that he sought, he might look forward rather than backwards, when the difficulties seemed greater.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): The statistics concerning annexe 2 are explicit but, to complete the picture and to advise the House and the country how widespread the practice is, could the Home Secretary give the number of applications for warrants which were made and refused, rather than those which were made and granted? If he does not have those figures to hand, will he make them available? Has he refused to grant any applications for a warrant?

Mr. Brittan: I do not have the figures to which the hon. Gentleman asks, but I do not think that producing them will be quite as easy or helpful as the hon. Gentleman suggests. I shall explain why. The process is not a straightforward one by which the agency says, "Here is an application. Yes or no?" Unless there is urgency, there is much interchange between the agency and those who advise the relevant Secretary of State. An application might not be made formally if it is made clear that it is unlikely to be granted.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): I warmly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals. Will he remind the House of the crucial importance of proper interception of communications in the battle against terrorism? Will he take this opportunity to confirm that any part of the legislation that he produces will not make that difficult job even more difficult?

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. He is right in saying that the role of interception in the battle against terrorism is extremely important. The Government's proposals provide a framework in which the carefully controlled use of interception can continue to play an important part in combating terrorism. I assure my hon. Friend that the safeguards and advances that I have described will not prevent the proper use of this weapon, where necessary, against that evil threat to our society.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Is the Home Secretary aware that the Post Office Engineering Union, which sponsors me, welcomes his intention to legislate on this matter? Indeed, it has been calling for such legislation for more than five years. Is he further aware that his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) about refusal to grant interception warrants makes me more worried about this legislation than I was when I came into the Chamber? Is he also aware that his saying that an application would not come forward when it would not be granted can only confirm what right hon. and hon. Members have been saying for years—that the interception is done in any case? The legislation does not cover that. Is the Home Secretary further aware that what he suggests in paragraph 21 of the White Paper would have made the Watergate affair legal if it had happened in Britain? We cannot tolerate that for long. He could have avoided all of this by accepting the amendment in which the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) and I had a hand in 1981.

Mr. Brittan: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's latter point. As to his first one, there has been a genuine misunderstanding. I said not that the application would not come forward because the interception is made anyway, but that the application would not come forward because, in the circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman referred, it would clearly be refused.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals. Can he reassure people who might question the need for interception in any circumstances by outlining some of the achievements and progress in the battle against crime and drug abuse, for example, as a result of the controlled use of telephone interception?

Mr. Brittan: It is difficult to do that without quoting individual examples. However, the police in England and Wales estimate that, in the past 10 years, they have been able to make more than 5,000 arrests, to recover about £40 million-worth of stolen property and to seize drugs valued in excess of £50 million as a result of interception.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I welcome the move towards legislation, but will the Home Secretary say whether in the matter of surveillance, for which guidelines were issued before Christmas, the Government intend to move towards a legislative framework? Is he aware of the misgivings about paragraph 21, which effectively says that the Secretary of State may issue warrants in support of the Government's defence and foreign policies? Is that not a licence to tap the telephone of any member of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament?

Mr. Brittan: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first point is that the legislation deals with interception, not with surveillance. I hope the hon. Gentleman will feel that the guidelines published in December, which amount to a considerable tightening-up of the previous arrangements, show that we recognise the concern about surveillance, and are prepared to take action to the extent that that is possible. It would be wrong to hold out any prospect of legislation in that area.

With regard to CND, the hon. Gentleman was present in the House when on another occasion I said that there was no question of special branch interception or interest in any organisation which campaigns in a legitimate way for legitimate political objectives however contrary they may be to the interests and policies of the Government.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement, but can he clarify the nature of the European Court's ruling? Was objection taken to the current practice or to the manner in which the power has been exercised, or was it simply to the absence of a statutory basis for the power?

Mr. Brittan: My hon. and learned Friend raises an important point. The European Court made no criticism of the procedures by which interception is authorised, nor did it comment on the merits of the use of interception in the case before it. Its only criticism was that the law in the United Kingdom did not spell out sufficiently clearly the scope of the power to authorise interception or the criteria for its exercise. Our proposal will meet that criticism and go further by reinforcing the safeguards against abuse and by providing a remedy for the individual.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): May we take the Home Secretary's statement as a retrospective apology to the House, because he and his immediate predecessor have stood at the Dispatch Box and told the House that nothing is wrong with the way in which telephone tapping is carried out? As he will legislate on the matter, will he tell the House whether complainants will have a right to be legally represented at the proposed tribunal?

Mr. Brittan: There is no question of apologising, because there is nothing for which to apologise. As I have said, the area covered is the same as that which has existed until now. Nothing improper was done in past practice. This legislation provides for a statutory framework within which to operate, and extra safeguards for citizens. Therefore, I feel no need to apologise for myself or my predecessors, on either side of the House. We may consider legal representation when we deal with the Bill.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that former Home Secretaries have told the House that they signed between 200 and 300 applications for warrants to tap telephones each year, yet it is common knowledge throughout the United Kingdom that we have specialised units capable of tapping thousands of telephone calls every day? I welcome the legislation, but will my right hon. and learned Friend give an undertaking today that, because of public anxiety about people having their telephones tapped, we shall be as flexible as possible with the legislation in Committee and will not make it a matter of political dogma, and that between us we shall try to get the legislation right for the sake of the British people?

Mr. Brittan: My hon. Friend is right to express the anxieties that undoubtedly exist about what I described in my statement as a disagreeable practice. I assure him that the figures set out in the White Paper are accurate. We shall debate the Bill fully and, I hope, in the spirit that has been shown in our exchanges so far this afternoon.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Home Secretary give a categorical assurance from the Dispatch Box that none of the trade union leaders involved in the miners' strike have had their phones tapped during the past 11 months?

Mr. Brittan: The hon. Gentleman will know why it is impossible to give such an assurance. As I said in answer to a previous question, it is never the practice in the case of individuals either to confirm or deny whether interception has taken place.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that during the Malone case the European Court accepted that the present procedures were effective in keeping the number of warrants at a low level, notwithstanding the increased use of the telephone and the increase in the level of serious crimes?

Mr. Brittan: My hon. and learned Friend is right. The figures published in the White Paper must be taken in the context of a massive increase in the use of the telephone. It is fair to consider them in that context. If they are considered in that way, they show a greater degree of restraint than if the absolute numbers are considered cold.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the anxiety felt at the time of the European Court's judgment on James Malone? Conservative Members greatly supported the independence of the Home Secretary that day. Will he therefore confirm now that his powers will in no way be hampered to secure and ensure the protection of this country in the interests of national security?

Mr. Brittan: I believe that the framework that I am announcing will enable me, and my other right hon. and hon. Friends who exercise these powers, to do what my hon. Friend wants. At the same time, it will provide a satisfactory statutory framework and enhance protection for individuals.

Water Authorities (Return on Assets)

Mr. Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Member to move the motion in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, I should say that today's debate is not one of those in which I am empowered to use my discretion to impose a limit of 10 minutes on speeches in the early evening. However, it is clear that many right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak and, therefore, I appeal for reasonably short speeches.

4.57 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Water Authorities (Return on Assets) Order 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1995), dated 17th December 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 7th January, be annulled.

I hope that it is convenient for the House to debate the second motion on the Order Paper:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Water Authorities (Return on Assets) Order 1985 (S.I., 1985, No. 78), dated 24th January 1985, a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be annulled.

I shall wish to move it formally later, Mr. Speaker, and we shall seek to divide the House upon it.

Mr. Speaker: If that is the wish of the House, so be it.

Mr. Rooker: We should not commence the debate without being aware that water is a natural resource and that we have today received the report of the Health and Safety Commission on the tragedy of the Abbeystead pumping station, in which many people lost their lives. Although we shall argue about finance, we should remember that in that tragic case we paid a high cost in human terms for ensuring that water reached our constituents' taps.

The water authorities are executive boards of Government. Members are appointed by Ministers of the Crown. They are subject to ministerial direction and control, and Ministers are accountable to Parliament. That brief description was given by a Minister at the Dispatch Box last Friday. The first question that will have to be disposed of is why we are here in mid-February—less than two months from the end of the financial year—debating whether to give Ministers retrospective approval for the directions and financial control they gave to water authorities behind closed doors at the end of 1983 and early 1984 for the year 1984-85, which is almost at an end.

The House is simply being asked to act as a rubber stamp on the first order. The effect of annulment within a few weeks of the end of the financial year was never contemplated by Ministers. There have been complaints about that in the past. In response to the complaints, the Government said in February 1984 in Cmnd. 9138:

"The Government accepts the desirability of laying before Parliament at the earliest opportunity the Orders which set the financial targets for water authorities."

That abuse of the House must stop. It is useful to put it on the record that we do not expect the House to be asked in future merely to be a rubber stamp.

We cannot stop the abuse today, but for 1985-86, which is what the debate is about, the award for making Ministers accountable to the House in time for us to take action must go to Mr. Roy Watts, the chairman of Thames water. With single-figure inflation, he and the other chairmen are being asked to increase water charges by double figures. Most want and need increases at about the rate of inflation. Thanks to Mr. Watts's insistence that he would not increase water charges beyond 3 per cent. without an order from Parliament, we are having this debate today. I should add that he is supported by his board of ministerial appointees.

The question that we must ask ourselves today is whether Parliament should give its approval to tax water through the orders. Can we all defend the proposal to our constituents, all of whom use the commodity?

Perhaps we are all here by mistake—a mistake of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. It was reported in the *Financial Times* yesterday that during the bilateral negotiations with the Department of the Environment he lost,

"the Treasury's fall-back position."

He stuck to his initial demand because he forgot what his second demand would be, and apparently the Environment Ministers gave way to him. I am sure that some time today we shall be told that a highly respected journalist on the *Financial Times*, Mr. Robin Pauley, got it wrong. However, we may be here by mistake.

We must decide whether the 1985-86 order taxes water, and I submit that it does. The CBI takes that view, as does the National Farmers Union. In the words of the Water Authorities Association, the water industry is being asked to

"make more money than is necessary to run the industry."

A reason given by a previous Secretary of State for the Environment, now the Secretary of State for Employment, for the reorganisation of the water authorities, and which was repeated in the 1983 Conservative election guide at page 289, was:

"Customers have not felt that they were really represented." —[*Official Report*, 7 July 1982; Vol. 27, c. 293.]

Following that reorganisation, dozens of water consultative committees were set up. They were meant to be a voice for the consumer, especially the industrial consumer. But they were not consulted about this proposal, and, so far as I am aware, none is in favour of it. Indeed, given that the water authority chairmen learnt of the proposed change only from television and radio after the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement, it is hardly surprising that the consultative consumer committees were completely ignored.

It is clear—I hope that it will not be a point of argument—that income collected on rateable value, as is half of water authorities' income, is a charge based on a taxing instrument, not a charging device. That is not an unimportant point. This is neither the time nor the place for a seminar or a long debate on current cost accounting. I for one would not be qualified to participate in such a debate, let alone to lead it on behalf of my hon. Friends. Anyone who compares the replacement cost of reservoirs with that of aircraft and says that it should be handled on the same basis will, in many people's view, be nothing less than a water wally. The attempt to revalue assets each year can be futile. There were not too many aircraft around when many reservoirs were under construction. It is easy to check the current value of an aircraft and its replacement —one telephones the British Aircraft Corporation or Boeing. We would need a time machine to do that for the water industry.

I suspect that, as yesterday, we shall be told that Price Waterhouse claims that current cost accounting for the

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water authorities is, "soundly based and sensible". Of course, as a partnership, Price Waterhouse does not publish accounts, so we cannot tell how it would cope with such a procedure. I rest my case on the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which in 1981 examined a water authority. That was the year in which the Price Waterhouse report was published. It stated:

"All the regional water authorities have encountered problems in assessing the present day replacement values of their substantial and in many cases highly specialised fixed assets. . . Knowledge of the extent and condition of the water industry's mains and sewers is incomplete, and uncertainties surround both the probable operational lives of these assets and the techniques that may be employed to facilitate renewal and refurbishment in situ."

That report on the Severn-Trent water authority and two private water undertakings was published as House of Commons Paper 339.

The Labour Government's White Paper on nationalised industries in 1978 cannot be prayed in aid in respect of water authorities. No targets were fixed at that time. In any event, if people wish to use that White Paper to prove their case, why have we not heard about it before? That argument will not stand up.

The current cost accounting techniques—I apologise to the House for going into some detail, but several points must be put on the record—involved in the statement of standard accounting practice No. 16, which has just lapsed, might be applicable to fixed assets such as aircraft, computers, machine tools and even buildings, but can they apply to Victorian-laid sewers, mains and reservoirs? The National Water Council, which no longer exists, set up a steering group to consider accounting techniques. It gave different estimates for the life of service reservoirs, mains and boreholes to the accountants Deloitte Haskins and Sells, which did the same job for the statutory private water companies. There was a difference of opinion even before the system began.

It is worth noting that the private water companies, which are not controlled by Ministers and whose borrowing is not included in the PSBR, were planning modest increases in charges of 2 to 3 per cent. The Essex water company is an example of that. But what are they doing? They are tagging along on the coat tails of the regional water authorities and jacking up their prices by double figures. That is Government-led inflation. There can be no other description of what is proposed by the private water companies.

The accounts of Thames water show it to be more profitable than ICI, Esso or Bowater, on any system of conventional accounting. That cannot be denied. Current cost accounting is disliked by private industry, and it has not gone unnoticed by the water authorities that, on the privatisation of British Telecom, one of the first actions was to scrap current cost accounting and to return to historic accounting.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Before 1979, did the Labour Government accept the principles of current cost accounting in relation to water authorities?

Mr. Rooker: The White Paper published by the Labour Government at the end of 1978 forecast changes in the financial structure of nationalised industries. That was never put into operation, but there was nothing in the White Paper about water authorities. No targets were set, as they are now, for a return on the assets of the water authorities. Since then, the water authorities have been reorganised. The system for those authorities was completely different before reorganisation.

I do not know—I challenge any hon. Member sitting on the Government Front Bench or on the Back Benches to give the House examples — of a private sector company that bases the figures on which it arrives at the prices of its products on a system of current cost accounting. They would not have a market for their products, whether it was ICI or British Steel or anybody in the private sector. Nobody does it. If they do, I think that we should have some examples today.

The system of current cost accounting is used—and in this case, we think, abused—as a cash generator, and in respect of a monopoly, of course, even more cash can be generated. Price is not a factor for water authorities. It is not for my constituents, and I doubt whether it is for the constituents of any hon. Member on the Government Benches. Obviously, in terms of industrial use, where there is large-scale metering, it would be. But the charge for water is not based on consumption, and the provision of water is a monopoly — this was reinforced by the Prime Minister in a written answer last week, in column *292* of the *Official Report* for 31 January, when she described it as a natural monopoly. She then seemed to dismiss privatisation of the water authorities because they were a natural monopoly of a crucial commodity.

From 11 million people, which is a quarter of the English electorate, in the Thames area, their water authority needs to collect and generate only £292 million in the coming financial year. This order demands that those 11 million consumers be charged £505 million, and this will still leave £12 million less for capital spending than had been originally planned. It is absolutely crazy.

Under this order, present-day customers will definitely pay more than the true cost of the service. That is taxation; it cannot be denied; it is a tax on taps; it is even a tax on toilets. We know that the Government's aims are lower inflation, increased capital spending and, we thought, more commercial freedom for the public sector. We are all aware that the Treasury has a Bill—or an owner's charter, as it has been described by some nationalised industry chairmen—to get even more control over the public sector than it has at present. The Bill was not mentioned in the Gracious Speech, but it is quite clear that one is being prepared for the next one. So we must take as our criteria for today, as the present state of the art, the five objectives for water authorities set out by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Environment, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Macfarlane), in the Adjournment debate on 19 December 1984, at column 454. These were higher investment, greater efficiency, a reasonable rate of return, moderate charges increases, and a reduction in borrowing.

As far as higher investment is concerned, the Thames water authority, for 1985-86, will be able to invest under this order only £114 million against its planned £126 million—a drop of £12 million. In 1987-88 it will be able to invest only £129 million against its planned £166 million—a drop of £37 million.

For the North-West water authority, planned investment of £195 million in 1987-88 is cut under this order to £170 million, which is a drop of £25 million. That is what the chairman told me—I say this in case there is any

argument about it—in writing before Christmas. The chairman of the North-West water authority, George Mann, says that the effect of the order

"in view of the state of the economy here in the north-west is extremely worrying".

The Lancashire water services council has told the CBI and right hon. and hon. Members that without this order charges in the north-west would be increased by an amount only marginally above the forecast for inflation. With this order it will be over 13 per cent. What a slap in the face for the north-west.

On the second point, greater efficiency, no one denies —and we applaud the fact— that virtually every water authority has achieved greater operating efficiency in the last two or three years. We congratulate them on that.

The third point which the Minister made was about the rate of return. This can deliberately be made to look artificially small with current cost accounting, when the assets on which the accounting is based are as specialised and as old as those in the water industry, 80 per cent. of which are under the ground. On profit against turnover water authorities are among the most successful 1 to 2 per cent. of businesses in this country. I repeat that, because it needs saying again and again. It is a tribute to those who run the industry and work in it. The water authorities are among the most successful 1 to 2 per cent. of businesses, based on profit against turnover.

On the fourth point, the Minister's objective of moderate charges increases is destroyed completely by the order. Thames planned 3 per cent., the Minister says 10 per cent.; Yorkshire planned 4 per cent., the Minister says 12 per cent.; the South-West planned 4 to 5 per cent., the Minister says over 10 per cent.; the North-West planned around 5 per cent., the Minister says over 13 per cent. And this goes on and on through every water authority in the country.

All authorities—I qualify this because I am not sure about Wessex—will increase their charges by double figures. I do not know whether the Wessex increase is in double figures or not. This is what each chairman told me in writing before Christmas. I regret that those chairmen, with the notable exception of Roy Watts of Thames, have accepted the Treasury line. I bet that some consumer consultative councils have been asking some very embarrassing questions of their authorities in the past few weeks because of the lead by the Thames water authority.

The Severn-Trent authority is even trying to stop paying its £100,000 rates on its luxury offices, which, if this order and the Government's machinery in respect of financial control go through, will be another £100,000 going to the Treasury instead of paying for home helps and road mending in Birmingham. The idea that water authority luxury head offices can be de-rated because they are somehow connected with the supply of water is ridiculous beyond belief and I certainly hope the Minister will support the line that the Inland Revenue is taking in opposing this kind of change. The Inland Revenue might be doing that, but the Treasury, of course, wants the money back.

Thames water will see its charges rise by a massive 29 per cent. in the next three years—we know that because of what is in the order and the financal figures—when the Government are targeting zero inflation.

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Rooker: The Minister shakes his head.

Mr. Gow: I did.

Mr. Rooker: I always understood that the Government's target was zero inflation. That is what steady prices mean. Steady prices mean zero inflation. This brings with it many technical problems that we cannot go into today. Thames water is to have a 29 per cent. increase in charges, and North-West water is even worse. The North-West will have cumulative charge increases in the next three years of 40 per cent. That is what the authority is saying to hon. Members.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): The hon. Gentleman is basing most of his argument upon the specific example of the Thames water authority—at least, that, for him, provides the most striking example of his thesis. But is it not a fact that we all want greater financing of the infrastructure in this country, and that includes water supply? Therefore, should he not welcome the fact that in these areas where costs are low, where extra revenue can be raised for finance for the infrastructure, charges should be so raised?

Mr. Rooker: I was conscious in preparing my remarks for this debate that I must not concentrate solely on Thames. The North-West, as I have highlighted, will be affected even more badly than Thames over the next three years in the cumulative effect on charges. It is devastated by its capital expenditure. The North-West will have less money for capital expenditure in two to three years' time than it is planning for. We all want increased expenditure on the infrastructure in the water industry, as elsewhere, but my figures show that the authorities I have cited will have less than had been planned even though they have to increase their charges. That is the point of the argument.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Is not the logic of all the hon. Gentleman's argument pointing towards the flaw in the theory of nationalisation? The real trouble is that while Governments own industries like the water industry Ministers of all parties will be tempted to interfere where perhaps they should not do so. I hope that he will agree that the solution to get everybody off the hook is to take the industry out of the public sector. Investment can then go ahead. If we can privatise the successful authorities the interests of the consumers and the people who work in those authorities will be best served.

Mr. Rooker: I shall await the hon. Gentleman's speech with interest, and I shall look with even more interest at the Lobby that he enters at the end of the debate.

What effect will this policy have on industry? There will be a 40 per cent. increase in the north-west and a 30 per cent. increase in the Thames area. There is a considerable amount of industry in the Thames area, and a quarter of the English electorate lives there. The CBI says that it will be a serious blow to manufacturing industry. That is not exactly bare knuckle stuff, but it is clear that the CBI is not happy about it and considers these increases to be a tax. We cannot understand why the Government are seeking to generate extra cash over and above that required from this vital industry.

We shall no doubt be told that water does not cost very much—only 21p per day for the average consumer. If the order is approved, that will increase by only 2p per day. However, I remind Conservative Members that for

[Mr. Rooker]

many millions of people the need to watch the pennies in order to allow the pounds to take care of themselves is a fact of daily life. The argument, "It is only 2p" simply will not wash.

The fifth target announced by the Minister in the Adjournment debate before Christmas was that of less borrowing, which clearly affects some authorities more than others. I do not deny that. Given the history of the authorities, their borrowing structure varies. I again use Thames as an example because it is a fair one. It is also a foretaste of what will happen to the other authorities in two or three years' time. In addition to the fact that Thames will have to increase its charges vastly over what is needed and cut its capital expenditure plans, it will have to pay back £61 million against a planned £18 million. Will any penalty be involved in early repayment?

In 1987-88, Thames will be required to pay £113 million, but it will have only £1 million of debt. For 11 million water users that will amount to forced lending to the Treasury. That is a tax and there is no other way of describing it. We shall be faced with complete self financing, debt redemption and a nice annual surplus to the Treasury. The 1985-86 order will mean that more than £100 million will be siphoned off from all the water authorities to the Treasury. That is what the Treasury will gain cumulatively. Much of it will come from Thames as some authorities will not be affected in the first year.

Current customers — our constituents — will in the next few years have paid off all the past debts and provided the assets for the 21st century. As well as stupid financing, that is absolutely unfair to elderly people who will not use the assets. It is also unfair on the working poor for whom there is no relief, given that the rateable value based system of water charges carries no rebate arrangement. I emphasise "the working poor" — there are millions of them — as opposed to those on supplementary benefit. So long as we maintain the present crazy rating system for property, those who suffer from that regressive system of taxation, such as single people, widows and small families, will be hit even harder because of the changes in water charges.

I know that we shall also be told that water authorities pay no VAT or corporation tax. Does anyone suggest that they should? Following implementation of the order, everything will be done at arm's length from the Chancellor. This measure flows from the Chancellor's autumn statement and the demands of the Treasury, and VAT is hardly needed when this technique is used. One does not need to introduce a Bill to levy VAT on water if a technique such as this is used, and I warn the House and the country that the same is in store for gas and electricity.

If I am doubted, I suggest that hon. Members look at the paper that the Treasury deposited in the Library on 20 December. No press notice accompanied it, but since then I have discovered that 70 copies went to the Press Gallery and that every political editor received a personally addressed copy. Obviously, on 20 and 21 December, the professional journalists of Britain were otherwise occupied.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Not with water.

Mr. Rooker: It is quite clear from the proposals that have gone out for consultation that this procedure, which will levy a back door tax on water in order to avoid the need for VAT, will be used in respect of gas and electricity.

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): I merely remind my hon. Friend that exactly the same tactics have been used in the case of the Post Office, which has been asked to double its profits despite the fact that the Government have already creamed off scores of millions of pounds in excess of what the Post Office needs.

Mr. Rooker: I remind my hon. Friend that the Post Office is on the list in the consultative paper. It is clear that the Treasury intends to tighten the screw even further.

Water charges are based on rates, and for the vast majority of the British people rates are a tax. Is it seriously suggested that we should tax a tax? That is what the order amounts to.

The Government got control of the water authorities — in reality, consumer co-operatives — in 1973 without giving a penny of compensation to the many local authorities which ran the previous set-up. In exchange, half the membership of the boards were allocated to councillors. But now we have executive boards which are all appointed by Ministers and which meet behind closed doors. Someone in the Treasury has decided that they are ripe for plucking, and consequently they are asked to levy a tax on water. I invite the Minister to bluff his way out of this and the House to reject the second order.

5.27 pm

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): I begin by responding to the request of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) in relation to the dates on which the House is invited to approve these orders. I give the hon. Gentleman and the House an undertaking that in future these orders will be introduced before the start of the financial year to which they relate.

I also wish to comment — some of my hon. Friends would want me to do so — on the story which appeared in yesterday's *Financial Times*. It was a hilarious story. Neither the author of the article nor the hon. Member for Perry Barr was present when these discussions took place. I have the advantage of having been present. I must tell the House that I have never known a Treasury Minister to mislay a paper of that kind, and most certainly my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury would not, and did not, mislay the paper.

This is a serious debate. It is one about which many of my right hon. and hon. Friends feel deeply. It is clear from the speech of the hon. Member for Perry Barr that it is an issue on which he too feels deeply.

The debate is essentially about four issues. First, it is about the rate of return which should be earned by the water authorities. Secondly, it is about higher investment in the water industry, something for which hon. Members on both sides of the House have been calling. Thirdly, it is about the reduction in borrowing by the water authorities. Fourthly — a matter to which the hon. Gentleman rightly referred — it is about charges.

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): I apologise for intervening so early in my hon. Friend's speech. When he was talking about the substance of the debate, he mentioned charges and those who have to pay the charges. Many of his hon. Friends wish to go into the

Lobby with him tonight, but, unless he can give an assurance that he will consider carefully the possibility of introducing rebates for water rates, it will be difficult for me and I believe for some of my hon. Friends, to join him in the Lobby. The proposed increases will have a devastating effect upon many pensioners and those on low incomes. Under the previous system in which rate rebates were applicable, general rates and water rates were taken together, so that rate rebates were available to pensioners and others on low incomes. Will he not at least consider and discuss this with his right hon. and learned Friends?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend is characteristically persuasive, and of course I shall consider what he says. However, I must remind the House of one matter, which will be the subject of part of my speech later. I think that a distinction can be made between general rates and water charges. The charge made for water is for services provided. My hon. Friend will know also that, in the calculation of entitlement to supplementary benefit, water charges are taken fully into account and some 3 million households already receive help with their water charges through the supplementary benefit system.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I think that the hon. Gentleman is misleading the House in two ways. First, although it is a charge for service, everybody in Britain receives the service. Secondly, it is only partly and not entirely in relation to supplementary benefit that the charges are taken into account and, as the Minister well knows, for those not on supplementary benefit, as his hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) said, there is no rebate. On that basis, the premise of the Minister is inaccurate and, at least in part, misleading.

Mr. Gow: I accept of course that almost everybody in the United Kingdom is in receipt of piped water, although many are not on mains drainage. That is not in dispute. I repeat that, when entitlement to supplementary benefit is calculated, water charges are taken into account, and some 3 million households receive help in that way.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I am sure that the Minister will wish to enhance his reputation by helping the House in this way. If old-age pensioners will not, or may not, receive a rebate, can he assure the House that they will not pay more and that an upward adjustment will be made? Can he also say something about those who are retired and on fixed incomes, because they too will suffer extreme hardship unless there is provision in the Budget for a tax rebate for those who just do not have the money to pay a 12 per cent. increase?

Mr. Gow: It is of course the case that increases in charges for water in the coming financial year will have to be paid by pensioners. I was referring only to the 3 million households which already receive help through supplementary benefit. For them, supplementary benefit will reflect the higher charges that will be imposed next year.

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): Will the Minister give an undertaking to the House that he will introduce a rebate on the water rates of those pensioners and other poor people who currently receive rebates on their general rate and are not on supplementary benefit?

Mr. Gow: No. I made clear in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown that I was not able to give that assurance. Indeed, the position is that, although rate rebates are given because rates are regarded as a kind of taxation, there is no rebate of water rates. Water charges, as I prefer to call them, are taken into account when calculating entitlement to supplementary benefit.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my hon. Friend aware that many pensioners who live on fixed incomes just above the level of entitlement for supplementary benefit, housing benefit and, no doubt, other benefits will find an increase of 9 per cent. intolerable? What justification can there be for imposing such a charge on them when the Government have a policy of reducing inflation?

Mr. Gow: As my hon. Friend knows, the charges made for water are included in the retail price index. An increase of 1 per cent. in water charges has the effect of one hundredth of 1 per cent. on the RPI. I shall return to that matter later.

I deal with the rate of return. This afternoon we are debating the fourth and fifth orders which have been laid under section 29 of the Water Act 1973. That section enables my right hon. Friend to direct that water authorities shall achieve such a rate of return on the value of their net assets as he considers to be reasonable.

The first order was made in respect of the financial year 1981-82. In that order, the current cost value of net assets was adopted as the basis of the calculation, and that change was agreed by the House without dissent. Since 1981, the same basis of asset valuation has been used in all subsequent orders, including those before the House today.

The House will have noted, not with surprise, that the hon. Member for Perry Barr made only a passing reference to the Labour Government's White Paper on the nationalised industries presented to Parliament by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) in March 1978. I wish to repair his omission.

Paragraph 3 of the White Paper affirmed:

"The Government must be concerned . . . in ensuring that there is an acceptable return on the public capital invested".

Mr. Rooker: Yes, they must.

Mr. Gow: I am glad to have the support of the Opposition.

Paragraph 4 affirmed:

"It was the Government's policy to treat the nationalised industries as commercial bodies so far as the expected return on investment was concerned".

My third and last quotation from the 1978 White Paper comes from paragraph 55:

"An adequate level of nationalised industry profits is essential to the continuing well-being of the industries and their customers and of the economy as a whole. They provide some of the funds for the very large investment programmes necessary to maintain supplies and services to the public. This keeps down the industries' new borrowing requirements, thus helping to reduce the burden of taxation and enabling the Government to maintain other important public expenditure priorities."

The House may think that the hon. Member for Perry Barr would have been more candid if he had pointed out that the Government are now following policies on water authorities that are precisely the same as those that I have quoted from the 1978 White Paper — a White Paper fashioned after even the Labour party had learned, with some humiliation, lessons taught it by the International Monetary Fund.

[Mr. Gow]

The average rate of return set for the water authorities in the 1984 order, for the current financial year, is 1 per cent. The 1985 order increases the average rate of return to about 1·4 per cent. for the coming year.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): The White Paper that my hon. Friend has been quoting talks about a 5 per cent. rate of return being expected from the nationalised industries. When does my hon. Friend envisage that the water authorities will have such a rate of return, and how much will charges have to be increased to bring such a rate of return about?

Mr. Gow: The Government have set targets, as my hon. Friend knows, only for the next three financial years. For the year 1985-86, the average rate of return for the water authorities goes up from 1 per cent. to 1·4 per cent. In the following year, the average goes up from 1·4 per cent to 1·7 per cent. and in the third year it goes up to 1·9 per cent. Thereafter the Government have set no targets.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): The Government reorganised water authorities. Arising out of that reorganisation, they expected greater efficiency and productivity. I am assured by my water authority that it is providing greater efficiency and production, and that this will increase. Therefore, why should it not be able to increase its return on capital, arising out of that reorganisation and increased productivity and efficiency, without interference from the Government? What is the use of that increased productivity and efficiency if the water consumer gets no advantage?

Mr. Gow: I understand my hon. Friend's point. There is a passage later in my speech which deals with efficiency. I give him an undertaking. If, after that passage, my hon. Friend is still dissatisfied, I shall give way to him again. I wish to make a little progress in my speech, not least because some of my right hon. and hon. Friends may want to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The targets differ from authority to authority because of differences in the rates of return presently being earned, and because of differences in investment levels, but the general policy will be the same for all authorities. Even next year's average of 1·4 per cent. is low when compared with a rate of return of 2·75 per cent. for the electricity supply industry and 4 per cent. for British Gas. As for the private sector, the Bank of England recorded that in 1983, for major non-oil industrial and commercial companies, the current cost return was 9 per cent.

The higher financial targets set by the Government will fund higher investment next year of about £90 million, bringing the total to £814 million, an increase of 12·5 per cent., as compared with the provision for this year. This extra investment in the infrastructure is something for which demands have been made within and without the House, and not least after last year's drought. Those demands have come from Labour Members, including the Leader of the Opposition, and from my right hon. and hon. Friends.

On 1 August last year, in a debate in the House, my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) and the hon. Member or Truro (Mr. Penhaligon), who uncharacteristically is not in his place, called for greater investment by the South-West water authority. This is exactly what the South-West will now get. Investment next year will increase by 15 per cent. from £33 million to £38 million. Investment in the North-West water authority, mentioned by the hon. Member for Perry Barr, will rise by 11 per cent. or £16 million. For Wessex, investment will rise by 40 per cent., from £35 million to £49 million. For the Welsh water authority, investment will rise by 19 per cent., from £47 million to £56 million.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I note what the hon. Gentleman says about investment increasing in the Welsh water authority area. Is it not true that the rate of return for which he is now looking is similar to that of last year, and that the borrowing limits are being substantially lowered? The lowering of the borrowing limits, together with the allowing of the capital investment, will lead to an increase in water prices of 12 per cent. next year and of 30 per cent. over the next three years.

Mr. Gow: I hope that the House will understand that I have ministerial responsibility only for the nine water authorities in England. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, who has responsibility for the Welsh water authority, will, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, wind up the debate. I would prefer it if he dealt with the Welsh water authority.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): My hon. Friend mentioned that I and some of my colleagues from the south-west called for extra investment in infrastructure. Can he confirm that, although the capital programme of the South-West water authority may be increased, that increase will be used mainly for meeting the extra burdens that central Government have put on the authority through the Control of Pollution Act? It will not improve the basic infrastructure for the ordinary consumer.

Mr. Gow: Mercifully, I am able to say that to diminish pollution is one of the most worthwhile tasks that can be carried out by water authorities.

The extra investment to which I referred will enable the water authorities to make more progress with the maintenance and renewal of sewers and water mains and further improvement in the quality of rivers, estuaries and coastal waters. Those who call for higher investment in the water industry are sometimes too ready to overlook the truth that, if money is to be spent, it has first to be found. That brings me to my third point about lower borrowing.

When the Labour party was in power, one of its most disastrous characteristics was that it believed that it was possible to finance extra spending by resorting to deficit financing on a massive scale. The author of the 1978 White Paper, from which I have quoted with approval, was the same right hon. Gentleman who, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, wrote his celebrated letter to the International Monetary Fund 15 months earlier. In that letter — *[Interruption.]* It is all very well for Labour Members to yawn. I want to remind them what happened when the right hon. Member for Leeds, East wrote to Dr. Johannes Witteveen on 15 December 1976.

Mr. Dobson: Does the hon. Gentleman propose sending details of this letter with every water rate demand?

Mr. Gow: That intervention makes me realise that I should not have given way.

I shall quote from the letter. It says:

"It is also essential to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement in order to create monetary conditions which will encourage investment and support sustained growth and the control of inflation".

Next year's higher rate of return permits the external finance limit for water authorities to be set at £203 million compared with £284 million this year. That is to say that there will be £203 million of additional borrowing next year by the water authorities as a whole. Only in the case of Thames, to which I shall turn in a moment, will there be a reduction in borrowing. By the end of this financial year, the total debt of the water authorities as a whole will be no less than £4·75 billion.

My fourth point is about charges. Understandably, there has been concern. Increases for next year will vary from authority to authority. So far, only three authorities have fixed their budgets. Our estimate is that the average increase will be rather more than 10 per cent. As I explained in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden), a 1 per cent. increase in water charges adds one hundreth of 1 per cent. to the retail price index. For this year, the average bill for domestic customers of water authorities is £77 a year, or 21p a day. Assuming an increase in charges of 10 per cent. next year, the average bill would rise from £77 a year to £85 a year, or from 21p to 23p a day.

In the case of Thames—easily the largest authority, serving 11·5 million people — the average bill for domestic customers is at present £73·41, or 20p a day. If next year's increase for the domestic customer should turn out to be 9 per cent., that would mean an annual bill of £80, or 22p a day. Even then, the charges made by Thames to its domestic customers would be below the average in England and Wales.

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): Is the Minister aware that the Thames water authority has considered the introduction of compulsory metering for all households? Is not this the sensible solution to the problem? It would provide a fairer, more equitable basis for charges and would enable investment decisions to be more sensibly made.

Mr. Gow: At my invitation, the chairman of the Thames water authority has agreed to serve on a committee that is considering the introduction of metering. I hope to receive the first report from the committee chaired by Mr. Roy Watts before the end of next month. Both the Government and this committee are considering the introduction of metering. Of course, water authorities' charges also reflect their operating costs.

I wish to deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir K. Lewis). The House will remember that, under the Water Act 1983, we reconstituted the authorities with small, businesslike boards. We have taken vigorous action to improve efficiency. We have agreed objectives with water authority chairmen. We have set performance aims which are agreed targets for reductions in operating costs. Efficiency as been improved, as the hon. Member for Perry Barr acknowledged. In the three years to 31 March 1984, all 10 authorities reduced their operating costs in real terms. All have reviewed their organisations, streamlining their headquarters staff and in most cases cutting the number of their divisions. Since 31 March 1979, the numbers employed have been reduced by 10,400 to 52,000. The largest reduction, of nearly 3,500, was achieved last year.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission has just reported on the Yorkshire water authority. The report said:

"We have no doubt that the level of efficiency achieved by the Yorkshire water authority in its early years"—

that is when the Labour party was in power—

"fell far short of what might reasonably be expected in a large public enterprise. However, we are satisfied that there has been a substantial improvement in recent years and that the pace of improvements has increased since the authority was reconstituted in October 1983."

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am sure the Minister is well aware that in 1973 many water authorities inherited a large debt. If the proposals are put into effect, when does the Minister envisage that the Welsh water authority will pay back to the Treasury its debt of £100 million?

Mr. Gow: If I may, I shall leave that question to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, as he has responsibility for the Welsh water authority. I shall deal later in my speech with the general point about repayment of debt.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The Minister referred to the Yorkshire water authority. As a member of that authority, may I ask the Minister to be honest with the House and explain the work that the authority had to do because of the introduction of new technology and the grid system? It also had to ensure that sufficient water supplies were made available in the county. Will the Minister also explain that it took a number of years, because of the resources that were available upon reorganisation, to achieve those results? The Minister ought to be fairer to the Yorkshire water authority.

Mr. Gow: I was quoting with approval from the recent report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Following the quotation that I have just read out, I hope that the House will join me in paying tribute to the chairman of the Yorkshire water authority, who is a doughty Welshman, Mr. Gordon Jones, to his board and to his employees for what they have achieved. The same tribute can be paid to all of the water authorities.

I turn now to the system of current cost accounting adopted by the water authorities.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Before he leaves this point, could I remind the Minister that he has not answered the question asked by his hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir K. Lewis) about why increased efficiency has not resulted in lower charges?

Mr. Gow: I said that I was going to deal with that point later in my speech. I gave an undertaking to my hon. Friend and I give a similar undertaking to the hon. Gentleman. If he is still unhappy when I have dealt with that matter I shall give way to him again.

Prior to 1981, the authorities produced historical cost accounts only. Those accounts suffered from two limitations. First, in common with all historical cost accounts they failed to reflect inflation — a factor of special importance in the case of water authorities with their very long-lived assets. Secondly—this applies to water authorities only — the way in which assets inherited from predecessor organisations in 1974 had been valued for accounting purposes compounded this weakness.

The following note appears in the accounts of Thames for the year ended 31 March 1984 — accounts which

[Mr. Gow]

were approved by the board, signed by the chairman and the director of finance and audited by Arthur Andersen and Co.:

"Pre-vesting tangible assets are included at the net book value recorded by the various predecessor authorities at 1 April 1984. In the majority of cases these values represented only the amount of loans outstanding on debt-financed assets, thus excluding assets that had been financed from revenue, internal funds and capital grants and contributions, or for which doubt had been redeemed."

A similar note—I believe that this is the point which the hon. Member for Perry Barr raised—appears in the accounts of the other nine authorities.

What that means in plain English is that a significant part of the assets of water authorities do not appear at all in their historical cost accounts. Calculated on that basis, it is hardly surprising that water authorities appear to show a reasonable rate of return. It is equally clear that historical cost accounts are not a sound basis for assessing a water authority's financial performance.

There is no need to take my word for that. Hearken to the present Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee when, in an earlier incarnation, he was Financial Secretary to the Treasury. On 1 August 1978, replying to a debate in this House on accounting practice in the nationalised industries, he said:

"For the avoidance of doubt, let me reaffirm what my colleagues have said on previous occasions — that the Government wholeheartedly support the concept of current cost accounting in the private and public sectors". — [*Official Report*, 1 August 1978; Vol. 955, c. 670.]

The shortcomings of historical cost accounts were recognised by the water authorities themselves. In 1980, it was decided that water authorities should publish supplementary current cost accounts in accordance with the inflation accounting standards issued in that year. In the following year, the Department of the Environment, with the approval of all 10 water authorities and all of their auditors, asked Price Waterhouse to review the current cost accounting principles adopted by the authorities. Price Waterhouse, as the House would expect, carried out a most thorough review. In its report dated November 1981 it concluded:

"The approach to current cost accounting which has been adopted is both soundly based and sensible."

The report acknowledged that a considerable amount of further CCA research and refinement needed to take place in future years. That is a continuing process and a further element of it is the working party on CCA asset valuation, whose chairman is Thames's director of finance. I hope that the working party's report will be available in the summer.

In setting the financial targets of individual water authorities for 1985-86, the Government have been guided by three considerations. The first is the need to bring the various rates of return on existing assets from their present level to a common figure over the next three years. That is a policy of convergence. Secondly, there is a need to ensure that new investment earns a rate of return of 5 per cent. The third consideration is to allocate the investment levels broadly in line with the differing needs of each authority as expressed in its corporate plan.

I do not think that I am overstating the case when I report to the House that none of the authorities was enthusiastic about the Government's policy of raising rates of return. However, all save Thames have accepted our decision and most have welcomed the scope for increased investment, which they see as necessary to improve services and standards in their regions.

I promised earlier to return to Thames, and I shall do so. The current cost valuation placed on its tangible fixed assets by Thames, and confirmed by its auditors, was £4,425 million at 31 March 1984. At the same date, the value of its tangible fixed assets at historical cost was £826 million and its debt amounted to £423 million. It is fair to say that neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I was aware of any dissatisfaction by any of the water authorities with the system of current cost accounting until after the Government had announced that they would seek a higher return next year. The proportion of the debt of Thames to its assets is very much less than that of any other authority. That is why the setting of a higher rate of return for Thames and for all the other authorities—Thames has been repaying debts since last year—takes the form of an earlier repayment of debt next year. Debt repayment in 1985-86 will be £60 million compared with £34 million in the current year.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): It is true that Price Waterhouse recommended current cost accounting in 1981. Whether it was right to do so is a matter for debate, but surely it did not recommend also the imposition of a financial target on the basis of CCA, which when translated into historic costs, as is the system in most of private industry, would lead to a rate of profit above that earned by ICI, even though Thames is a monopoly. Surely Price Waterhouse did not do that.

Mr. Gow: In 1973 my right hon. Friend was a Member of this place and I was not; he was also a member of the Government and I was not. Under section 29 of the Water Act 1973, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is empowered to set the rate of return for water authorities. If my right hon. Friend and his colleagues were right to introduce that measure, I think he might accept that which appears in the recently published report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General. If the Comptroller and Auditor-General had thought we were wrong to set financial targets on the basis of current cost accounts, possibly he would have referred to it. However, my right hon. Friend will have studied the report closely and he will know that the Comptroller and Auditor-General made no such reference.

Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends have suggested that the water authorities might be transferred to the private sector, and I understand that that prospect would not be unwelcome to the chairman of Thames. There is a precedent, at least in part, for such a course. There are 30 private water companies in England and Wales supplying 25 per cent. of that area's customers wth fresh water. Although the companies are subject to financial controls by statute, they raise their money in the market place. Their funding is not included in the public sector borrowing requirement.

In our manifesto, we promised to transfer more public sector businesses to independent ownership. The transfer of water authorities, which form a natural monopoly, presents special problems, not least because of their regulatory functions. Nevertheless, my right hon. Friends and I will be examining the possibility of a measure of privatisation in the industry.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to intervene. It is unfortunate that his political views on these matters are not up to his courtesy.

The measure to which he referred when responding to the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) put together for the first time the organisation of water supply, water disposal and sewerage. All that we have been discussing applies as much to water disposal and sewerage as it does to water supply. Is the Minister suggesting that the regional water authorities and their subsidiary parts, which used to be local authority operations and funded by the Exchequer to the extent of £100 million a year in rate support grant up to 1974, be similarly transferred to private enterprise?

Mr. Gow: The House knows that the function of the 30 water companies is only to provide fresh water and that the function of the water authorities is to provide fresh water, take away foul water and deal with other environmental and regulatory services. My right hon. Friends and I will be examining the possibility of a measure of privatisation in the water industry, and that means the water authorities.

Mr. Spearing: Fresh water or foul water?

Mr. Gow: Fresh and foul.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I represent an area which is largely supplied with water by an efficient private enterprise company. I hope that the Minister will not delude his hon. Friends into thinking that private enterprise water companies within the present system are immune from the burden of debt which is brought to them by the regional water authorities. For example, the Newcastle and Gateshead water company has to increase its charges to consumers because of the amount that it has to pay for what is provided to them, supposedly in capital, by the regional water authority.

Mr. Gow: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, which is well known to the House.

The House has been patient and I am almost done. I have something to say particularly to my right hon. and hon. Friends. All of us, faced with a choice between lower or higher increases in charges, would opt for lower. But the Government have to take a broader view, not least because of the principles set out in the 1978 White Paper, which have been endorsed by this Government—and not by this Government alone but by Parliament.

On 6 December, the House approved the autumn statement presented to Parliament by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. On page 21 of that statement, the external financing limits for the nationalised industries were set, including £203 million for the water authorities. Having approved the whole, we have also approved the parts.

So far as the water authorities are concerned, we have followed a policy which has been consistent and persistent. It is a policy which has meant streamlined boards, a commitment to greater efficiency, better service, a realistic return on public assets, and now more investment.

The journey to a Britain of sound money and honest finance is, in many respects, a painful one, but that journey has to be made and these orders are an essential part of that strategy.

6.11 pm

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) so clearly told the House, for the first time in the history of the realm the Government are imposing a tax on water —a basic commodity. That is what the orders mean. Conservative Members are as worried about that as we are. In the Minister's final words he sought to sell the concept of a tax on water on the basis that he would privatise the nationalised water industry. A tax on water is as repulsive to Conservative Members as it is to us.

The Minister talked about water companies and the extent of their operations. It occurred to me to ask whether the order is hybrid. Does it affect the water companies or only the water boards?

Mr. Gow: The orders apply only to the water authorities.

Mr. Oakes: Some of the water companies supply water. One part of the supply of water is involved, but not the other. That smacks of hybridity.

Government Back Benchers must be puzzled at the Government's action. Last night there was a three-line Whip on the rate capping of local authorities because they are spending too much. Today Tory Members are operating on a three-line Whip to order water authorities to charge the consumer more.

I shall be brief because many right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. I want to discuss the nature of water rates. One has control over the consumption of gas or electricity, but no control over the consumption of water. Even if one does not limit the amount of water one uses, one still pays the same rate. The whole rating system tends to be regressive, but water rates are particularly so.

I sympathise with the poor people who are not on supplementary benefit and who will have to pay this Government-imposd levy without rebate. The Minister said that he is unable to allow rebates. For the average household the increase will be £11 or £12 a year. That will be a considerable increase for all our constituents.

People are being taxed but cannot fight back. That is why hon. Members will resist the order. In a cowardly way the Government are trying to place responsibility for their tax on the already unpopular water authorities. The public should realise that we are talking about a tax. For the first time a Government are taxing water. They are trying to push it through the Lobbies tonight by promising their hon. Friends privatisation.

6.15 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction will take the Government's proposal for 1985-86 back to the Treasury and change it, although I realise that he cannot because he is bound by the writ of the autumn statement on public spending.

I regard the Minister as one of the most courteous in the Government. He is scrupulously attentive to the worries of the House, but this time he has been sold a pup by the Treasury. He now has the miserable duty of trying to sell it to the House. I should have no qualms if we were dealing with a matter which was unpopular but for which the intellectual foundations were right. All Governments have to put forward unpopular measures which are difficult to

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sell and it would be absurd if Government supporters ran away every time that that happened, no matter how difficult the sales task.

I do not hesitate to support a policy that seeks to improve the financial organisation of nationalised industries and to establish a proper basis for recovering their long-term costs, provided that those costs and the assets which have to be financed are properly valued. I fear that in this case that proper evaluation has not been worked out.

As the Minister said, Price Waterhouse recommended current Government accounting for nationalised industries in 1981, and that was accepted by the Government at the time. However, that is four years ago and since then the accounting profession has split about the virtue of CCA. We are also living in a far less inflationary age—thank goodness—so the situation is different.

It was agreed four years ago that CCA was right and the water boards accepted it. However, there was no agreement about setting a financial target which produces, when translated into historic costs, a rate of return on capital higher than that earned by ICI and other major industrial companies when that organisation is a monopoly. CCA has the effect of vastly uprating the value of the capital assets of any organisation, particularly a water authority.

What would happen if those rules were applied in the private sector? Parts of ICI have a natural monopoly, but great care is taken not to push up to astronomical heights the rates of return on a historical basis. The question of whether CCA should be used involves a different debate. The key difficulty lies in the use by the Government of the words "adequate rate of return."

The figure of 1 per cent. sounds miserable when applied through current cost accounting to the colossally inflated value of the assets of some gigantic organisation such as the Thames water authority. However, in the language of historical costs, that produces a return higher than that earned by ICI. In applying financial targets, caution and balance have to be used. I cannot see where the caution and balance are being used in this application of policy.

The current cost accounting method, which is now under intensive dispute among accountants, must be treated cautiously. It inflates asset values enormously and it inflates the depreciation which must then be covered by income to finance those asset values. In the case of the Thames water authority—I am concentrating on that authority not only because my constituency comes within it but because it is such a glaring case of all that can go wrong when one applies this sort of policy too rigidly—the amount of depreciation that is required by what is proposed is three times what Thames believes it needs fully to replace its assets and maintain them in high quality order.

Under the Government's plans, the authority will be investing less than it would otherwise wish to do.

Mr. Jackson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the net asset value of British Telecom is £8·4 billion, which, on the basis of the valuation of Thames water authority's assets, means that that authority is more than half the size of BT?

Mr. Howell: That illustrates the absurdity of the approach. CCA may be the general basis on which nationalised industries operate, but it must be applied with great sensitivity to different types of industries.

Even in the case of water authorities, there is a convention by which the value of assets, certainly those in place before 1981, is abated by 40 per cent. I suspect, however, that even that asset valuation is highly doubtful because one must bear in mind the replacement cost of a sewer, reservoir or installation, which has a life of perhaps 800 years. Is the replacement cost to include the cost of digging another hole for another reservoir or a new sewer?

One need only ask such questions to see the basic absurdity of building up a gigantic capital value, on which a rate of return is then calculated and which inevitably looks minuscule. It is clear that a mistake has been made somewhere in the Whitehall machine. I do not blame Ministers at the Department of the Environment in particular—they have had a heavy load to bear in other areas—but it looks as though they missed this one.

The Minister of State says that he has been even-handed as between water authorities, and I see his feeling about the virtue in that. But why was the Treasury even-handed as between what are very different concerns? The Thames water authority is by far the largest. It is a gigantic outfit and a wholly different business proposition. It is much better equipped than the other water authorities and, above all, it is paying off its debt and returning money to the Government. It has what is called in the jargon a negative EFL—a negative external financing limit—so that it is a different proposition.

It would have been a happier outcome for these affairs if, instead of even-handedness in the literal sense of applying a broad and unsatisfactory formula to all authorities, more sensitivity had been shown as between the different water authorities, some of which operate under completely different conditions. Hon. Members in all parts of the House could speak of the different problems that affect water authorities in different parts of the country.

I fear that this issue has been handled carelessly in the bowels of Whitehall. I do not like to see the Minister of State loaded with the duty of having to present such a weak case. It sounds as though it has been formulated not on the basis of rational argument, discussion and understanding of the nature of the industries concerned, and not even on the basis of trying to establish, within the overall framework of the Government's correct policy for the nationalised industries, different details for different industries. It has been settled on the basis of saying, "Do not bother me with facts. These are the figures. You make them fit."

I do not like to see policy made on that basis and I hope that it is not symptomatic of anything deeper inside the policy-making machine in the Treasury and Whitehall. The position should be corrected, although the Minister explained that unfortunately he is not free to correct it. At least let us hope that next year the same unhappy and intellectually unsound basis for dealing with the accounts of a body such as the Thames water authority are corrected. In the meantime, I would find it impossible to support the Government in the proposals as set before us.

6.26 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I join the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) in saying that

some gross errors have been made in the Treasury's book-keeping relating to the water industry. I hope that his hon. Friends noted what he said about the financing of regional water authorities.

I support the motion for a number of reasons, not least because of the 4·5 million people in the Yorkshire and Humberside area who will be affected by this legislation a substantial number will suffer hardship. The Labour group for the region is strongly opposed to the order because, as has been pointed out, many householders will not qualify for supplementary benefit or other help towards the additional costs that will be imposed upon them. Housing benefit does not include a refund in respect of water charges. It is clear that the Government are deliberately creating hardship for many people.

Hon. Members, including Conservative Members who represent Yorkshire constituencies, have been asked to oppose the order. I hope that they will heed that appeal. Whatever may be said about the possibility of privatising the water authorities in the future, we must consider the costs that will fall on consumers now. There was no more than a hint from the Minister that privatisation might come in due course. It is clear that before that stage is reached the consumers will be paying dearly.

Even the CBI, a friend of the Government, states in its parliamentary brief that industry, already struggling for survival in the competitive world in which we live, will be caused additional expense, perhaps of as much as £100 million a year, as a result of the order. The Minister said that it was hoped that in future years the regional water authorities would be given more notice of orders such as this. It is clear, therefore, that water charges will increase and that there will be greater hardship for those who rely on the regional water authorities.

The CBI warns that, unless industry is buttressed against the proposed increases, the additional cost could cause further unemployment. That is a stark warning from an organisation which has supported the Government throughout. The CBI confirms what my right hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) said about this being a tax on water. It says that the regional water authorities will be tax collectors for the Government. One way to change the proposal is by supporting the motion, and I hope that Conservative Members will give that serious consideration.

Reference has been made to average increases and the way that they will affect householders. The Minister mentioned averages. We were not told the average rate assessment that was taken into consideration. In the Yorkshire area the increase is based on an average rateable value of £135. What will happen to people on fixed incomes, and pensioners who will not qualify for rebate and whose rateable assessment is above that? Their increases will be substantially more.

The Minister said that the increase for domestic consumers in Yorkshire would be 12·5 per cent. and that the overall increase would be 10·5 per cent. Some Yorkshire domestic ratepayers will have an increase of 19·6 per cent. in their water charges because of the way in which the rating system is applied. Is that a fair or just tax to impose upon consumers?

Consumer councils have been mentioned. When the local consumer council was told that the decision had been taken to increase charges, there was a call from the consumer council for all members of the Yorkshire water authority to resign because the increases would have serious consequences for users in the Yorkshire area. The anxiety expressed by the consumer council should not be underestimated. Consumer councils were set up to tell water authorities of the views of consumers, but no notice has been taken of the anxiety that they have expressed.

Consumers in Yorkshire are worried about the way in which the regional water authority and the Government are attacking consumers. Domestic consumers will suffer in a number of ways from the increases. First, there is an average charge, and it has been pointed out that the average increase in many cases will be three times greater than the rate of inflation. On numerous occasions we have been told by the Prime Minister and other Ministers of the importance of keeping inflation low and under control. In some areas the increase will be five times greater than the rate of inflation. Where is the justice and fairness in that approach to water consumers?

I should like the Minister to take note of a further injustice being caused to domestic ratepayers. The Yorkshire regional water authority is transferring charges for treating foul water and sewage from commercial undertakings to the domestic consumer. That kind of decision can be made without any explanation or notice because the public and press have no right of admission to the meetings of the regional water authorities. Ratepayers and consumers in Yorkshire should be given an explanation of why that transfer is necessary. I ask the Minister to inquire into the circumstances of that decision in the area.

Domestic consumers suffer more than others because they have to pay two standing charges. One is for water, and one for sewerage. We have been told that in the Thames area there is a suggestion that the installation of meters should be mandatory. When I was a member of the Yorkshire water authority, we talked about meters. We said that by using a percentage of the water that had gone through the meter we could assess charges for sewerage and for treating foul water. If that is done, the domestic consumer has to pay one standing charge only. Two standing charges are a great injustice to domestic consumers.

The Minister talked about the Water Act 1973. Section 30 gives water authorities comprehensive powers

"to fix, and to demand, take and recover such charges for the services performed, facilities provided or rights made available by them".

That section has been superseded by the Government's action and by the way in which they are instructing water authorities to fiddle the charges that they are imposing on industry, commercial undertakings and domestic consumers.

The Minister also mentioned the matters that affect charges throughout the nine English regions and the area of the Welsh water authority. I received a copy of a newspaper which highlighted the dramatic rise in water charges and spoke of them as being double the rate of inflation, and referred to consumers paying more towards capital investment. That was not the *Daily Mirror* or *The Sun*; it was the Yorkshire water authority's newspaper. The author of the article was the chairman of the authority. The Minister paid him a tribute. The chairman decried the Government's action and the way that they are forcing all water authorities to increase charges by more than they want to.

I find it strange that Gordon Jones, the chairman of the Yorkshire water authority, is criticising the Government

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for the way in which they are imposing their wishes upon regional water authorities, because the Minister said that, although some water authorities were reluctant to accept the increases, his own chairman had done so without reservation. The chairmen of water authorities must decide whether to support the consumers or the Government. They cannot tell the Minister that they accept the increase and then go back to their regions and criticise the Government. That is why I take off my hat to the chairman of the Thames water authority for his action on this issue.

I remind Conservative Members that their constituents, too, expect their support in seeking to annul the order. I appeal to all of them to vote accordingly today.

6.40 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South) : I have the good fortune—or misfortune, however one cares to look at it—of being a graduate of Oxford university. One of the intellectual games that we played when I was there was to take a subject to which one felt strong emotional hostility and try to argue in favour of it. That was my approach to today's debate. Having done some reading on the matter, I now conclude that there is a great deal of sense in what the Government are trying to do.

When I used to serve in local government I was responsible for some very large capital programmes, some of over £100 million. But the capital expenditure levels in some water authority reports show an astonishing complacency about the need to repair and replace existing systems, and particularly about the need to provide new systems in areas of population growth and new industrial development. The figures for the past 10 years show no growth at all. Most water authorities seem to have gone backwards.

My husband's family lives in the area of the South-West water authority. Ten years ago that authority's capital expenditure was £18 million and it blithely went on spending roughly that amount for the next decade, although to maintain its programmes at 1974 levels it should have been spending about £38 million by 1979-80.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Will my hon. Friend give way as she is referring to my area?

Mrs. Currie: No, I should like to get on. When we spent our holidays there and visited Lundy Island, there was not even any water for the sheep.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: If my hon. Friend knew anything whatever about the south-west, she would know that the water authority's programme of reservoir building was disrupted time and time again by objectors to new reservoirs.

Mrs. Currie: I defer absolutely to my hon. Friend's knowledge of the area, but I took the trouble to read the authority's annual report. The report for the subsequent year, 1977-78, is full of photographs of the chairman, who referred to a feeling of anti-climax and pointed out with great complacency that the reservoirs of Devon were still half full at the end of the subsequent rather wet summer. The figures do not bear out his complacency. I suspect that the £20 million per year being spent would be just about enough to provide a water service for a place like Lundy without taking account of the increase in housing and industry in the area.

Last summer there was another drought and my family and friends again had to use standpipes.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Sheer ignorance.

Mrs. Currie: My hon. Friend should ask his constituents what they think of the water authority.

Mr. Harris: Will my hon. Friend give way as she is referring to my water authority, too?

Mrs. Currie: No. I have sat through several debates in the past couple of weeks and no one has given way to me. Not one water authority has managed to maintain its 1974-75 capital programme in real terms.

Mr. Steen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Currie: The worst region is Wales, which is spending about £50 million per year when merely to maintain the 1974-75 level would require more than £100 million. It is no wonder that there are problems there. All the water authorities are culpable and it is worth considering why.

In the past, the water authorities' finance has been split between the consumer and the Government. Effectively, the consumer has paid for current expenditure, including debt charges, but as this is not a labour-intensive industry and much of the debt has been written off over the years, we have had cheap water and sewerage on a day-to-day basis. Capital expenditure has been financed at least in part by borrowing. That is part of the public sector borrowing requirement whether we like it or not, and I certainly do not.

Part of the reason why the water authorities have failed to respond to need is that throughout the 1970s pressure on the public sector borrowing requirement by the Labour Government, who had to go cap in hand to the IMF, led to sharp cuts in capital expenditure, not just for the water authorities but for the Health Service, housing and virtually everything else. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction said, in 1978 the Labour Government introduced a White Paper putting the first financial restrictions and constraints on the activities of water authorities. It is sheer humbug for Labour Members to talk about hardship, because they started it.

It has therefore been decided, as I understand it, to cut the water authorities loose from the public sector borrowing requirement. There are several ways of doing that. The Government have chosen to shift the burden of finance entirely from the Government to the consumer and to reduce the present borrowing requirement of £286 million to nil by 1986-87. That is quite neat. It is claimed that it is not inflationary. On the figures that we have heard today, a 12 per cent. increase in water charges will add just one tenth of 1 per cent. to the retail prices index and only £7 to the average domestic bill, so talk of hardship is to a large extent sheer humbug. The effect is certainly far less than that of the recent increase in mortgage interest rates.

The rate of return chosen is 1·9 per cent. by 1987-88 on current cost accounting. That is extremely modest compared with the levels set for other public utilities. The electricity supply industry is being asked to find 2·75 per cent., the gas industry 4 per cent. and British Airways 5·75 per cent. in 1983-84. It is certainly far lower than the 9 per cent. average on current cost accounting reported in the Bank of England *Quarterly Bulletin* last September for the average of all industries and sectors. The best in the consumer goods sector is the health side, which is

returning 16 per cent. in current cost accounting terms and 25 per cent. in historic cost terms; so much for the worries of my hon. Friends about the effect on this sector of limited list prescribing.

I do not know where my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) got his figures for ICI, but if he got them from the Thames water authority he might consider asking that authority to read the accounts again, as the latest available return for ICI—1983-84—was 6·2 per cent. in current cost terms, which is a great deal more than is being asked of the water authorities.

Mr. David Howell: I got them from Conservative Central Office.

Mrs. Currie: That might explain a good deal.

The only industrial sector to show a return of around 1 per cent. is the car industry. The best that one can say about that is that at least that industry is now beginning to make a profit, and thus a positive return rather than a negative one.

Mr. Freeman: I am following with great attention what my hon. Friend is saying. Can she explain how the water authorities can make sensible judgments about investment decisions without a sensible basis of charging? Without some price-sensitive method of charging, how can the industry judge whether or not to build a reservoir in a particular area?

Mrs. Currie: The water authorities, with their background knowledge of what it costs to replace their assets, are in a better position than anyone else to make such judgments. That is the root of the problem. If they do not allow for adequate depreciation in the cost of replacing their assets, they have to come cap-in-hand to the Government for the money.

I understand—I defer to the professional competence of my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman)—that we are trying to shift the burden from the Government to the consumer. There are other ways of doing that, and perhaps we should ask our hon. Friends to consider them. I suggest that it is intelligent to borrow long term to finance long-term assets. In housing, we borrow over 60 years. I am not the only hon. Member who has had the privilege of climbing on to a JCB machine and pulling down property for which we will still be paying well into the next century.

We could, and should, take the water authorities out of the PSBR all together. I suspect that we could do that by fiat, in much the same way as we decide week by week which measurement of money supply—M1, M2 or M3—we will use that week to make a judgment about the growth or decline in the money supply.

However, it would be better to do it properly. I should prefer to see those bodies returned to the private sector altogether. They could then borrow to their hearts content at whatever rate they could get. They could make a profit, and that would be financially lucrative for the Government—if the water authorities are as profitable as they say they are—because they would then pay corporation tax, which they do not now pay.

If we were to privatise the water authorities, irate consumers could become shareholders. Nobody loves the water authorities. There might even be lower charges. Much of my constituency is served by the South Staffordshire water company. That company's charges for water supply are increasing by only 2 per cent. in 1985-86. I commend the company. We might avoid the silly situation that often arises in Derbyshire, which is blessed with the sweetest water in the world, in which local users of traditional springs have to pay a tithe to the Severn-Trent water authority before they can use them. The effects of privatisation on other industries such as freight and shipbuilding have been entirely beneficial.

The Government should decide whether the water authorities are part of Government—in which case they do not need to make a profit, but they should be public and allow the public into their meetings — or they are businesses. If they are businesses, why do the Government own all the capital and set targets of any kind, whether spurious or worth while? I call on the Government to make up their mind.

I set myself a target and I have tried to fulfil it. In all honesty, I say that a Government who are committed to keeping down inflation should be cautious of any price rises and of any increases in taxation, in whatever form they masquerade. The public services require a steady, well-organised and well-funded programme of investment. We should beware of fiddling around with the accounts at the behest of the annuality fiends in the Treasury. The Government have my support tonight, but I look forward to more radical thinking in future.

6.55 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): This debate is about the Government's proposal to tax people more for what they drink and, among other things, what they flush. It raises significant constitutional issues about how we should deal with proposals for taxation. The Minister was right to say that on the first three occasions when orders under the 1973 Act came before the House they went through without debate. This is the first occasion on which there has been a challenge to the executive action of fixing the real rate of return — the Government's power to decide how much profit the water authorities should make in the coming year.

There have been protests in the past. Those protests have mounted. The most recent protests were heard, I believe, in the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee at the end of last year, when my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright) asked the civil servants who were giving evidence for the Treasury in answer to questions on the Chancellor's autumn statement what was the basis of the accounting for the water industry. It seemed to my hon. Friend and to others, including the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark), that it was inappropriate to apply the same tests as elsewhere. Amazingly, the civil servants did not know the basis of the accounting method. If the Minister does not believe me, I refer him to page 34 of the Select Committee minutes of 26 November 1984. That is a worrying start.

As newspapers have made clear, by these orders the Government are taxing through the back door. This is yet another example. They have gradually increased backdoor taxation in the cases of gas and electricity and they are now increasing the proportion of it in the case of the Post Office. When, instead of the finite or relatively finite resources of gas and electricity, or the commercial context of the Post Office, what is involved is—thank God—an infinite resource, people feel that the sticking point has been reached. Water is a resource that everyone gratefully

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

receives and uses. The same principles, therefore, do not necessarily or properly apply to water as apply to gas or electricity.

Some people do not use gas. A few people are not customers for electricity.

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman says that everybody uses water. Would he not agree that if we were considering this measure as a form of tax it would be highly undesirable, because it would hit the businesses that are heavy consumers of water and discriminate against them in comparison with businesses that are not heavy users?

Mr. Hughes: Yes. There is also a valid question about the relation between how much a customer uses and how much he should pay. However, the fundamental point of the present debate is that what the customers are being asked to pay is far more than the cost of running the service at a profit — the cost of properly managing the water authorities that process and supply the water.

There is another constitutional point. The Minister referred to it in his opening speech. The proposals involve differential levels of taxation. I accept that there may by an argument for making sure that the real rate of return in different water authority areas is similar. It could be justifiably claimed, however — no doubt the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) will do so in a moment—that the Welsh people should be asked to pay for what they receive but should not be asked to subsidise what other people across the border receive. There are arguments about the proper relationship between services received and the charges paid. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has told me that, in his area, customers of the private water company in Newcastle contribute half what they pay to the regional water authority's costs of the Kielder dam and all its works, which do not benefit them at all.

There are many discrepancies. However, if there is to be an equivalence of charges, why should it be at an ultimate rate of 5 per cent. in real rate of return as opposed to 1·5 per cent. or 2 per cent., which would itself be more than the rate of return for any water authorities at the moment?

The House normally deals carefully with taxation matters. To protect the rights of citizens, we ensure that we scrutinise carefully anything to do with finance. The injustice here is that we have only an order, debatable for a little more than one hour, concerning a form of taxation that is at its highest ever level for unjustifable reasons. Moreover, the taxation is not being imposed by the Government, who are chosen from Parliament — an elected body—but by bodies that are appointed and the meetings of which, with the excepton of Wales, are closed to the public. The consumer consultative bodies that have been set up to protect consumer interests oppose the tax and we cannot resort to the Audit Commission to get it to investigate what is going on. The only accountability that is available is through the House, and we are given invalid arguments.

The Minister has to make much of the accountancy techniques. Current cost accounting has been used in the past too, but that does not make it any more valid. In the gas industry, pipes must be identified because of dangers that might arise from them. As the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) said, the assets of the aviation industry are obvious. The assets of water authorities—in the case of Thames, 80 per cent.—are underground. Many water authorities do not have plans of their assets and they certainly do not have detailed knowledge of them. The Government are applying an unrealistic exaggeration of the value of such assets in assessing the current cost. It is no more than an estimate and it is based on an inaccurate and unverifiable premise.

The proposals are amazingly inconsistent with Government policy. The Minister said that everyone must increase their payments to reduce their borrowing. I should like to quote from a letter that the chairman of Thames water sent to hon. Members. He wrote:

"Ministers frequently argue that repayments of debt followed by a continuing paying to Treasury are only to be expected in the case of Thames because we have a relatively low level of outstanding debt—in other words a low interest burden. The impression is given that we enjoy a 'windfall' advantage. The simple reason why Thames has a low level of borrowing is because Thames and its predecessors followed prudent spending and financing policies for years. We avoided the costs of borrowing. Ministers appear to be saying that past efforts don't count. It is rather like saying that I have a low mortgage, partly paid off. My neighbour has a newer and higher mortgage. Since we are equally wealthy we should pay the same. My mortgage is quickly paid off but since I can obviously afford to pay I have to continue to pay out the money."

It is also inconsistent to argue that, although Thames water has a lower debt burden, it must accelerate its rate of repayment. Like other water authorities, Thames is a commercial enterprise and does not need to repay that amount of money.

There is another constitutional argument which shows how flawed the Government's arguments are. We still have private water companies. If, with the same level of profits, they increased their charges to their consumers by the same level — 10 per cent. — they would be acting illegally. It is wrong to have different standards and the Government should ensure that the monopolies—water authorities—do not exploit their position.

Like other water authorities, Thames water has made it clear that it needs money to invest in infrastructure. We know that 25 per cent. of the water that is gathered is lost as it flows round the pipes. It is ludicrous to require water authorities to reduce capital investment because the Government want money to be paid back. All the demands are for investment in infrastructure to increase. All hon. Members will have seen local press reports outlining water authorities' need for more money to spend on infrastructure. I have a press cutting for 30 January which says:

"Huge spending cuts in flood-protection and land-drainage by the Severn-Trent Water Authority have come under attack."

The *Lynn News and Advertiser* reported:

"Threats of delays in providing long-awaited sewerage schemes in West Norfolk have been strongly criticised . . . Anglian Water has suggested that schemes at Castle Acre . . . could be postponed".

The Grantham Journal reported:

"A major review of all new water supply, sewerage and sewage treatment projects in the region is being carried out by Anglian Water because of the financial squeeze."

Sheffield's *Morning Telegraph* reported:

"Repairs to Sheffield's Victorian sewerage system have been delayed by cash shortages."

Building reported:

"Sutton is having talks with Thames Water Authority"

to ask it to divert more money because there is not enough money for the sewage replacement works in its area.

During the recent freezing weather, people in Rotherhithe had to use standpipes in part at least because we have not the investment necessary to provide the perfect service.

The Government's policy does not work socially or economically. Consultative committees have written to hon. Members saying that, although they were set up to be consulted by the Government, the Government seemed determined to ignore their views. We also conclude that the Government's policy has no logic in economic terms. They rate cap local authorities one minute and then rate up water authorities the next. There is no incentive for management in water authorities to do the job that they have set out competently and professionally to do. The fight against inflation will suffer, the commitment of board members in water authorities will be impaired, employee motivation will suffer and eventually customers will suffer as they will have to pay more. The Government will be the only possible beneficiary. They are making an unjustified claim and I hope that the Minister realises that the logic of the Government's case is clearly flawed.

7.7 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): I was interested to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister the advice that that eminent firm of consulting engineers—Price Waterhouse—has given. Its knowledge of the condition of mains pipes throughout the United Kingdom must be second to none. That is what we are talking about—wholly spurious figures which might seem convincing to Messrs. Price Waterhouse but which are meant to represent a perceptible reality when they appear in the books of water authorities. If they are not meant to represent a perceptible reality, they are not a sensible base on which to attach a return, whatever the figure might be.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for bringing me a glass of water.

Mr. Harris: No charge.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: We need not waste time on absurd speeches such as that we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), who seems to be under the impression that Lundy is the responsibility of the South-West water authority. If she reads the Water Act 1973, even her own eyes will tell her that it is not.

Mrs. Currie: May I——

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Yes, she may go and read the Act. If my hon. Friend were familiar with the history of the South-West water authority of the past decade and a half, she would know that delays went into years, not months, for example at Meldon reservoir. Plans for Swincombe reservoir were frustrated, and it did not come into existence. If those reservoirs had functioned when they should have, the picture of drought would have been wholly different. The delay at Roadford reservoir prevented it from functioning during last year's drought. She made no reference to that, although she claimed some expertise.

Mrs. Currie *rose*——

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: I shall give way as often as my hon. Friend did, which is once, and when I come to a suitable point. To import such deplorable ignorance about the South-West water authority into such a debate is not a service to the House. I shall give way when I have finished dealing with such nonsense.

The debate is not about how one costs aeroplanes or visible things with a known maintenance cost and visible attrition. It is about what are technically termed assets, but which can be a liability because the cost of replacing them can be even higher than starting the scheme de novo, which obviously is not the case. We are dealing with a historic network that in many cases bears no relationship to the pattern of the authority which exists today, and which at hideous cost links the disparate parts of the system so that they relate the pattern of population and demand today to the resources.

Mrs. Currie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the gracious way in which he has given way. It was no part of my case to suggest to him anything other than my ignorance of his area and his considerable knowledge of it. I did not say that Lundy was part of that water authority area, but merely that the cost of providing a service to such a place would have taken the entire capital programme of the water authority at the time. Does my hon. Friend agree that the kind of capital programme that he advocates, and, indeed, which is needed in the South-West water authority, would cost a great deal of money and result in a substantial increase in charges to his constituents, whatever accounting system is used?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: We could have had three times the capital programme for the same cost if the water authority had been allowed to conduct itself as a business, which is what Ministers often exhort it to do. The previous chairman of the South-West water authority wanted to borrow money at 8·5 per cent., but was forced to go to the Public Works Loan Board and borrow at up to 22 per cent. Exhortations to behave like a business are followed by interdictions on so doing.

An authority is still not allowed to behave like a business or to borrow money as a good business man would. It is forced to adopt accounting practices which attach a wholly artificial value to what are not assets. They are not assets if they require extra reservoir capacity because they leak like sieves, and cause constant complaints about discoloured water because they are made of old flaking pipes that are scaled up, and if they are subject to variations in pressure at times of low flow from some sources, or when demand is highest when it is swollen to three times its normal size in the summer. To treat those as assets, as in the ridiculous computation by Price Waterhouse, and to expect a putative return on them is the sort of nonsense that I do not expect from a Conservative Government, and which I do not intend to support.

A dangerous heresy was nearly expressed—that was, of regarding water authorities as if they were owned by the state. They are not. The component parts of the South-West water authority were owned by the local authorities concerned, and have never been owned by central Government. There is no parallel between the financial disciplines, in terms of yielding a net yield to central Government, imposed on gas or electricity, which are owned by central Government, and those of local water authorities, which are not. The Government are endeavouring to generate employment, especially in the peripheral areas, by holding down avoidable costs in local authorities in the form of rates. It is wholly counter to that policy artificially to force up the costs of the charges imposed by water authorities. The costs are not confined

[Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop]

only to supplying water and removing foul water and sewage, but include environmental charges, which are pure taxation. The decisions that lead to environmental charges are political, not business decisions. Yet they take place in secret and with the press excluded from the deliberations leading to them. That is an undeniable fact.

We are dealing with a matter that runs counter to much of the Government's policy — which I support — to minimise costs, generate new enterprises, and reduce as far as possible the capital requirements on new entrepreneurs. That is cut away if, with the other hand, one imposes on them wholly avoidable costs.

It is not good practice to say that capital equipment with a long service life should be financed from revenue rather than borrowing. That is exactly what borrowing is for. The borrowing of which we disapprove is the borrowing from a failure to balance current accounts: it is borrowing in substitution for income on current account, not capital account. We must let the authorities behave like businesses and exercise business acumen about where to borrow. We must not force them into the public borrowing sector. There is no earthly reason why they should not have borrowed on the continent instead of from the Public Works Loan Board. That is the crux of the matter. We do not get out of nonsense of that kind—the Government have it in their power to rectify it by a stroke of legislation —by supplementing it with nonsense of this kind.

As statutory instruments cannot be amended, the best thing to do is to invite the Minister to withdraw them. That is always open to him, and it is the sensible thing to do. Other Ministers have done it in the past. The sensible thing is to treat the statutory instruments as though they were presented in draft form to the House, to collect the views of the House, and to withdraw them. The orders should not be passed into law. If the Government seek to do that, they will do so with the opposition of many hon. Members, not with their consent.

7.19 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): As hon. Members will recall from previous debates, water in Wales is a burning issue. Indeed, it is hot water that has become even hotter today. Wales is in the unenviable position of suffering from excess rainfall, which leads to floods, and of having inadequate reservoir and water networks, which leads to drought in summer. It exports water to regions such as the Severn-Trent water authority and the North-West water authority, but Welsh consumers pay twice as much rate poundage as the consumers in those areas. Wales seems to get the worst of all worlds.

Perhaps I may describe the background against which we are considering the orders. In Wales, water rates are considerably higher than those in the rest of the country, and have been twice as high as those in nearby areas. It is interesting to consider the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General for 1983-84, which shows that in the average household bill in Wales water charges account for £47·76. That compares with an average in England of £33·87, and it is interesting to note that the figure for Severn-Trent is £30·27 and for the north-west is £31·15. A 10 per cent. increase in Wales, which will also be hard hit by the orders—we are agreed that they are bad for everyone—will mean an increase in real terms of £4·76. In the north-west area, the increase will be £3·03. Therefore, the increase in Wales will be 50 per cent. higher in real terms than the increase in the north-west area, yet in Wales disposable income is lower than in many regions of England. The position is extremely bad.

The position could be improved in two ways. First, the Welsh water authority could obtain adequate payment for the water that it exports to other areas. The recent High Court case against the Welsh water authorty, to which Plaid Cymru was a party, was settled out of court, with the water authority recognising that it had the right to charge more for the water that it sends to other authorities in England. The Welsh water authority may have been a little slow in catching on to that, but the Severn-Trent authority was not. The *Western Mail* of 21 January, under the headline, "Water bills for city trebled by authority", states:

"Birmingham is trebling the price of Welsh water . . . and selling it to Liverpool. Birmingham — which has always insisted that Wales cannot make a profit out of selling water to England, has increased its bill to Liverpool from £360,000 to around £1 million."

The other way of getting a fairer deal, if we must have a near uniform rate of return on capital to which the orders refer, would be to have an even scale of charges in England and Wales. We pay the same price for a Mars bar whether we buy it in Birmingham or in Caernarfon; why do we not do that with water? It would be more equitable. But Wales gets neither a fair price for the water taken out nor equal charges. As I said, Wales gets the worst of both worlds.

The increases have been introduced against that background. For the first time, there is a statutory requirement on water authorities to make specified profits that are higher than many of the water authorities would have wished. Many hon. Members have referred to the rebellion of the Thames water authority. That rebellion is partly because the increase is a tax. It is a tax without representation, because the water authorities that impose such charges are not elected bodies. That is a bad principle.

The chairman of the Welsh water authority led us to expect a decrease in real terms in water rates this year. In a letter that he sent on 30 November to the local advisory councils in Wales, he said that, although the authority had hoped for a 2·5 per cent. decrease in real terms, the Government's policies announced in November had made that impossible. The letter stated that the proposals of the Government are to do this

"by a combination of higher target financial returns and much lower borrowing limits. As a result of this Governmental policy decision, the Authority can no longer restrain the increases in charges below the increase in the RPI. The new financial constraints are such that we will have to raise charges by considerably more than this in each of the next three years."

That is, indeed, bad news.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): Will the hon. Gentleman care to comment on the other position adopted by the Government? If this were a local authority that wished to increase its charges, it would be rate capped.

Mr. Wigley: That is the great irony. Only last night the House was debating rate-capping legislation which stops authorities increasing their charges, yet here is a specific provision to increase charges. Not surprisingly, there has been a massive reaction in Wales and elsewhere. One is reminded of the water rate rebellion in Wales three years

ago, when 20,000 people withheld their water rates. The Government are heading towards stirring up a similar reaction.

In a letter of 22 January to the Secretary of State for Wales, the consumer advisory committee of Gwynedd says:

"At a special meeting of my Committee held yesterday members expressed their great personal concern, and the concern of the consumers they represent, at the Welsh Water Authority's proposal to increase their charges by 30 per cent. over the next three years. They were further incensed when they recalled statements made last year by the Chairman of the Water Authority that it was the firm intention that annual increases be kept within the level of the retail price index. Members were given to understand that this undertaking could have been fulfilled but for the intervention of the Government in November 1984 . . . It is the stated hope of my committee that there will be less Government intervention in future in the operations of the Water Authority."

That letter is signed by Mr. Vernon Hughes.

The National Farmers Union also wrote to me, and perhaps I may quote from the original:

"Mae ein aelodau yn methu a deall sut mae yr Awdurdod yn medru cysdiro codi y pris cymaint dros ben lefel chwyddiant yn y wlad."

—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may laugh. I am used to that reaction from certain hon. Members but for the benefit of hon. Members I shall translate the letter. It states:

"Our members fail to understand how the Authority is able to consider increasing the price so much above the level of inflation in the country."

That is especially pertinent in Wales, because many farmers are milk producers, who have been clobbered from another direction because of the ineptitude of the Government.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): The hon. Gentleman will realise that we do not yet know precisely by how much the Welsh water authority will increase its charges next year, because it has yet to meet to decide that. However, there will be at least three elements in the decision. The authority must allow for inflation when it decides the increase in charges. Another factor in domestic charges relates to the transfer of costs from the non-domestic sector, and there is also the factor caused by the change in Government targets. The change in targets amounts to only about 2·75 per cent. of the proposed overall increase in charges.

Mr. Wigley: Once again, the Minister's figures do not add up. Of course, there are swings and roundabouts, and some people will have higher increases than others because of the move towards an equalising of charges within the Welsh water authority area. Everyone recognises that, but the chairman of the authority was talking about an average increase of 30 per cent. over three years, not about a maximum increase. The Minister says that there is inflation. Of course, there is, but the Welsh water authority has been especially effective in keeping down costs, and, without the Government's interference, it would have increased its charges by about half the retail price index for the coming year. That argument is disposed of.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Wigley: I have not quite finished with the Minister yet. His third argument was the effect of the Government's proposals, and I shall come to that in a moment.

Sir Anthony Meyer: One reason why the Welsh water authority has been so effective in keeping down costs is that it was reorganised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, in the face of intense opposition.

Mr. Wigley: There have been reorganisations and some have been beneficial. Some have led to problems for the consumers, but they have led to lower operating costs and we should be seeing the benefit of that in our water bills. We are not, because of Government policies.

What we are seeing is an increase in the water capital investment programme in England and Wales for the next year from £686 million to £769 million. That is an increase of £83 million in the investment that the Government recognise is needed in the water industry.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) referred to projects that need to be undertaken. We in Wales know from last summer's drought and from the floods of a few years ago of the expenditure needed, and I recognise that other areas have needs as well. There is recognition by the Government of a need for £83 million more in capital expenditure, but at the same time the Government, because of their monetarist and cash limits policies, have decreased the external financial limit from £264 million to £183 million, which is a drop of £81 million. Taking those two together, this is a difference of £164 million that has to be met; a shortfall of £164 million.

So the Government say that they are going to increase the rate of return from 1 per cent. to 1·4 per cent. That is an increase of 40 per cent. The return last year was some £400 million over England and Wales, and 40 per cent. of £400 million is £160 million. That more or less balances the books. But the Government cannot escape the criticism being made from this side of the House particularly that it is their policy of cash limits and reducing the available capital that is leading to the need for the excuse of getting a higher return on capital. It is not a matter of following a theoretical conception—or perhaps it is. I will come back to that. It would appear that there is a need to find £160 million and therefore there has to be this theoretical justification of a required return on capital.

Responding to the Minister's point that it was not the Government that caused the problem with increased charges in Wales, they most certainly made things worse. In Wales, the return last year was already 1·47 per cent. Therefore, one can expect little additional revenue to come from the return on capital of 1·45 per cent. stipulated in this order. But there is a need next year for £14 million more in terms of the capital expenditure that the Government have sanctioned for Wales, and by 1987-88 there is a need for £35 million more. If that £35 million is to be funded by increasing the profits generated by the authority and retained for capital expenditure, that needs a return of over 2·5 per cent. on the assets of the authority by 1987-88. That is the logic of what the Government have sanctioned on the one hand by the capital investment programme that they have boasted of in Committees and elsewhere and which is needed, and on the other hand by the restrictions that they announced last November in the external financial limit. Therefore, there is a need for an increase of £35 million, which is equivalent to some 30 per cent. over the three years. That has come directly from the Government's own policies, and the Minister cannot escape from it.

[Mr. Wigley]

Turning to the background of this whole issue, it is a move towards privatisation. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who opened the debate for the Opposition, said, we have to consider it in the context of the "Nationalised Industries Legislation Consultation Proposals", which were lodged in the House only five days before Christmas. This is directly relevant to what we are discussing, because it refers to the private sector companies being regulated by a common set of statutory provisions and says that

"the Government considers that it would be advantageous if a single Act set out the core framework to be applied to nationalised industries."

It goes on—and this is very important—to say that one of the six elements that it refers to in such legislation would be

"the formation of companies and privatisation."

If we look at the list of the industries that would be privatised we see, in annex A, the Welsh water authority.

In other words, what we are seeing tonight is the first step along the road towards privatisation. What we have in the document lodged five days before Christmas, when some people were in an alcoholic haze, apparently, according to comments heard earlier tonight, is a framework to get the accounts of water authorities in a format that will be transparent to those who may want to make a take-over bid, that is, these proposals are meant to make the road to privatisation easier.

There we have it. These orders are not just a pragmatic response to a shortage of cash in the water industry; they are a step towards the privatisation of the industry, not only in Wales but elsewhere, as part of an overall privatisation package which, side by side with cash limits, is giving the problems which Wales and other areas will have to pay for by a 30 per cent. increase in water charges.

7.35 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I think it might be helpful if I were to review briefly some of the principles on which these orders are based. The Government, in putting them forward, wish to achieve, among other things, three things in the water industry. First, they wish to see increased investment; secondly, they wish to reduce public borrowing; and, thirdly, they wish to encourage water authorities to achieve on publicly owned assets what the Government consider to be a reasonable rate of return. It occurs to me, particularly listening to the debate tonight, that, far from being criticised for these aims, the Government could almost be criticised for not going hard enough for them. Let me just elucidate that point.

We are all in favour of increased investment in the water industry. I have heard that cry many times from both sides of the House. What it would seem the Opposition parties are against—indeed, they seem to have struck a chord of sympathy in one or two of my hon. Friends—is not so much the investment as paying for it. I have often wondered, particularly in the years before I entered the House, why it was that it was always future generations that seemed to be being caned for the fact that past generations had put in investment and not paid for it. I am beginning to understand why, because there is this reluctance to link the two necessary facts, that investment is not going to drop into our laps from on high, and that it has to be paid for. So, when we talk tonight about increased investment, should we be surprised that there are going to be increased charges to pay for it?

One of the objectives of these orders is to reduce public borrowing. I am not surprised that the Opposition parties are against the orders, because they are not very keen on reducing public borrowing. All the Opposition parties fought the last general election on the basis of increasing public borrowing. They were soundly defeated. I hope, for the sake of the political careers of myself and my hon. Friends, that they will be so again. Nevertheless, the aim of the orders is to reduce public borrowing. That inevitably brings with it the possibility that charges will go up.

The third objective which is a basis for these orders is to produce what the Government consider a reasonable rate of return on net assets. The Government have set as a reasonable rate of return 5 per cent. on new investment, and 1·4 per cent. rising to 1·9 per cent. in 1987-88 on existing assets valued on current costs. We have heard many protests at this rate of investment tonight. I assure my hon. Friends—the Opposition parties will not be interested, because they do not believe in a rate of return on public assets—that if we are looking at privatisation of parts of the water industry, with the exception of the Thames water authority, we have a long way to go before we will produce a rate of return which the market will find attractive to enable us to privatise these public assets at the proper price. The rates of return quoted by the Government are by no means exceptional in large companies which are trying to utilise their assets. If anything, in my view, as a practising accountant, the Government have been over-generous to the water authorities in the past and are sensibly taking the view that it will take time to catch up.

Those are the principles on which these orders seem to be based. We have heard a lot about those authorities which object to the orders, but there was one authority which was referred to by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) as not having sent in any information. That is not surprising, because it is an authority which totally disproves his case. It is the authority which covers my constituency—the Wessex water authority.

I wish to comment briefly on the effect of the orders on the Wessex water authority to show that, far from being the gross attack on water authorities that they have been painted, the orders highlight the effect on an authority which for a number of years has run on a sound financial basis. It has invested sensibly over those years and has conducted all possible economies, and after these orders the Wessex authority will be able to go into the world perfectly able to offer a reasonable service to its customers.

The chairman of the Wessex water authority, Mr. Malcolm Anson, points out:

"we have a compelling need to increase the level of investment above that which has been permitted in recent years and, particularly, above the level permitted in the current year, if we are to arrest the decay of old assets, maintain, let alone improve, our levels of service, provide for growth in the region and meet our statutory duties under the Control of Pollution Act and other regulations. This has been recognised by the Government"—

in the external financial limit which has been set.

"the setting of the financial target for Wessex at 1·4 per cent. simply provides another reason for doing something which we would have needed to do in any case . . . I hope . . . you will feel that the Return on Assets Order 1985 is beneficial in its implications for your Wessex constituents and that you will feel able to support it."

I reassure the chairman that I have every intention of supporting this order.

The amazing difference between a well-run authority such as Wessex and some of the complaints that we have heard today is also revealed in a reply which the chairman of the Wessex authority has given to the CBI, whose views were quoted with approval by several hon. Members. He said:

"I do not believe that it is generally true that the setting of financial targets in the form of return on assets is unnecessarily adding to charges. It is not so in Wessex . . . It is past capital expenditure on storage, mains, telemetry and automation that has enabled us in Wessex, in the last ten years, to get through two droughts, a strike and exceptionally severe winter storms without any real inconvenience to industry or our other customers, and at the same time to reduce operating costs by 2 per cent. per annum for the past four years—a trend which is continuing. For the future, I believe that the levels of investment now proposed are what industry should be asking for and supporting."

It is clear that there is a dichotomy of views between the water authorities about the effect of these orders. Following the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), I hesitate to dare to comment on other authorities, but although some may have particular problems because of the way they have been managed in the past and the effects of financial targets, with the exception of Thames, the position by and large cannot be nearly as bad as some hon. Members have tried to make out.

It is only fair to remind the House that I speak as a practising accountant and a member of the firm of Harpern and Woolf, which has been involved in the debate on current cost accounting. I also speak as an opponent of current cost accounting, and have consistently opposed SAP 16. I was delighted when it was withdrawn. Although there is no black and white in accountancy, I believe that one or two industries are perhaps less inappropriate for current cost accounting than others. Those industries can be distinguished by the fact that, whether we use the term "fixed assets" or "fixed negative assets", their assets have extremely long lives. As a result, the depreciation charges included in their accounts which are based on those assets are totally meaningless if based on historical costs.

As an opponent of current cost accounting, I accept that CCA has at best been an imperfect substitute. However, in the case of industries such as water authorities, CCA is probably a better substitute than historical costs. I was delighted to see that, in his financial report in October, the chairman of the Thames water authority agreed.

Any chairman of a body such as a water authority has an opportunity either to use current cost accounting or to say in his report that he believes it to be inappropriate for his industry. That opportunity was not taken by the chairman of the Thames water authority, who signed the accounts without such a rider. Indeed, his auditors, Arthur Andersen—not consulting engineers, but nevertheless auditors used to looking at accounting principles—approved those accounts despite the fact that the chairman and his director of finance did not add a rider about current cost accounting.

That report states:

"the current cost convention is not a system of accounting for general inflation, but allows for price changes specific to the Authority's operations".

In other words, the chairman is agreeing with me and is saying that, although CCA is imperfect, it is appropriate to the operation of a water authority. The chairman adds:

"In the current cost accounts, all fixed assets are depreciated over their estimated useful lives".

Those lives are set out in the report.

Therefore, I was somewhat surprised to read in a letter from the Thames water authority that there has been a conversion on the road to Damascus and that the chairman now totally disagrees with the report that he signed four months ago. He now believes that the asset lives included in his authority's report are inappropriate for the purpose of fixing rates of return. I am not sure, however, to what other purpose accounts should be put in an authority of that size. Despite the chairman's absence of adverse comment four months previously, he also believes that CCA is wholly inappropriate to the operations of Thames Water and the relationship between accounts and the rate of return which is inevitably based on those accounts.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) said that CCA was an imperfect tool and that it should not be used as a method of fixing a rate of return. His point was echoed with greater force by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). However imperfect CCA may be as a means of fixing rate of return, it is the best guide we have. It is certainly far better in the case of a water authority than the historical cost convention, which on asset lives of about 200 years is wholly inappropriate. I accept that current cost accounting must be treated with caution, but nevertheless it is far better than anything else available.

Mr. Jackson: What is my hon. Friend's estimate of the effect on charges in his area of the application of a 5 per cent. rate of return on a current cost accounting assessment of the assets?

Mr. Stern: In the Wessex water authority, the charges next year are expected to rise by 11 to 12 per cent. after the application of the required rate of return to assets valued under the current cost accounting practice.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: I have the impression that the form of argument of my hon. Friend is that an aeroplane with one wing is better than an aeroplane with no wings, whereas I would say that neither was any use for flying.

Mr. Stern: My hon. Friend, with his customary humour, has slightly twisted my point. I was saying that the only way of fixing a rate of return and of measuring the public's use of the public's assets is by valuing the assets that are being used. I do not agree with my hon. Friend about aeroplanes because they have far too short a life for current cost accounting to be wholly appropriate. We are discussing assets with a life of between 100 and 200 years. In that case, current cost accounting can be appropriate. In adopting a financial target and in conducting a financial exercise we must use a financial tool, and current cost accounting is the best tool available.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the reasons that the chairman and the board of Thames water are unable to accept the Government's present policy is because, the higher the rate of return, the greater the inadequacies of the accounting mechanism that are revealed, particularly with this mechanism, although it may be better than others. However, I take the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) that if one demands—and there is demand this year—a greater rate of return, the result of working on an inadequate premise is multiplied many times in the

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

inadequacy of the criterion that the Government are now applying. We ought to allow Thames water to make that judgment, as the hon. Gentleman said, rather than suggest that the Government make it for the authority.

Mr. Stern: I would not agree in any way with the hon. Gentleman. The rate of return is merely a factor applied to a value. The closer one can arrive at the true value to the authority of an asset or group of assets, the more accurate the rate of return will be. The suggestion that we should move away from current cost accounting because it gives an inconvenient result to Thames water is wholly opposed to the principle of trying to find the most accurate possible method of measurement of the way in which public assets are being used.

I hope that I have demonstrated that the opinion of one authority has changed in the course of four months from the time that it produced and signed a public document to the time that it realised the effects of using the figures in that public document.

We are debating, I suggest, not the basic argument about accounting principles or assets' lives but rather the contrasts between different water authorities. I have quoted the case of Wessex, which is prepared to accept that present and future investment has to be paid for and that it must consider the interests of not only present but also future ratepayers. Rather than load an unacceptable burden on the future, Wessex accepts that part of that burden must be borne today. It is part of the burden only because, as the House knows, investment in the water industry is a continuous process. It is like painting the Forth bridge.

The authority in which my constituency lies is prepared to accept the financial consequences of the present situation, and other authorities in my view are crying out to court cheap publicity at the expense of present and future ratepayers. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That is my honest view, based on the contrast between the statements of the chairman of Thames water four months ago and the exactly opposite statements that he now makes. I believe that that is fair comment.

I call upon the Minister to protect my constituents, the ratepayers in the area that I represent. I ask him to ensure that the prospects of what appears to be a very well-run authority, as in the case of Wessex, will be protected by the orders.

7.54 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I shall confine my comments to the implications of the orders for the people of Wales. In doing so I pay tribute to the Welsh water authority for its openness in granting access to its meetings to the media and to the public, and because it will soon be the only water authority in the United Kingdom to retain a virology laboratory. That is significant, because the quality of water is vital for the health of the population. I hope that the Minister will consider having similar virology facilities in other water authorities, and also the benefits of public access to water authorities.

In 1985-86 the financial target of the water authority in Wales will be 1·45 per cent. of the value of net assets, while the external financing limit will be set at £20 million. Under the orders, by 1987-88 the rate of return will be raised to 1·9 per cent. and the external financing limit will be lowered to £13 million. The Government have chosen to impose upon water authorities the combination of a higher rate of return and a lower external financing limit. The Government faced a number of options, one of which was to increase the rate of return in line with the retail prices index, combined with an increase in the external financing limit.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Wales, in his winding-up speech, owes it to the people of Wales to say why he has chosen to force the Welsh water authority to increase its charges when areas of England which receive Welsh water, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) made clear, pay lower charges than the area from which the water comes. This is the situation at a time when the people of Wales, according to the latest statistics of the European Commission, live in one of the six poorest regions in the European Economic Community. It is another hidden tax on one of the poorest regions in the EEC. In my view, this is an unacceptable measure, and I hope that the Minister will ponder the words of the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) and consider withdrawing the orders.

The matter goes deeper than that. The Minister must explain why the Government have chosen not to raise the external financing limit of the Welsh water authority so that even greater effort can be made to increase investment in the Welsh water industry. To take the example of current availability of capital, the Welsh water authority will require at least 30 years in which to construct sewage outfalls to the sea which comply with Department of the Environment criteria. It is vital for the tourist industry in Wales, at a time when the Government have cut regional financial assistance by £60 million this year, that such a programme of investment is radically speeded up.

It is little wonder that the Secretary of State for the Environment, in a reply that he gave me in the first week of December last year, was not prepared to accept the recommendations in paragraph 4.68 of the tenth report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. That paragraph recommended the setting of a date by which the recommendations of the Jeger working party on sewage disposal relating to discharges of crude sewage were to be implemented in full. It is bitterly disappointing for the people of Wales that the Government are not prepared, after talks with the water authority, to set a date for the implementation of that programme. The Government are once again ducking their responsibility by giving the Welsh water authority the task of forcing the Welsh people to pay for capital investment out of current revenues, while at the same time projecting their own sterile philosophy on to the shoulders of others.

I wish to give the Government their proper due. Their proposal has one major advantage—it is consistent. The consistency is borne out of the overwhelming confidence which the Government are generating daily in the hearts and minds of the people of Wales. That confidence relies heavily on the tenet that the Government must, at all costs, continue to pursue policies which accelerate the slide of Britain down the world economic order. Britain's economic standing in the world is going down, and the people of Wales are at least confident that the Government are pursuing the correct economic policies to continue that course.

An example of this consistent economic idiocy is that water, a free public good according to the economic textbooks, is about to become very expensive for the

people of Wales. Therefore, I once again urge the Minister to consider carefully what the hon. Member for Tiverton and other Conservative and Labour Members have said, and withdraw these orders.

8.2 pm

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): At the outset, I wish to say that when the House divides, I shall vote against the Government. No hon. Member does that lightly or without careful consideration. In the discussions that I and other colleagues have had with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) he has been the most courteous, considerate and careful of colleagues in spending both his time and energy endeavouring to explain the issue and the Government's position.

My vote tonight against the Government in no way reflects my hon. Friend's inadequacy in getting the case across. The issue is quite straightforward and has little to do with accounting practices or the return on assets. It is about straightforward politics. It is about the Government's central and major objective of containing inflation and ensuring that ratepayers receive good value for services provided as cheaply and efficiently as possible. Therefore, it is with great regret that I shall cast my vote against the Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said that the Government's objective is the containing of inflation, and I agree with that. Throughout my time in the House since 1979, I have voted consistently with the Government on their central economic policies on reducing inflation. I see that that is absolutely essential and in the best interests of the people of the United Kingdom. The Government's objective of seeking to secure wage increases of around 3 per cent., particularly in the public service, is also the right objective.

However, if the Government have the right objectives, how can we say that the water authorities should increase their charges by about 10 per cent.? How can we then say to the work force of Great Britain and to British commerce that their charges should be held? This is why the Government are so wrong in what they are proposing.

There are other aspects to the matter. Last night, the House had to decide about rate limitation. Throughout my time here, I have been critical of the minority of local authorities who have wilfully disregarded the interests of the poor, commerce, industry and the institutional ratepayers such as the Health Service, and have put up rates faster and higher, to the great damage to the community as a whole. The House, in its wisdom, has agreed rate limitations. If we support that principle, it is inconsistent then to vote to increase water charges. That is impossible, and as a matter of conscience, apart from any duty to my constituents in Westminster, North, I simply could not follow that contradiction. I think that I speak for many hon. Friends who will not be supporting the Government tonight, but who may not be as fortunate as I have been, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in catching your eye.

Alas, the Government are almost friendless on this issue. In the debate, one or two speeches have been in support of them, but even one of those had some limit in its support. The Government's friendlessness arises from not only the lack of support within the House and on the Conservative Benches, but from those voices outside the House whose opinion is so significant and who generally support the Government's policy and objectives. The CBI, the chambers of commerce and industry and the consultative councils for the water authorities are all against the Government. We know the opinion of the chairman of Thames water, and my comments about water authorities naturally relate to that authority as my constituency is in the Thames water authority area.

The Government's proposals remove from the management of Thames water, and perhaps the other authorities, the one plank that management has to encourage efficiency within its business. If there is to be no tangible gain of lower charges to the consumer of the water services, why should management and the employees of the water authorities work to achieve a higher standard of efficiency? The Government's proposals would seriously damage the ability of management in the water industry to manage.

Alas, the only comment that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne made in his interesting speech with which I could find much favour was his suggestion that at some point denationalisation might be a possibility. I applaud that suggestion. Surely the answer is to remove the water industry with its extremely interesting, developing businesses with many opportunities both at home and overseas from the quagmire of the Treasury's public sector borrowing requirement and from all the other areas that constantly drag us into the whirlpool of dissent and confusion. I very much hope that my hon. Friend will be persuaded to heed the message that we cannot go on increasing charges without looking at fundamental principles.

I do not intend to discuss the return on assets. I am not an accountant. I cannot judge between the claims and statements of my hon. Friend and his excellent civil servants and the claims and statements of the chairman of the Thames water authority and his excellent employees. I do not know who is getting the best return on assets. I do not believe that to be a particularly relevant argument. The case is quite simple. We are saying to the public that we should keep inflation down. We are also saying that we should keep rates down. The public want that to be achieved. Therefore, the public cannot understand, nor will it understand, why the rates should go up.

Moreover, commerce and industry, which are seeking to hold their prices and make themselves competitive overseas, cannot understand this policy. The knock-on effects of putting up water charges to commerce and industry involve hundreds of millions of pounds. We should remember who are the big ratepayers. They are the London electricity board, the gas boards and the retail food industries. All of them pass on these charges to the consumer. One cannot even protect those who are on supplementary benefit. The poor always pay, even if it is only via the back pocket. Therefore, I join other hon. Members in suggesting to my hon. Friend that even at this late hour he should consider whether or not the Government ought to proceed with these orders. It will not do if significant groups of people are constantly ignored by the Government. The Government have many strengths. Their one weakness is that they do not listen well enough and hard enough to many of their own supporters and, perhaps more importantly, to the people of this country.

8.12 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I wish to pay one compliment to the Minister. I have found a cliché for him. One of his ministerial colleagues said

[Mr. Gerald Bermingham]

recently that the water authorities would not be privatised. It appears that because of his open statement this afternoon the Minister has become a courteous assassin of that ministerial declaration by his colleague. The Minister will recognise that some months ago I suspected that privatisation was lurking in the background or in the wings. Nevertheless, that declaration was not made last Friday; it was made this afternoon.

The Government are prepared to sell almost anything. I have been racking my brains to discover what else they could find to sell. If the Government get rid of the water industry and of all the other nationalised industries, the best thing that we could then do would be to turn Great Britain into a limited company, stick it on to the Tokyo and New York stock exchanges and sell it off. The Government would then have completed the job. Everything would have gone.

It is nonsense to talk about the water industry in terms of its being a publicly owned asset that is up for sale to a certain group of city bankers or speculators on foreign stock exchanges. It just is not so. How are the Government going to do it? Are the water authority areas to be rearranged? They are quite arbitrary, in any event. We have heard that Wales sells its water to Birmingham, which in turn sells its water to the north-west. It is quite ludicrous. There ought in this land of ours to be some assets which belong to us all—air, water and, with a bit of luck, light and heat, but even those might be up for sale soon, so I must be careful about what I say.

We ought to consider the water industry in a realistic way. What are the Government seeking to do? By means of these orders they are seeking to reduce borrowing, for if they reduce borrowing there will be less pressure on the public sector borrowing requirement. One or two hon. Members who are accountants have spoken in this debate. Having heard what those hon. Members had to say, I am jolly glad that I am a lawyer and not an accountant. If a sewer has been lying under a road for 50 or 70 years, how can one put a notional figure on it and expect a financial return at the end of the year? To try to do so would be the height of absurdity.

Based upon SAP16—what a pity it is that we have to use initials instead of words; would it not be better to say standard accounting practice No. 16?—the Government are valuing the Thames water authority at about £4,425 million worth of assets. The Government are looking for a 1 per cent. return and therefore wish to raise an extra amount of money. Consequently, the rates are to go up this year by 12·4 per cent. In the north-west the rates are to go up by 12 per cent. Over the next three years the Thames water authority rate will go up by 29 per cent., while that in the north-west will go up by about 40 per cent. For what purpose? Who will pay? The ratepayers will pay.

We cannot get away from the fact that we are all taxed either as ratepayers or as householders. To use a rating term, the levy is based upon a notional rental value. Upon that basis a sum of money is levied upon one's property. Regardless of whether one uses a bucket or a tubful of water a day that property attracts the same levy. It does not matter whether one's income is £50 or £5,000 a week. On that property, the same amount of money will be levied.

It is a very unfair form of taxation. Rating always has been unfair. We are to allow the nine English authorities and the one Welsh authority to impose a levy at that kind of rate. We, the mere ratepayers, have no say. Those authorities are not accountable to us. They are run by people who have been appointed by Ministers. In the old days they were at least partly accountable to us. Before 1983 there was local authority input into the running of the water authorities. That is no longer so.

I would remind our courteous Minister that the Boston tea party, which was about taxation without representation, did not do King George very much good. I suggest that the Minister ought to take a leaf out of our history books and remember what might happen if he continues down this particular road. With great respect to him, by pursuing this policy he is doing neither us nor himself much good. The people who will have to pay are the ratepayers. The ratepayers include both the rich and the poor. The poor have no way of recouping these charges. We know that under the rules of the Department of Health and Social Security water authority payments have to be paid by these people. They have to reach into their own pockets.

If a notional profit is made, the Government will increase the amount of money in their coffers at the end of three years. That is the object of the exercise. The Minister is aware that at Question Time yesterday I asked him this very question. *Hansard* will show his reply. He said that he did not consider it to be a tax, but I think that everyone else recognises it to be one.

At the end of the day the public sector borrowing requirement will fall slightly and it will be said that more money is available for tax cuts. The poor, who will pay increased water charges with no relief, do not benefit from tax cuts, because they do not pay tax. Once again, the poor will finance the tax cuts of the not so poor. The poor will pay, and so will industry and commerce. The unit costs of products will increase and Britain will become slightly less competitive in world markets. We shall all become the losers. The Government seem hooked on the policy that even the air that we breathe must make a profit for someone. That policy does not produce a fair society. It does not produce the society which any of us wants.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House accept that there are certain services that are fundamental to our way of life and are not for sale or profit. They believe that they should be for the use of everyone, at the most economic rate.

8.22 pm

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I hope that the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) will forgive me if I do not respond to his speech. Instead, I shall take up some of the remarks which were made in the two speeches from the Government Benches which were in favour of the orders.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) seems to defend the Government's case on the basis of some esoteric games that she played at Oxford university. I played games there in a rather more straightforward and simple manner and perhaps that is why I disagree with my hon. Friend in this instance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) confirmed my fear that accountants are second only to lawyers in being able to make a mystery of any issue and to use language that the rest of us, alas, cannot often understand. If my hon. Friend were still in the Chamber, I would put it to him that if he is in favour of

privatisation he would be in favour of water authorities borrowing their money on the open market and arranging their finances accordingly. If we are trying to move industries from one sector to the other, why should we make one set of rules for the public sector and another and different set for the private sector? We do our credibility no good when we do that.

I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Minister because it is always worth doing so. I welcomed what he had to say about privatisation. We expected only a skilful rendering from my hon. Friend, but he reminded me of an experienced lawyer who chose to defend his client in a case in which he was not really sure of the merits. The lawyer felt that he had to put up a good show because of the high fees that his undoubted abilities entitled him to receive. I was not sure that the Minister was as convinced of the Government's case as he wished us to believe.

It is about time that other areas were discussed apart from those covered by the Thames water authority, the Wessex water authority and the Welsh water authority. My comments will be directed to the area covered by the Anglian water authority. I have been requested specifically by Wellingborough borough council to make a protest about the charges that will be imposed upon those living in the area. I received a deluge of pieces of paper from the Anglian water authority containing many different comments.

The chairman of the Anglian water authority stated:

"No one likes to see this level of increase but it is inevitable if we are to maintain investment to safeguard the standards of existing services and at the same time cope with the tremendous demands which are imposed on us by regional growth—the fastest in the country."

He continued:

"The Government has also decided that this should be paid for by increased charges rather than more borrowing. These decisions account for about one half of our charges increase and inflation on our costs for the remainder."

The income of the Anglian water authority is about £270 million but its operating costs are only about £115 million. It is having to find £95 million to cover depreciation and £55 million to cover the rate of return on assets fixed by the Government. Figures such as these illustrate why so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends are unhappy about the Government's proposals.

I was worried when I read the statement made by the Anglian water authority about the future. It states:

"The Government intends to continue to reduce the amount of money that water authorities like Anglia can borrow until they eventually become self-sufficient with customers paying for all capital investment directly through charges."

I do not think that there are many families or firms that could adhere to that sort of financial regime, however much they wished to do so. I suggest that my hon. Friend the Minister is asking the impossible and the unnecessary of water authorities. It is no wonder that the National Farmers Union at local and national levels is extremely worried about the proposed increased charges. The local county secretary of the area that I represent wrote to me as follows:

"The Order, if confirmed, will raise charges to some two to three times the current rate of inflation for the next three years, and perhaps longer, and will bear harshly upon consumers. Livestock producers and horticulturalists will be particularly oppressed by the measures".

That includes the especially hard-hit dairy industry, which is already reeling from the effects of the Common Market. Local authorities, farmers' organisations and the CBI are worried about the order, and so it is not surprising that constituency Members are concerned.

I thought that one of the benefits of increased charges would be the implementation of many much-needed capital projects in the east of England. Yet in the third piece of paper that the Anglian water authority sent me I read the following:

"A major financial crisis is threatening essential work on sea and river flood defence schemes to protect people and property in the Anglian region according to local land drainage committees. Government cutbacks in the amount of money which is made available for such projects, coupled with strict financial controls on the amount of money which Anglian Water can borrow to help finance capital schemes, means that all five land drainage committees face the prospect of vital schemes being delayed".

It seems that the increased charges will not result in the implementation of the capital projects that are needed. Anglia is the fastest growing part of the country and it has many new installations. It is odd that it is being asked to accept a system of depreciation that is based on assets being many years old. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West suggested that an accounting system must be devised that reflects the difficulty of estimating the length of life of certain assets because it is so long. It is peculiar that the system that has been adopted shortens the period of depreciation rather than lengthening it. I hope that that will be explained when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales replies.

Against this background it is not so surprising that many of us have become somewhat bemused by the Government's actions. It seems that the Government are saying that water authorities can no longer run their own affairs commercially, as we said at one time that we wanted them to do.

The backlog of capital projects is still too big. Charges are to go up at least by two-and-a-half times the rate of inflation. The enforced rate of return means an extra taxation on water.

I thought, perhaps naively, that the Government believed that we should ensure that nationalised industries are run and managed commercially and responsible for their own decisions. I believed that our first aim was to fight inflation. I also thought that we had a special concern for the lower paid who are in danger of being caught in the poverty trap.

Before Christmas I tabled a question to the Department of Health and Social Security to discover how many people were in receipt of rate rebate and therefore, by definition, not in receipt of supplementary benefit and without help with their water rates.

The Minister said today that 3 million people are assisted by supplementary benefit. The answer that I received was that 3,600,000 people receive rate benefit. That means that 5 million people, or one-tenth of our population, will have to meet the increase in water charges in full without any help.

Mr. Gow: I said that 3 millon households were involved.

Mr. Fry: The point is that more people will not be helped than will be helped.

I also asked the Department how much it would cost to operate a water rate rebate scheme. I regret that after many weeks I still await that information.

[Mr. Fry]

So despite my hon. Friend's eloquent explanation the position is unsatisfactory and not understood. It is not understood by local councils, by the farming community or by industry and commerce. Their attitude and mine is based not on an abstruse argument about accounting but on common sense. If one increases the price of anything above the inflation rate that increase causes inflation. The Government are shooting themselves in the foot. They are attacking their own policies.

Those of us who have supported the Government over local government reform are entitled tonight to say "If you want that continued support at least be consistent". Despite the great admiration that I have for my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction, I cannot, on behalf of my constituents, support the orders. Indeed, it is my duty to oppose them. I trust that my hon. Friends will join me in the Opposition Lobby tonight.

8.34 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I have enjoyed many of the speeches from both sides of the House tonight. I particularly enjoyed that of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham). I agree with his exposition of the lunacy of the Government's privatisation and profit motivation, particularly as applied to water services, which are so important to the healthy lives of our people.

The Government are in hot water, not least with their own Back Benchers. The orders will result in an increase in water rates for everyone. If all Government Members realised that, they too would rebel against the Government.

The Treasury has brought the matter to the boil. The Thames water authority is primarily affected by the orders. I shall outline the objectives and achievements of that authority since it was created in October 1983.

I recently received a letter from the chairman of Thames water, Mr. Roy Watts, to whom I paid tribute last week. He said:

"Thames' objective including 'running the Authority as a major well-run business'. We were also exhorted to ensure that charges to customers were below inflation. My Board and executive have done that. We have substantially reduced costs, including a reduction of one-quarter in the number of managers and an equal amount of office property. We have restructured the Authority, adding the disciplines of profit loss and of the marketplace

And much more. So much, in fact, that we have produced a programme for 1985 which repays £18 million of due debt, introduces an enlarged capital programme which will accelerate projects and introduce cost-saving techniques, but which also holds down price rises to customers to 3 per cent., some two points below inflation. Equally important we have tested our programme against the best practices in the private sector. And our plans ensure continuing improvement in future years."

The Government are turning those policies on their head. They are sabotaging those beneficial policies.

The underhand tax rise in the Chancellor's autumn statement is to blame. The Minister is defending that underhand tax rise. He is imposing the Treasury's policy upon the water authorities by forcing the orders through. He could be described as the water industry's "Gowleiter".

The Minister said that there was a difference between water charges and water rates. The customers do not recognise such a difference because there is no practical difference. The Minister claimed that this was not a tax. If the Government compel water authorities to generate funds beyond those that are necessary and require them to pay them to the Treasury, that is a tax. It is like VAT on take-away fish and chips.

The Minister stressed current cost accounting. Roy Watts in his letter said:

"The Thames Board — a Board full of professional and business experience—is clear that such a basis for targeting is wrong in principle, wrong in application, generates excessive cash surpluses, and is inflationary."

The CBI — not an organisation which I would normally cite — believes that there are serious doubts about applying CCA to the water industry

"where long-life assets are concerned, and where the useful life is a subjective judgement; where the assets comprise basic infrastructure, and could not be sold; where the assets are never likely to be replaced but will be maintained at current cost, such as reservoirs . . . any comparison between water authority rates of return and those in the private sector is bound to be misleading . . . there is every reason to believe that the water authorities are already highly profitable enterprises compared with the private sector if a common method of appraisal is used."

The fallacy of using current cost accounting was exposed by Roy Watts in an interview that he gave to *The Sunday Times*, published on 20 January, in which he said:

"We believe that the current cost convention and other arguments used by the Government are a smokescreen for the real intention, which is to raise money for non-water purposes from my water customers."

In other words, it is a tax.

Mr. Freeman: Will the hon. Gentleman explain, for the benefit of hon. Members on this side of the House, what particular technical aspects of current cost accounting concern him most?

Mr. Cohen: I should have thought that the CBI's objections to it would have the hon. Gentleman's support. I would be happy to discuss the details of CCA with him, but hon. Members may think that a 15-minute speech is not the occasion for that.

The Minister said that the argument was about four categories of effort. One category to which he did not refer was that of efficiency, which surprised me coming from a Minister whose Government are always extolling the virtues of efficiency. The record of the Thames water authoriy is excellent — I doubt whether even Conservative Members would deny that—yet it is being penalised for its efficiency. The Government pay lip-service to the need for efficiency and value for money, but when the crunch comes they penalise those who give value.

The Thames water authority's plans show that the authority is acting in a prudent manner and would in 1985 repay £18 million of its debts. It would be debt-free by 1989 if it had its way. It is clear, however, that the Government want unjustified increases even on that rate of efficiency. Any surpluses that water authorities receive from high charges will go not to the consumer but straight into the Treasury. That is a tax all right.

There is opposition right across the political spectrum to what the Government are doing. Not just the Thames water authority but the water industry generally opposes the order. From the business point of view, the CBI said:

"The increases proposed for next year will add £100 million to business and industry's costs. They will hit certain industries such as food, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, brewing and paper, particularly hard. . .Such increases could threaten still more jobs at a time when industry is compelled to match the efforts of its international competitors."

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): My hon. Friend is dealing with an important aspect which, to be fair to Conservative Members, has also been raised by them. The North-West water authority has made it clear that, because it will not be permitted to use capital resources, the increases proposed will not only affect jobs in the area but will create hardship for many people, in particular the low-paid. That is a critical issue in this debate.

Mr. Cohen: I agree with my hon. Friend that the possible loss of jobs and the hardship that will be created are issues of paramount importance. I was citing the CBI's view of this legislation because that body is supposed to be a friend of the Government and to support their policies and strategies.

Many people will be adversely affected by the order, and I have received many letters to that effect from constituents, particularly those living on small incomes. The Minister has refused to allow rebates to people in that situation. There will be unnecessarily high water rates bills. In the Thames water authority area, for example, there will be an increase of 12 per cent. rather than of only 3 per cent. in 1985-86.

There will be great anger in March and April of this year when bills arrive through people's letter boxes. It should be made clear to the public on those bills that the Government's surcharge is to blame. The Government seem determined to press ahead with their unpopular strategy, come hell or high water. The House should ensure that it sinks without trace.

8.46 pm

Mr. Martin Stevens (Fulham): I apologise to the House for not having attended the earlier part of the debate. I have been upstairs in a Standing Committee.

Had I been in the Minister's shoes, I would have made exactly the same decision in this matter as he made. I chide him, however, by adding that I would have handled the announcement and implementation of the decision differently, for I feel that his handling of it contributed to the response of the Thames water authority.

In speaking about that authority, I am sorry to be on the opposite side to my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler). The Thames water authority claims that it has been running the organisation as a private company, and it is generally agreed that its management has been extremely efficient. I have known Roy Watts for many years, since in my capacity as chairman of Annual Reports Limited I produced British Airways' annual report, and I know him to be a man of exceptional ability. However, it is fair to probe a little his claim that the accounts of the Thames water authority match those of a private company.

I hope that the Minister will ask him bluntly whether, in his opinion, the rate of depreciation proposed in the authority's figures is adequate. I do not think that it is. One can argue that because of the higher quality of the infrastructure, and because Thames has been experimenting with methods of rebuilding sewers which do not require the digging of holes, there may be detailed questions to ask about the way in which the current cost accounting system has been applied. Even if we take that into account, Roy Watts would be bound to confess that his level of depreciation is inadequate.

The second point that I should like to consider in Thames water's accounts is its borrowing. I never like to contradict the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). He said that under present plans Thames water would have repaid its debt by 1989. The true timetable under its present plan is 15 years. I do not believe that many accountants employed by a private company would welcome such a long loan. If my hon. Friend were to press Roy Watts on that point he would accept that there is merit in the proposition, in a nation that is still overborrowed despite all our efforts, that that rate of borrowing should be paid off more rapidly than the authority was planning.

Thames water is annoyed by the fact that it will have to go on paying £60 million a year even after the debt has been paid in three years' time. It does not pay corporation tax. Water is zero-rated. I hope that my hon. Friend will consider the matter in the coming month to see whether it will be possible to arrive at a slightly more gentle arrangement. To be asked to continue repaying debts after they have been settled might have the same result—I believe that it is called negative debt repayment or some such term.

Mr. Gow: Negative EFL.

Mr. Stevens: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That is rather like negative recruitment, as it used to be called when I was a business man. It always gives rise to understandable resentment.

There is the issue of the corporation's asset value.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Member agree that what is unique about Thames water is that none of its capital expenditure is being financed from borrowing, unlike other water authorities? It will therefore inevitably be reducing its borrowing requirement and borrowed money. It already has less than any other water authority in England.

Mr. Stevens: The hon. Gentleman is right. Every Conservative Member has commended Thames water for the admirable way that it has carried out its business. I do not belittle that achievement. It is the only one of 10 regional water authorities in England and Wales conducting its business without borrowing.

When we talk about asset value, we return to our old friend—current cost accounting. It is right that my hon. Friend the Minister should remind Roy Watts that it was his former finance director who originally proposed that that system of accounting should be used by the 10 regional water authorities. Price Waterhouse, which is not wholly unknown, although not as distinguished as the partnership to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) belongs, but which is nevertheless a highly regarded firm of accountants, agreed that that system was the best in the circumstances. At this moment, a working party is reviewing the method of accounting used throughout the 10 water authorities. The present finance director of Thames water is the chairman of that review body.

If Thames water is denationalised, which is what I believe its directors desire, how much will it be worth? The value of such an undertaking will depend upon its profitability. We may argue that my hon. Friend the Minister's profitability requirement is insufficient to produce a £4 billion asset value which the current cost accounting system has generated, but if I were doing his job I should want to ensure that if that asset were sold it would attract as much money as possible. I am sure that that point has been made already today.

[Mr. Stevens]

If I were to tell my constituents that we are protecting them against a water price increase of something under 2p a day but that the price that they will have to pay for that will be the loss of £1 billion or more, I think that they would agree that the national interest is best protected by the profit requirements that my hon. Friend has imposed.

Mr. Loyden: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that some industries are intensive water users. The car industry is one example, and there are many others. Has he taken into account the fact that if these increases are imposed they will have consequences for jobs and the economy. A broader view must be taken, we must get away from current cost accounting. Like it or not, water is something that the state must provide for domestic and industrial consumers.

Mr. Stevens: I think that the figure for trade and industry is £100 million. That is 100th part of 1 per cent. on inflation.

We must accept, as my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North so cogently put it, that the proposals are an extremely difficult package to sell. We cannot enter the House, as all Conservative Members did after the general election, on the ticket that we shall cut public spending and borrowing and ensure that our national assets pay their way, and then start moaning when we have the difficult job of implementing that proposition. My hon. Friend the Minister is carrying out his job manfully. I shall be happy to be a humble member of his following.

8.57 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Stevens). Apart from his final remarks, his contribution showed that those who have taken part in the debate, at least on the Conservative side, are divided into two categories — those who have taken the academic accounting or "Oxford" approach, and those of us who like to think that our feet are firmly on the ground and who see the matter in simpler terms and certainly in political terms.

Having sat through the whole debate, I still do not really know what current cost accounting is. If I tried to cover up my ignorance, my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) would no doubt shoot me down by asking questions as effectively as he did to the Opposition. Moreover, I do not begin to understand what negative external financing limits are. I am absolutely sure, however, that my constituents share my ignorance of those technicalities and will see the matter as I see it.

What will hit my constituents in a couple of weeks' time will be the rate demand from the South-West water authority telling them that if they are domestic ratepayers they face an increase of roughly 12 per cent.—way over double the rate of inflation. When they ask me to explain the reasons for that, I might offer to send them a copy of the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham and hope that it will persuade them, but I know that they will not be persuaded any more than I am. I regret to say that I was also not persuaded by my hon. Friend the Minister, despite all his charm and courtesy and an excellent glass of muscadet last night—*[Interruption.]* I apologise if I have breached some awful convention which Back Benchers are expected to observe. However that may be, I remain unconvinced by my hon. Friend's argument.

I take the example that I mentioned to my hon. Friend last night — the little old lady living on the Lizard peninsula in my constituency. The South-West water authority tells me that a person with an average house, if such a house exists, will be paying £104·59 per year in the coming financial year — a much higher figure, incidentally, than the national average of £80 given by my hon. Friend the Minister—so if my little old lady on the Lizard lives in an average house she will face an increase of £11·11. To Members of Parliament, particularly Opposition Members, that may not seem a great deal of money, but to my little old lady, probably living alone on a pension, it is a lot of money and she cannot obtain any rebate.

My next comment would be addressed to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) if she were present. On the basis of a holiday in the south-west—we are, of course, delighted to have her as one of the emmets — she launched into an attack on the South-West water authority. If the South-West water authority needs to be attacked, Members from Devon and Cornwall have no hesitation in doing so. We do not require the assistance of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South, especially when her comments are based on ignorance of the situation.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): The hon. Gentleman is making a very spirited riposte to his hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie). Has he observed the usual parliamentary courtesy of advising her of his intention to do so?

Mr. Harris: Yes, of course. My charming hon. Friend came and sat down just across the Gangway and said that she hoped she had not offended me. I assured her that she had not offended me, but told her that I might make a passing reference to her speech in my own contribution. The hon. Gentleman may rest assured about that.

My hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South both referred to increased investment. I would go along with that package if I could put my hand on my heart and tell my constituents that the awful Victorian sewerage system in St. Ives town, which has polluted beaches and damaged tourism, and which attracted international publicity two years ago, would be renewed as a result of the Government's proposals, but I cannot do that—I only wish that I could.

I have made inquiries of the South-West water authority and I understand that there is to be no great advancement of the investment programme of the authority for sewerage and water supply schemes. Much of the extra money will be spent on meeting the proper demands of central Government in connection with implementing the control of pollution legislation. There may be a spin-off for St. Ives and for the tourist industry, but the increase must be seen against a background of drought last year and of antiquated sewerage systems. People in the south-west ask, "When is something going to happen?" I do not think that the increase will result in much acceleration in normal capital programmes.

I have spoken for long enough. With the greatest reluctance, I have to say that I shall not be with my hon. Friend the Minister in the Division Lobby tonight.

9.6 pm

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): It is a pleasure for me to follow my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr.

Harris). I take a different view. I shall support the Government in the Lobby tonight. I should like, first of all, briefly to explain why.

Once we had accepted the medium-term financial strategy and the autumn statement, it was crystal clear some three months ago that water rates would have to rise in the coming financial year. One cannot wish the end and then not will the means.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives conjured up the proverbial old lady who asks each hon. Member, "Why are my water rates going up?" In the Anglian region the rise is to be 12·5 per cent. One must be honest and explain in simple language that the Government are determined to reduce the aggregate external financing limit of the nationalised industries. One must explain that in simple language, and explain the need for increased capital expenditure. The reasons have been made clear. It then becomes clear that charges must inevitably rise—that the self-financing ratio of water authorities must rise. We must be honest in explaining the background to our constituents, and we must be honest with ourselves in deciding whether the water rate increases were inevitable. I believe that they were, and I shall support the Government.

I have two important questions to ask my hon. Friend the Minister. First, how can water authorities judge investment programmes in future? My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction will remember admitting several months ago that perhaps, in the case of the Kielder project, there was over-provision. He was not the Minister responsible. There are examples of capital investment projects in the water industry that in my humble judgment were not properly thought through, and cannot be adequately justified today.

I look forward to reading the Watts committee report on metering, which is due at the end of March. I suggest that the capital expenditure figures that my hon. Friend the Minister gave are questionable. I do not believe that any industry can justify such a significant capital investment programme. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives said that the only justification for capital investment was need. That is not a satisfactory answer. The correct way in which to measure capital investment in the water industry is to examine the price elasticity of demand, as is done in the electricity and gas industries, and any other utility. That can be measured only if the consumer is allowed to make the decision on the basis of price. The correct way in which to measure capital investment is to use a universal metering scheme.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will argue with the Treasury, once again, that the rules which govern the involvement of private sector capital in public sector projects should be revised. The water industry has capital investment of £200 million to £300 million. In some water authorities, a higher level of capital expenditure is justified, but it is not possible for them to carry out their capital investment programme because they are constrained by Treasury limits. If private sector capital could be introduced in the construction of, for example, a pumping station or a reservoir, we might not be faced with these substantial water rate increases.

My hon. Friend should ask the Treasury to think again about the imposition of these rules. One way out of the impasse might be to ask the Treasury to take professional advice on how to take a view about the extent of contingent liability that will fall on the taxpayer if the public sector projects in which private sector capital is introduced fail or do not live up to the original promises and predictions. The Treasury says that it represents the taxpayer, who will have to pick up the bill, thus making it difficult for private sector capital to come in on such projects.

I hope that what I have said has been constructive. I encourage my hon. Friends who doubt their ability to persuade their constituents about the applicability of or the justification for the increases to think back to the autumn statement debate and their commitment to the medium-term financial strategy.

9.12 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminister): It gives me little pleasure to speak today for two reasons. First, I have an extremely painful toothache and, secondly, I must oppose my hon. Friend the Minister's proposals.

I shall be brief because most of the issues that I intended to cover have already been dealt with. I should like to associate myself wholly with what my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) said. My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North dealt with the details of why the Government's proposal is not satisfactory and the political reasons why we cannot accept it.

I cannot see that current cost accounting is the right way in which to approach the valuation of capital in an industry such as the water authorities. Their assets consist largely of sewerage pipes, water pipes and tunnels, some of which have been there for as long as 180 years. The Thames water authority covers most of my constituency, and it says that the valuation put on its pipes is £4·5 billion. It is not reasonable to assess the return that the authority is expected to make on its annual expenditure by referring to asset values which have been plucked by that weird accounting process. I am no expert, and do not propose to go into the details of it for fear of tripping over myself. There is no reason for putting a figure of £4,500 million on the assets of Thames water authority.

A more realistic way to assess whether the authority is operating sensibly and profitably is to examine the cash cost of the operation and the returns that it is receiving over VAT, and to see whether it is making an adequate trading profit on its turnover. The authority's cash operating expenditure for 1985 will be £292 million. The Government's current cost accounting process demands that it should also cover a depreciation figure of £145 million and an additional profit of £68 million. That means that the return that it must generate is more than two thirds as much again as the operating costs which it incurs.

I am not a business expert, but I run a small farm. To expect that sort of return on that sort of annual turnover seems to be a wholly unrealistic way of assessing a proper return from the industry. It is grossly unfair of the Government to attack the water authorities, which, as my hon. Friend the Minister acknowledged, have done a tremendous amount of work and achieved tremendous success in pulling the industry round and making it more efficient and effective during the past few years. To say that the industry is not returning an adequate figure because it is only 1 per cent. of the £4,500 million figure on the current cost accounting is unfair. The asset value and turnover are two reasons why I find it impossible to support my hon. Friend the Minister, and why I must vote against the proposals.

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

The way in which the accelerated repayment of loans is being demanded from water authorities is serious. Thames water authority was to repay its Government debt over 10 years. That has now been reduced to three years. Its annual repayment this year was to be £20 million, but under the Government order it will have to pay £60 million. My hon. Friend denied that that constitutes taxation, and said that he was clawing back money that the Government had lent. I do not accept that, but even if it were so it is an unreasonable banking practice for a bank suddenly to tell a continuing industry, "I am sorry but the plan that we previously agreed to repay the debt over a substantial number of years will have to be scrapped, and we demand the full repayment down to zero borrowing within three years". That is what the Government are doing in their role as lender in this operation. That is an unreasonable way to approach the business.

That sums up the two points that I wished to make in addition to what has been said. It is politically impossible for the Government to rate cap local authorities, to fight inflation, and to try to keep costs down as a primary objective in our strategy — which all Conservative Members fully endorse—and then to increase by 10 per cent. a basic cost that will hit at the poorest section of our community and cause great anxiety and trouble to those who can only just afford to find such a payment.

9.18 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I join Conservative Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction on the patience and courtesy that he has shown before and during this debate. I wish that the substance of his argument was as impeccable as the form of his presentation this afternoon. I am one of those hon. Members who cannot find sufficient justification in what the Government have said for voting in favour of the orders. Having heard the lecture that my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) recommends that we give to our proverbial old ladies, I believe that they will not be satisfied by what he said either.

I am worried not only about the impact of what the Government propose to do this year, but about the danger in future years. I regret very much the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister could not repudiate the suggestion that the principle of a 5 per cent. rate of return will be applied to the water authorities on all their assets in the future.

I do not wish to repeat arguments that have been made by others. I welcome the Minister's statement, for which he has not been given sufficient credit so far in the debate, that the privatisation of water authorities is under active review. The Conservative party believes that, in general, private enterprise manages better than the public sector. We belieye this, not because we think that managers in the public sector are less competent, but because we have concluded from hard experience that the public sector is so constituted, in terms of parliamentary accountability and Treasury financial discipline, as to be a peculiarly difficult environment for commercial enterprise. The case that we are discussing today demonstrates that point fully.

That being so, the House should draw two main conclusions from this debate about water rates. First, there will inevitably continue to be many economic activities in the public sector which cannot be privatised for various reasons, or at any rate cannot be privatised immediately. Therefore, we must not let up on the effort to make the public sector a more satisfactory environment for commercial enterprise. We must not neglect our continuing responsibility to those who run the nationalised industries, to those who consume their products, and to the workers in those industries. In that context, the proposals that we are considering are unsatisfactory.

The second conclusion that I draw from the debate is that the Government's review of the privatisation of water authorities which the Minister announced today should come to an early and positive conclusion. I need not remind the House that the Chancellor of the Exchequer says that he needs £2 billion-worth of asset sales each year. Although the Thames water authority is certainly not worth £4·5 billion, as the Minister claims, it is probably worth between a quarter and a half of the amount that the Chancellor requires.

Mr. Gow: I did not claim that. It was claimed by the chairman and the director of finance of Thames water authority, who put that figure on the assets. Of course, the figure was confirmed by the authority's auditors.

Mr. Jackson: The question whether current cost accounting should be applied to nationalised industries, especially to the water authorities, in valuing their assets is one issue. A separate issue is the rate of return that should be expected from them. That is what we are concerned with tonight. To return to my point, the Government will not obtain £4·5 billion if they sell the Thames water authority, but the proceeds from such a sale would go some way to meeting the Chancellor's requirement. That is one reason for considering it seriously.

Of course, it has been said, and it is true, that water is a natural monopoly—but there are ways of overcoming the problem. In many countries, water services are not in the public sector. Mayor Chirac of Paris has just privatised the water supplies to that city. We should study all such examples. In the case of British Telecom we have organised sophisticated mechanisms for the regulation of a monopoly, and those mechanisms could easily be applied to the operation of water authorities.

I am afraid that, if such mechanisms were applied, they might have the effect of preventing the future private owners of water authorities from behaving towards their consumers as the present "owners" now propose.

9.23 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Like my hon. Friends the Members for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) and for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), it gives me no pleasure to disagree with my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government on this matter. It will give me even less pleasure to vote against my party for the first time in 11 years, but I was sent to Parliament with a duty to represent my constituents' interests and to use my judgment in assessing the issues that come before the House. Doing both those things, I must say that my hon. Friend's proposals are wrong.

I am strengthened in that judgment by the seven consumer consultative committees set up to safeguard the interests of the 11 million customers of the Thames water authority. All those committees are against the proposals and the orders.

Many of the arguments against the orders have been well rehearsed, and I do not intend to detain the House by

going over familiar ground. But my hon. Friend speaks of increasing capital expenditure and reducing borrowings. He knows perfectly well that the Thames water authority has been increasing and is planning to increase its capital expenditure, and to do so from revenue. There is a clear and perfectly respectable economic argument for telling a water authority that it should invest more in capital projects, and we all know the reason for that. But to go on to say that it must not borrow money to do it because that will increase the PSBR, that its capital investment must be from revenue and that it must increase its water rates to enable it to do so is another matter.

Of course, the Thames water authority does invest from revenue, and it plans to continue to repay such debts as it has. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that the requirement to increase the rate should not apply to it. But, in that case, says my hon. Friend, it must repay its existing debt more quickly, so it will still have to put its water charges up. I do not think that that is equitable or sensible. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster that it is barely ethical, and certainly there is no economic justification for it.

I do not intend to go into the detail of the argument on current cost accounting, except to say that it seems to me impossible to draw a comparison between the assets of something like British Airways and those of the Thames water authority. The sort of figures that have been produced are hypothetical and unrealistic. I understand that current cost accounting is widely considered to be a very unsatisfactory system. It is little used outside the state industries and it certainly is not appropriate for the water industry.

My hon. Friend says that he has dealt with the authorities in an even-handed fashion, but he has admitted on several occasions that Thames water authority is in a different position from the other authorities. It is different by virtue of its financial circumstances and of the state of its assets. So why is it necessary to treat the Thames water authority in exactly the same way as the other authorities and to impose a wholly unnecessary financial burden on the 11 million customers of the authority, including my constituents?

I hope that, even at this stage, my hon. Friend will take the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) and others and consider again the effect of these orders. I put it to him that he should withdraw the order in its present form and re-table it, without involving the Thames water authority in its requirements. If he does not do so, if he intends to proceed with the order as at present drawn, I cannot vote in favour of it and will have to vote against it.

9.27 pm

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn Hatfield): Even at this late stage, recognising that it might be difficult for my hon. Friend to take up arms against this reservoir of troubles and by opposing end them, I appeal to him nevertheless to reconsider. I deeply regret that I must add to the very evident ripples of discontent with an alternative Oxford view, for I cannot support the order as it stands tonight. However, I welcome the Government's commitment on privatisation of the water industry, as I have previously welcomed the inquiry into water metering.

Mid-Hertfordshire has the benefit of a combination of water company—in the main the Lea Valley, but in part the Colne valley—and water authority, that of Thames. Charging to the consumer is therefore also a combination, approximately 50 per cent. being the consequence of company as water supplier and 50 per cent. that of authority as sewage disposer. Without the intervention of Government, the net result would have been an increase in overall charges of probably just under the rate of inflation. Now the signs are that the consumer will be faced with approximately double that figure. I fully appreciate the anxiety about the need for an adequate return on public investment, because the taxpayer must be protected. However, I hope that the anxiety expressed by my constituents will equally be appreciated. They are also water rate payers, and they also expect protection.

The Government have been well advised to seek far greater efficiency from the water industry and a far more commercial approach. The Government have been ill advised to act so that such gains for the consumer are overtaken by what amounts to a tax on water. The order should now be withdrawn and a bridge over these troubled waters be found. The central policy objective of ending, not adding to, inflation must be adhered to. Having dipped a toe, my hon. Friend has surely found the temperature somewhat lukewarm!

9.30 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): We have had a rather longer debate than originally anticipated, but the basic fact remains that these two orders are essentially part and parcel of a Government exercise to increase the cost of water quite unnecessarily. Needless to say, domestic consumers throughout England and Wales, let alone business interests, are not very pleased.

The issue has been spotlighted by the courageous stand taken by Mr. Roy Watts, the chairman of the Thames water authority, who has voiced his concern in the columns of *The Times* and elsewhere. Nevertheless, this is not confined to the area covered by the Thames authority and applies equally to the 10 water authorities throughout England and Wales.

As the National Farmers Union pointed out:

"It is wrong that what is effectively a tax is to be levied on an indispensable product provided by a monopoly supplier."

Likewise, the CBI pointed out that it would constitute an additional cost burden, and added:

"It could threaten still more jobs".

With 3 million to 4 million unemployed, I would have thought that it was time that the Government gave all their attention to what is perhaps the most important question of all.

The Government's policy towards water has been spawned over a number of years. What was once essentially a local government service has been taken over. All board members throughout the country are now appointed by Whitehall. Since the late 1970s there have been successive restrictions on capital spending, and by 1981 water authorities were committed to current cost accounting. It is noticeable that British Telecom switched from this system of accountancy back to historic cost accountancy as soon as it became a private enterprise concern. There must be a moral in that.

The 1985-86 target for the Welsh water authority is 1·45 per cent. Presumably that will go up to 1·7 per cent. next year and 1·9 per cent. the year after. I confess that those figures look modest. With this arcane system of accountancy, they constitute a considerable burden. It

[Mr. Roy Hughes]

means that the present generation is being asked to pay off debt far more quickly than necessary. When a waterworks is built to last 50 to 100 years, how can one justify taking all that money from people who are living today when the waterworks will benefit people who are not yet born? The idea, of course, is to have a regular annual surplus of funds to flow back to the Treasury.

I was interested in the minor altercation that took place earlier between the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) over charging procedures, among other things. The Minister indicated that the right hon. Member for Guildford had served in the Government in 1973 when the Water Bill went through Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) pointed out to me that in the debate on 2 May 1973 the late Mr. Graham Page, the then Minister for Local Government and Development, gave clear promises that consultation would take place with all manner of interested parties. In practice, we know that there has been little or no consultation with the consumer bodies, and certainly no agreement with them. It has been apparent in the debate that the Government have had little or no consultation, and certainly no agreement, with their Back Benchers.

We know that in other public utilities—for instance, gas and electricity — prices have been increased unnecessarily again. However, the difference is that a change in the consumption of water has little effect because the charges for many consumers are based on rateable value.

Then there is the contradiction which the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) pointed out. On the one hand the Government are pressing local authorities to hold down the rates—and many Conservative Members support the Government in that respect—while on the other they are driving up water charges, which are also based on rateable value. The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) put it clearly when he said that in his view the Government were shooting themselves in the foot. What is more, there is no system of rebate for the less well off. Many people will suffer considerable hardship as a result of the measures, and no satisfactory answer was given by the Minister in opening the debate.

The Government's policy has an element of farce about it. Somebody has suggested that the next move might be value added tax on sewage disposal, which is perhaps the biggest take-away business of all. What a ridiculous position the Government are getting themselves into. Listening to the remarks of the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), I feel that it will need more muscadet to convince even the Government's own Back Benchers.

I know from correspondence that I have received from individuals in my constituency that the Welsh water authority has cut its labour force to the bone. For the forthcoming year, it had hoped to propose an increase in line with the retail prices index. Now, directly as a result of the Government's measures, water charges in Wales for the next three years will go up by 30 per cent. Other authorities throughout the country will make similar increases.

I should have thought that a Government must be pretty heartless to increase the price of water, which is such a basic commodity. There have been ridiculous forms of taxation throughout history. Pitt introduced the window tax, which was virtually a tax on light and air, to finance the Napoleonic wars. The Prime Minister has often lectured us on Victorian values, but she seems now not to be satisfied with that and wants to go back to Georgian times.

Water in Wales, as the Under-Secretary of State for Wales knows, is an emotional subject. We have abundant supplies and our people can never understand why they have to pay such an exorbitant price for water. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) pointed out eloquently the increased burden that will continue to be put on the whole of western Europe. How can any Welsh Minister go along with such proposals? The chairman of Thames water has made a principled stand. His lead should be followed and the Government forced to change course.

9.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): We have heard speeches from 18 Back-Bench Members, from constituencies that lie in all parts of England and Wales. That alone reflects the fact that the two orders that we are debating apply to all water authorities in England and Wales. That is a significant point. Recent articles in the press have concentrated on the effect on the finances of the Thames water authority of the Government's target for the return on assets. In fact, the Government's policy is consistent for all 10 water authorities. In raising the target from 1 per cent. on average to 1·4 per cent. on average, the Government are generating additional funds for all authorities, enabling each to undertake additional investment and to make some contribution to the reduction in public borrowing.

Over the past few weeks, we have heard sincere cries from Labour Members that there should be more investment in the water industry, as in other forms of infrastructure. I am astonished to hear them playing down that call for investment tonight. Each authority is being enabled to make some contribution to the reduction in public borrowing; that is a cause that is dear to the hearts of many Conservative Members.

As the policy applies to all 10 water authorities, so it affects all their consumers. In one way or another, nearly every man, woman and child in England and Wales is a customer of a water authority and so is financially affected by these orders. But these orders affect the whole population in another way. Everyone is affected by the management of the national economy. We are all taxpayers and have a responsibility for what public bodies and the Government borrow. The debate on these orders reflects that interest, too — our interest in sound economic management and the proper control of public expenditure. The debate has been about the Government's resolution of the competing claims of taxpayers and consumers. However, let me make it quite clear that water authorities are not consumer co-operatives and never have been.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Roberts: I have many points to answer and I would ask the hon. Gentleman to forgive me.

Some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who has just tried to intervene, the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes),

the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) and the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), have argued that water authorities will be required under the orders to raise more money than they need, that this is taxation by the back door and, by implication, that this is an abuse of monopoly. The Government reject that view. We are of course sensitive to the consideration that water supplies and the other services provided by the water authorities are vital to public health and that they are provided on a monopoly basis.

Of course we cannot permit the customer to be overcharged for these services, but I must remind the House of what my hon. Friend the Minister said in his speech:

"Our policy for the nationalised industries and the policy of the Water Act 1973 is that water authorities should make a reasonable return on their net assets."

The rates of return which are specified in the orders we are debating are in all cases less than 2 per cent. By any reckoning that is not an unreasonable rate of return. Therefore, I argue that the question of taxation does not arise. There would only be an abuse of monopoly power at the point where an unreasonable return was to be exacted.

We are debating the fifth order of this kind and have never previously been accused of using orders for taxation purposes. It is quite a novel approach to this kind of order. Other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), asked why a Government who are prepared to cap local government rates are at the same time setting targets for water authorities that will require them to increase their charges.

As we all know, the water authorities are quite separate from local government. They have been separate since 1974, when the local authorities were reorganised under the Local Government Act 1972 and when the water services were reorganised under the Water Act 1973. Water authorities have kept their spending under control, consistent with the Government's public expenditure requirements. As my hon. Friend the Minister said in his opening speech, since 1981 water authorities have controlled their operating costs and, indeed, have reduced their operating and manpower costs year by year in response to the Government's objectives for the management of the public sector and the control of public expenditure.

With controls over capital and current expenditure established, it is possible, as it is also necessary, both to increase water authorities' targets and to reduce water authorities' borrowing. The result is to increase self-financing and the proportion of their expenditure met from charges.

Local government presents an entirely different picture. Many local authorities have been sedulous over the years in controlling their expenditure and in seeking to make it efficient, economical and effective, but others seem to regard spending as a sign of virtue. As a result, the Government have had to introduce this series of measures to contain local government expenditure. That has been done by means of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, the Local Government Finance Act 1982 and most recently the Rates Act 1984. It was essential for the Government to keep their economic strategy on course — to control public spending and reduce inflation, particularly as it affects industry and commerce.

Where local authorities had not been responding by reining back expenditure to the constraints of the block grant, target and penalty system, we had no alternative but to seek Parliament's approval to placing a limit on the amount that they could raise from their ratepayers.

I see no inconsistency with what we are doing in the water industry and in local government with its special problems. Within the framework of the Water Act 1973, the water authorities have provided and developed their services consistent with the public expenditure policies of the Government of the day.

Mr. Simon Hughes: If it is part of the Government's policy to reduce costs for commerce and business by reducing rates and thereby holding down inflation, surely that is not consistent with their policy of increasing the costs of commerce and business by increasing water rates and thereby increasing inflation.

Mr. Roberts: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction has dealt with the target achievement and its effect on inflation. The hon. Gentleman's argument about costs for commerce and industry has been advanced by the CBI. I remind him and others that the CBI was among those who called for higher investment in the water industry, especially in the document entitled "Fabric of the Nation".

The hon. Member for Perry Barr appeared in an article on the front page of *The Times* this morning and appeared in "The World At One" as a result of his "discovery" in the Library, of all places, of a document entitled "Nationalised Industries Legislation: Consultation Proposals". Reference has been made, either directly or indirectly, to this by a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson). Better informed Members than the hon. Member for Perry Barr will know that the document has been available and widely circulated since 20 December, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced in a written answer that he was placing a copy in the Library. He tells me that there was consultation for months before 20 December.

The proposals apply to water authorities along with 17 other industries. Among the proposals is one that the Government should introduce legislation to empower industries to set up subsidiaries under the Companies Act and to transfer to them property rights and liabilities. This would enable industries to carry out their activities through Companies Act companies. We say that this may or may not be a prelude to privatisation.

As far as that discovered document is concerned, general enabling legislation is being considered and we are still at the consultative stage. It is consistent with the Government's view that activities of state-owned businesses should be transferred to the private sector where this makes commercial and practical sense.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: I shall come to the issue raised by my hon. Friend in his speech.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: But will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Roberts: I shall take up my hon. Friend's remarks when I come to the relevant part of my speech.

[Mr. Roberts]

The setting up of Companies Act company subsidiaries to water authorities is one of a number of possible ways of bringing a measure of private sector participation into the operations of water authorities. There is no question of setting up a private company to control water pollution. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction said, we must have a regulatory mechanism to prevent the abuse of monopoly.

The Companies Act subsidiary company is not necessarily the best option. It is too early to discuss what the options might be. I go no further than to say that we shall examine the possibilities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) suggested that the water authorities' assets are really liabilities. In that remark he recognised the investment needs to which other hon. Members referred. However, my hon. Friend is wrong to conclude that it is therefore wrong to value and account for assets. Water mains and sewers deteriorate and provision must be made for their replacement. They will be replaced at today's or tomorrow's prices, not at yesterday's prices. That is why current cost accounting is needed. Values are based on the analysis of recent contract prices.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) rightly reminded us that the possibility of over-provision — because we have improved methods of renovation and some items may not need to be replaced —has been recognised——

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you confirm that under Standing Orders the debate does not have to finish until 11.30? The Minister does not have to gabble as if the debate must end at 10 pm. Is that correct?

Mr. Speaker: That is entirely correct.

Mr. Roberts: As I was saying——

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: My hon. Friend referred to what is common in state-owned industries. Is he aware that we are not talking about state-owned industries? The water authorities are not state-owned.

Mr. Roberts: I never said that they were state-owned, but they are quasi-state-owned. They are publicly owned.

The 40 per cent. abatement factor was reviewed by Price Waterhouse and it gave its opinion, to which reference has been made. A later opinion can also be quoted—that of Professor Carsberg, now the director general of Oftel, who reported on CCA in the water industry in 1983. His report

"supports water authorities in their use of current cost accounting and commends their skill in using it. . . Strictly defined historical cost numbers are not available: to obtain them would involve the use of procedures even less reliable than those required for the measurement of current cost".

This has been a far-reaching debate, covering even more than the four issues that my hon. Friend referred to in his opening speech, but at this very end of the debate the issue is whether the public are best served by the implementation of the orders that we have before us, or by abandoning them in response to the Opposition's prayer.

The Opposition's argument falls because, on the one hand, they cry out for more investment in the water industry, and, on the other, they are not prepared to will the means, except by their usual, thoughtless profligate universal remedy—increased public borrowing. It is the remedy to which they always resort, like addicts to their fix, and it is a fix that does no good for them or, in the end, for the people of Britain.

The Government's position and that of their supporters on the Benches behind me has been clear and constant —*[Interruption.]*—ever since we approved the public expenditure White Paper. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) in that I cannot see how any of my hon. Friends who approved that White Paper can oppose these orders, which are associated with it. There can be no turning back on this issue. *[Interruption.]* There can be no turning back tonight, and I commend the orders to the House.

Question put and negatived.

WATER AUTHORITIES (RETURN ON ASSETS)

Question put,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Water Authorities (Return on Assets) Order 1985 (S.I., 1985, No. 78) dated 24th January 1985, a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be annulled. — *[Mr. Rooker.]*

The House divided: Ayes 191, Noes 295.

Division No. 95] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dover, Den
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Evennett, David
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Fry, Peter
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Godman, Dr Norman
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Greenway, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hanley, Jeremy
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint

Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jessel, Toby
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Mackenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Murphy, Christopher
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Wheeler, John
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith

Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Carol Mather and
Mr. Robert Boscawen.

Question accordingly negatived.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion relating to Ways and Means may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. —*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

London Regional Transport

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

10.11 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I beg to move,

That provision may be made specifying as £258,179,588 the amount which the Greater London Council are to pay to London Regional Transport under section 49 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984.

This motion paves the way for the introduction of a Bill to determine the total of grants to London Regional Transport to be payable by the GLC for the financial year 1984-85, after 29 June 1984 when the Government took control. *[Interruption.]*

I explained why this measure is needed in my statement to the House on 29 January. The High Court quashed the direction that I made under section 49 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984. There is thus now no direction in force regarding the payment to LRT of the grants that the GLC budgeted for and precepted to pay to London Transport in 1984-85. *[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are debating probably one of the most important measures that will ever affect London transport, but I cannot hear a word that the Minister is saying.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appeal for quietness, in order that the Secretary of State may be heard.

Mr. Ridley: This matter must be urgently resolved, if possible before the end of the financial year. As I told the House, I intended to appeal against the High Court judgment. But, having studied the judgment, I concluded that it was the Act itself that did not correspond with our intention, which was clearly stated at the time when it was passing through Parliament. Clearly an appeal would not resolve that problem, let alone the uncertainty over the amount to be paid. The Government had no option but to bring a new Bill before Parliament to settle quickly the amount of grant that the GLC should pay to LRT.

I say "settle quickly" beause both LRT and the GLC need to know what their financial position will be, and they need to know as soon as possible. LRT has to budget and plan ahead for 1985-86 and beyond, as well as to settle its 1984-85 accounts. The GLC is at the crucial final stages in its annual budgetary and rate-precepting processes. Legislation is the only way to resolve the uncertainties and give Parliament the opportunity to determine the outcome in a way that is reasonable as between the parties concerned. If the House approves the resolution, I intend to introduce a Bill immediately.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I had understood that it was not the Secretary of State's intention to take the Bill immediately this evening. Am I to understand that he has changed his mind?

Mr. Ridley: I said that I would introduce the Bill. It is not possible to introduce the Bill until the House has passed the Ways and Means resolution, but the normal intervals between introduction and Second Reading will of course obtain.

[Mr. Ridley]

In laying this motion, I have at the front of my mind the interests of travellers, LRT and London ratepayers. All stand to lose if we do not legislate. The GLC, through creative accounting and legal action, has tried to deprive LRT of substantial sums of money which ratepayers paid specifically for public transport and which LRT, by its efforts during the past seven months has earned. I think that the House would agree that such money should be returned to the ratepayers and passengers, not squandered on GLC lunacies. The Government are not trying to rob the GLC—we have not seen the colour of any of the money under discussion tonight. It is the London ratepayers and the London traveller who the GLC is seeking to rob.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Would this so-called robbery by the GLC have been possible if the Secretary of State had drafted properly the Bill that became the Act that he is now amending?

Mr. Ridley: I used the word robbery as it is the word which the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) used on the day of the statement. So untrue were those phrases that they are more appropriate put as I have used them. I agree that the legislation is defective. I am sure that the whole House wants to put it right so that the intention of the House can be fulfilled.

There are four separate sums of money at issue as a result of the court's judgment. The first is a sum of £10·2 million which the GLC argued that it had already paid in the financial year but for which we had not given it credit in setting the direction.

When I made the direction under section 49 on 29 June, the statute required me to deduct from the total grant required the amount of grant already paid to LT by the GLC up to 29 June. Accordingly, acting on the best information then available to me, I deducted the sum of £78·7 million. In fact, a payment of some £10·2 million had been made by the GLC at the beginning of 1984-85, which LT had requested to close its accounts with the GLC for the previous financial year, 1983-84. It subsequently came to light that the GLC had paid that money but had carefully labelled the payments as relating to 1984-85. This was a trick—a piece of creative accounting—to enable the GLC to avoid paying what it owed LT in 1983-84. LT clearly considered that the payments should have been made for 1983-84. Indeed, the ratepayers had been precepted for the full amount. LT endeavoured to settle the matter with the GLC accordingly, but the GLC, of course, was in charge, and LT had reluctantly to accept the GLC's decision.

In all conscience, the GLC should have paid this money out in 1983-84 to settle its outstanding liability and because it had already asked the ratepayer for this amount. However, I did not pursue this sum before the court because section 49 relates only to payments during 1984-85. The GLC got round section 49 by relating the payment to 1984-85. The payment amounts to £10,220,412. I therefore propose to increase the amount for which the GLC was given credit in the period before the Government took control to £88,920,412. The House should be under no doubt that the GLC has robbed LRT and the ratepayers of this £10·2 million by a trick.

Secondly, there is an issue arising from amendments agreed by this House to the GLC's Money Act 1984, which covers the financial year 1984-85. At the time that the direction under section 49 was made, the House had passed an of instruction to the Committee considering the Money Bill. The import of this was that, unless specific proposals for reductions in expenditure were put forward by the GLC, the expenditure provisions in the Bill should be reduced by just under 7·5 per cent. In the event, and after the direction had been made, the GLC decided not to put forward proposals, so reductions were duly made across the board according to the instruction to the Committee. The effect for LRT was to reduce the provision for prescribed capital expenditure to be funded by grant from the GLC by some £12·9 million. The Money Bill has recently been enacted in that form and the Bill will reflect the reduction in provision for capital expenditure.

The figure quoted in the motion, therefore, is accordingly the figure in the original direction, £281·3 million, abated for payments in respect of 1984-85 and the £12·9 million reduction arising from the GLC Money Act. That gives the figure in the money resloution. Within that sum, two sums of money remain at issue. The first is LRT's expected surplus for this financial year.

The hon. Lady will doubtless seek to argue, as her amendment implies, that payments of grant by the GLC should be further abated in respect of the improvements in LRT's financial position which have developed since control was transferred to the Government. That is an intolerable suggestion. It would mean that additional income, which has resulted from improved productivity, better than expected sales of travelcards and from LRT's decision to raise fares earlier this year, would all be handed over to the GLC. It would mean that the benefits from the efforts of LRT's management and work force since the GLC lost control of LRT would go to the GLC, and not to LRT, its passengers, and London's ratepayers.

I would like to remind the House of two remarks I made during the debate on section 49 in Committee—

"It is not my intention to take more through the clause than is strictly necessary for running LRT for the year in question, so that they shall not end up with a surplus."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 15 March 1984; c. 1114.]

When I made my original direction, LRT's forecasts showed that it would need funds equal to the maximum that I could specify under section 49. Indeed, LRT had forecast a deficit. I made my direction accordingly. As I said in Committee, it was almost impossible to get it plumb right when we were working for a year ahead and did not know what the circumstances would be. I therefore said:

"If there is a surplus or deficit at the end of 1984-85 . . . that will go towards next year's determination of subsidy. It will either be added to or subtracted from the needs for the following year."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 15 March 1984; c. 1116.]

Later in the year, in November, I had to decide how much grant LRT would need for the following year, 1985-86. By that time the estimates showed a small cash surplus for the current year. It is now forecast at £29·5 million. Also by that time LRT, in the course of turning the business round, had necessarily incurred transitional costs which will now show as accrued liabilities in this year's account. Therefore, LRT's grant for 1985-86 and the proposed ratepayers' contribution have been calculated on the basis that LRT would not have to meet any unfunded liabilities accruing from 1984-85 in 1985-86.

I expect that we shall hear the hon. Lady argue that that money should be given to the GLC instead. Not only

would the GLC receive an undeserved windfall, but LRT would be left without adequate funds. Is that what Opposition Members really want? It would mean big fares increases or cuts in services or investment, or an increase in the ratepayers' contribution for next year.

It is quite clear to us that the only fair outcome is for the money to be retained by LRT and used to benefit the passengers and ratepayers who contributed to it in the first place. As I said, I made it perfectly clear in Committee that our intention was that any unforeseen surpluses or deficits should be carried forward into the subsequent year.

There is a further sum at issue. Before the Government took over LRT, the GLC encouraged London Transport to enter into agreements to lease £27 million worth of assets —mainly buses. The GLC had never done that before. It decided to indulge in leasing for 1984-85 after the Government had determined the GLC's capital allocations for the year. That was another piece of creative accounting deliberately designed to circumvent the controls of the GLC's capital expenditure. By financing part of LRT's capital through leasing, knowing that it would shortly lose responsibility for LRT, the GLC hoped to escape the responsibility for funding more than a tiny fraction of those costs, pushing the rest on to LRT and the hapless ratepayer for future years.

I explained clearly when the Committee was considering section 49 that we regarded this dodge as unacceptable. I made it clear that we would expect the GLC to pay to set up a reserve for that leasing. Therefore, within the total sum specified in the resolution, there is provision for a payment by the GLC to enable LRT to set up a capital reserve to cover the financing costs of the assets leased in 1984-85. That reserve provision amounts to £20·8 million, which is no more than the GLC was notified at the time that it would be required to pay, and it is no more than would be required to cover the costs of the leasing payment. I will explain precisely how it is made up, if the House wishes.

I have given the exact explanation for the figures. No doubt the hon. Lady has come armed to the teeth with sheaves of briefing from the GLC. She looks a little perplexed, perhaps because I have anticipated so many of her arguments and she cannot think of what to say. No doubt that will not stop her. But before we hear the voice of London, intoning as though in a seance through the medium of Crewe and Nantwich, I challenge the hon. Lady to tell us whether she will oppose a measure that will protect the interests of London passengers, ratepayers and taxpayers, or whether she will vote to rob them of money they have paid for public transport to give the GLC a windfall to spend on God-knows-what. Does she want higher fares and rates in London? That is the implication of voting against this measure tonight, and I commend the resolution to the House.

10.32 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I beg to move, as an amendment to the motion, in line 1, leave out '£258,179,588' and insert '£208,300,000'.

I am deeply angered by the fact that we should be discussing such important legislation so late on a Thursday night. If I gave the Secretary of State the impression that I was perplexed, perhaps I could explain it to him in simple terms. Even I, after many years in the House of Commons, am astonished at the effrontery of any Secretary of State who dares to pass legislation which, when it is examined by the courts, is found to be so badly defective that he has to come to the House to put it right. What is more, he comes to the House, not in the state of penitence that one would have expected from any reasonable Minister, and not to explain to the House how he dared to introduce something that was regarded by a judge in a major court as being unlawful, irrational and procedurally improper; he comes here with true arrogance to suggest that, if his laws are unacceptable, he will change them.

This is the Government of law and order. This is the Secretary of State whose attitude towards the ratepayers of London is that, when it suits him, he will take over the major transport system. However, he will not pay for that system. That would be too easy. He will insist on levying on the ratepayers of London further sums of money to pay for something which they did not want, which will provide a worse service, and which in the final analysis will be extremely difficult to defend.

I am really deeply offended that we should be taking this measure now. I understand that the Government do not intend to go ahead with the second measure on the Order Paper today, but I would have thought that, knowing as they did that we had major debates to take place in the realm of water and a number of other things, if there had been even a grain of — I will not say "humility", because that is a word that the Secretary does not understand — but of sensitivity to what is really important he would have said that we could not possibly take a measure of this importance at this hour.

The Secretary of State has used the English language in a cavalier fashion which really astonishes me in his talk of creative accounting, robbery and trickery and all the other words that seem to be part of his normal, measured way of addressing those for whom he is responsible. Let me just remind the House of what this piece of legislation is all about.

I am deeply angered, and I think it is possibly a measure of the insensitivity of the members of the Government that they do not seem to understand that what we are talking about is a major transport system for the capital city of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. So let us talk about what the Secretary of State really intended to do.

The right hon. Gentleman decided originally that he was going to take over the whole of London transport and he set up, without any consultation whatsoever, a Bill which was to make the GLC pay for London regional transport. Four areas of really great importance were involved in this decision: first, the causes of the decision; secondly, the methods being used to implement it; thirdly, the Government's real reasons for wanting the change; and, lastly, the effect that this decision will have on the whole of London.

Three days after the LRT Act became law, the Secretary of State took over LRT and demanded, without consultation, £281·3 million from the GLC under section 49 of the Act. The Act did not require consultation, and of course it was not something which leapt naturally to the mind of the Secretary of State. But when the GLC took him to court Mr. Justice McNeil found in his verdict that "natural justice entitles the payer at least to make representations".

One result was that the Government made an error and charged £10·2 million above the maximum allowed even by their own section 49. The right hon. Gentleman conceded this after the court verdict.

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

The Government's claim also involved creating a surplus for LRT by three different methods. First, they decided to reduce the LRT capital needs by £12·9 million, but they still, of course, charged the GLC. Secondly, LRT's budget for 1984-85 was based on a fares freeze. The Government, however, when they took over, pushed up fares by 12 per cent. on 1 January 1985, thus reducing the need for grants by £8 million. But the Government still asked that the GLC should be responsible for that sum. The LRT reduced its need for redundancy money, after being taken over by the Government, by £21·1 million, but the Secretary of State still charged the GLC for the surplus.

So the Government tried to take £42 million from the GLC to create a surplus for LRT once it was within their sector—this in spite of the fact—and we have heard the Secretary of State quote from his own remarks in Committee—that he had said

"There is no intention of trying to make a surplus." —[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 15 March 1984; c. 1116.]

He was referring, of course, to section 49.

However, when the GLC challenged the Secretary of State it was revealed in court that a letter from an LTE executive member to an Under-Secretary in the Department of Transport proved that there was an intention to create a surplus of at least £11 million by 6 June 1984—before, in other words, the Bill became law. The Government also sought to take a further £20·8 million from the GLC to pay off in one go the total cost of the leasing reserve. We have heard from the Secretary of State that this was because the GLC was cheating and trying to fix things. In fact, the right hon. Gentleman was asking the GLC to pay off the total cost in one lump sum.

The Secretary of State made it quite clear in Committee that he would do this, even though he was perfectly well aware that it is traditional that new authorities inherit the debts of their predecessors, and that a leasing reserve is a standard practice among transport authorities.

The Hon. Mr. Justice McNeill, who, after all, was asked to judge these matters, said of this decision that the Secretary of State could have legally enforced his view through a Money Bill but that he did not choose to do so. He concluded:

"was it reasonable for him to do so. . . in the circumstances set out above it was not".

The Secretary of State used five methods to take a total of £73 million from the GLC. On every one he was found guilty by a court of law. On every one the judge allowed no possibility of misinterpretation or confusion, with the one exeption of the leasing reserve. That verdict was given on 11 January 1985.

The Secretary of State had conceded his £10 million error before the verdicts. However, he repeated in this House—not once, but four times—during transport questions that he would not discuss the implications of the case, apologise to the House or give any indication of what he intended to do to put right his own fault. He said that he had appealed or was appealing and that the matter was sub judice. That was not so. Not only did he not appeal but it emerged that he had been given very clear intimations by his own legal advisers that were he to do so, he would have no possible grounds for winning as it was plain that what he had done was unlawful, irrational and procedurally improper.

On 29 January, the Secretary of State announced plans to change the law. In other words, he had been found out and decided to create retrospective legislation. He gave five excuses for this action. First, he said in a rather lordly fashion that the court took a different view of his legislation. That is a nice way of saying that the court said that he had broken the law. It is rather like a burglar saying that theft is not actually against the law, just that the judges tend to take a different view.

Mr. Martin Stevens (Fulham): I thought that section 49 meant exactly what my right hon. Friend thought it meant. Did the hon. Lady and her hon. Friend think it meant something different at the time when the Bill was going through the House?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I think that any Secretary of State who brings a law to this House has a responsibility to ensure that it makes sense and that it is written so that it will stand up to examination, particularly if it affects the transport system of London. On top of that, having been found out, the Secretary of State should have had the decency to apologise to the House. Instead of that, he has come back with a change in the rule book. He does not like the game, so he will change the rules. London Regional Transport would have to give back to the GLC £50 million, we were told. This is wrong because the grant happens to be paid in instalments and only £177 million has been paid so far. If the Secretary of State had accepted the ruling of the court, the GLC would have had to pay only another £31 million instead of £81 million.

The Secretary of State said that the old legislation would accomplish what he wanted. Of course, that is not surprising because what he wants to do is to break the law. He said that an appeal would not effect what he wanted. What the Secretary of State wants has been found by the law courts to be unlawful. He said that it would be wrong for rates that had been raised to pay for transport to be used to buy something else. In that case, perhaps the Secretary of State thinks that in 1983-84, when the GLC budgeted to spend £235 million on transport but needed only £173 million, the £62 million should have been spent on transport irrespective.

Secondly, if the money goes back to the GLC, all of it will go to reduce the rate. If it goes to the LRT on the other hand and reduces LRT's needs, only two thirds will go back to the ratepayers. So much for the empty boast of the Secretary of State that he is worried about the ratepayers of London.

What the Secretary of State is doing is putting before the House legislation which has already reduced the sum demanded. The amount has been reduced from £281 million to £258 million. In other words, the Secretary of State has surrendered on the £10·2 million but also on the £12·9 million surplus capital money. If the Government conceded that the capital surplus was unacceptable, why are they still demanding a revenue surplus of £29·1 million?

Let us be clear, whatever the wording of the Bill, that it is retrospective legislation. The Conservative party in the past has been exceedingly outspoken on the question of restrospection. The GLC will be charged for services provided by another authority in a period of time predating the enactment of the Bill, and they never warned at any point that this might happen. The Conservative party has always prided itself on disliking such Bills. The present Foreign Secretary, referring to retrospection, said:

"First, warning must be given to the taxpayer of the intention to legislate in this way".—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1978; Vol. 953, c. 1641.]

In 1978, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said:

"This is entirely destructive of civilised life in this country."

The House of Lords also does not care greatly for retrospective legislation. That may be one reason why we are debating a motion which cannot be amended by the House of Lords. We are not even clear whether the Government intend to allow the other place to debate the matter in any detail.

The discussion really concerns the fact that the Government intended to charge the GLC £73 million more than they had the legal right to demand. Now, as a great concession, they will charge the GLC only £50 million more than they have a legal right to demand. The reason is to conceal the cuts that have been made in LRT since it was taken over by Whitehall. Even though they are no longer the responsibility of the GLC, the rates for LRT will rise 35 per cent. in April under the subsequent levy order. The total burden will increase from £208 million to £281 million. The Government want control of LRT, but they do not want the financial responsibility. As far as the Government are concerned, the GLC can pay for a Whitehall-run service. That was the motive, of course, behind the 12 per cent. fare rise. It created a surplus of £8 million which the Government intend to use to cut fares and funds for LRT next year. The Secretary of State for the Environment is claiming that the GLC has balances of £71 million. When the law is changed, the GLC will have to pay more to the Government, but it estimates that its balances will then be zero, while its rate-capping limit and its rate targets are all based on the £71 million balance. Secondly, the Bill assumes that the GLC must pay over to LRT £20·8 million for the leasing reserve fund. However, it is interesting to note that the GLC would have to borrow that money to pay that sum. It has no powers to do any such thing. Therefore, are we to believe that the GLC will have to risk breaking the law to change the Secretary of State's calculation, and to support him in what has already turned out to be a clearly illegal move.

The Secretary of State said, in an article in *The Standard* on 4 April 1984:

"The savings of money is a matter of the greatest interest to 4,000,000 people who pay rates in London. We are determined to reduce the burden upon them".

Very soon, the ratepayers of London will find themselves facing yet another intolerable levy on top of their existing problems.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): Is not the hon. Lady's anger based on the fact that LRT, since the Act came into force, has been more successful, efficient, profitable and popular than the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends suspected or hoped? Does she not prefer the GLC to receive benefits for its dubious causes rather than to provide genuine services to the people of London?

Mrs. Dunwoody: The hon. Gentleman has always had some confusion in his mind about what service to the taxpayers and ratepayers means, or he would not be a member of the Conservative party. I point out that many people in London have no doubts about the effects of the changes on LRT. Not only are the fares higher and services worse, but look at what the local papers are saying. When there was a discussion in Sutton about the rate for the next year, the local paper said:

"Optimistic forecasts about Sutton's rate next year were dashed this week with the announcement of the new Transport Rate.

What this means is almost 11p in the pound will be added to rates bills by the new London Regional Transport quango . . .

Next April, despite no longer having responsibility for London Transport, County Hall are to be permitted to keep their precept at 36.75p.

So the new LRT precept of 10.8p just announced will be extra money. It will add about £26 to the average rates bill in the area . . .

Dr. David Trafford, leader of Sutton Council, said it was absurd to permit the GLC precept to stay at 36.75p when they no longer had to pay for LT.

'It makes a nonsense of our rates plans,' he said."

No member of a local authority has any doubt about what is happening. They all know that we have a Government that are so determined to centralise that they have gone ahead with their plans with no consultation either with the people who will be most affected, or with the duly and properly elected members of the local authorities.

We have a Secretary of State who produced inept, badly drafted and incompetent legislation, and then had the effrontery to come back here and say that as the judges had found that what he was doing was unlawful, he would redraw the law. Therefore, this is retrospective legislation. Those Conservative Members who boast of their commitment to law and order may find it difficult in the future to explain to the ratepayers of London how they can stomach this Government. They say that everybody else must obey the law, but when they found themselves in a position, created by the Secretary of State for Transport, in which they had a bad deal—the ratepayers of London will get a bad deal out of it—they came back to the House. They will not apologise, nor will the Secretary of State offer his resignation, or even suggest that he was in any way wrong. Instead, the Government are trying to make a new law so that the next time that the Secretary of State is challenged, he will not be told that what he has done is unlawful, irrational and procedurally improper. The Secretary of State may find it amusing, but there are many people in this capital city who tonight will understand exactly what is happening. They will know why it is necessary to take this measure late at night. They will know why the Secretary of State does not want it to be debated in the full light of day. They will draw their own conclusions about how genuine his commitment is to the transport system of the greatest capital city in the world.

10.55 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The London Tories never cease to amaze me. At the last general election the Prime Minister announced—as an afterthought, so we are told by several distinguished members of her party—that the Greater London council would be abolished, that London Regional Transport would be set up and that the power to control transport in London would be taken away from the elected representatives of the people of London. What was not said—I have checked what was said in their election speeches—was that the power to control transport in London would be taken over by a secretive, unelected quango over which the people of London would have no control and which would be able to levy a rate on Londoners. It meant that the most arrogant, inept and stupid member of the present Cabinet—which means

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

that he has had to work very hard for the title—had to introduce a Bill which had proved to be totally inept and did not do what he said it would do.

The Secretary of State then applied it wrongly and the High Court decided that what had been done was irrational —that should be no surprise to any hon. Member— unlawful and procedurally unsound. We do not know whether the Secretary of State overruled his ministerial advisers about the way in which he ought to proceed. Perhaps the Secretary of State did overrule them and that is why he placed himself in this position.

The Secretary of State then came to the House to announce what he already knew—that he had been caught out. He misled the House. Because he was scared stiff of being asked questions he applied the sub judice rule, which meant that he could not be asked questions. He said that he had appealed against the decision, and we now know that that was not true. On the strength of that alone, the right hon. Gentleman ought to resign.

The right hon. Gentleman has now introduced a most amazing piece of retrospective legislation. He did not have the guts to bring a Bill before the House and then the financial consequences that would flow from it. We have the financial consequences, and there is to be a Bill which will flow from the financial consequences. If others ran their businesses or Departments as the Secretary of State is running his, they would be hounded out of office. He should be hounded out of office for his abysmal performance.

Tonight the Secretary of State managed to give the impression that his own total incompetence was in some way or other the fault of the Greater London council. The GLC opposed his Bill. It said that it was badly drafted, but the Secretary of State took no notice. The GLC said that what he was trying to do was stupid, ignorant, incompetent and unlawful, and that is how it has turned out to be. Yet the Secretary of State has used it tonight to attack the GLC.

What I ought to say, because the Secretary of State does not represent a London constituency, to the few Conservative Members who purport to represent London constituencies — not many of them are here tonight representing those constituencies — is that they really ought to consider how they should discharge their responsibilities to their electors. Within the last two days this House, in a three-hour debate, has decided the budget of the GLC and the budget of the Inner London education authority. That is what we did last night by means of the rate-capping orders.

Those authorities would have spent hours and hours in detailed and careful deliberations before deciding the fate of many services in London and the fate and standard of inner London schools. Instead, Ministers have proceeded in their craven way and accepted everything that the Prime Minister has demanded of them. The Government decided the budgets of the GLC, the Inner London education authority and two metropolitan counties in one three-hour debate. It seems that "Yobbos rule—OK" under this Government.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): My hon. Friend is being too charitable. He has not mentioned that Merseyside and South Yorkshire were dealt with as well in the three-hour debate.

Mr. Dobson: I accept that. That is a reflection of the Government's wide-ranging intellectual powers. Tonight we are determining partly the budget and future standard of service of London Regional Transport. We are about to come to a decision on another whacking chunk of the GLC's budget. This will follow the despicable speech of the Secretary of State, which clearly made some of his hon. Friends ashamed. That was their reaction to his inept presentation of his stupid case.

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): Does the hon. Gentleman think it right that money raised from London's ratepayers by the GLC for London Regional Transport's purposes should be applied by the GLC for some other purpose?

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Yes, such as reducing the precept.

Mr. Dobson: As my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said, the Secretary of State was trying to steal from the GLC. Some of the money could reasonably stay with the GLC and some of it could reasonably be returned to the ratepayers. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) should be reminded that some of the money will go straight from the pockets of London ratepayers into the surplus of an unelected transport quango. That is the form of local government which he and his right hon. and hon. Friends have introduced.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The money resolution which accompanied the London Regional Transport Bill, as it then was, was a strange one, on which I spoke. It provided that any surplus arising from LRT's business would be transferred to the Treasury for the ensuing year. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) shakes his head, but that is my understanding. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) agree that we are discussing a sum that is £50 million more than the needs of London Regional Transport for the current year?

Mr. Dobson: I confess that I no longer have a grip of one part of the detail on which my hon. Friend's intervention turns. The Secretary of State is smiling, but he has no right to claim that he has a grip on anything. It is only his incompetence that brings us here tonight. I remember that it was made clear during the debate on the money resolution of the LRT Bill, as it then was, that surpluses could go to the Treasury from London Regional Transport. I note that the Secretary of State no longer shakes his head. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman has steadied his brain for a moment.

Mr. Tony Banks: I invite my hon. Friend to refer to the report of the proceedings in Committee on the London Regional Transport Bill of 15 March 1984, at column 1114. He will find that the Secretary of State gave a clear undertaking that money would not be taken away from the GLC to create a surplus for London Regional Transport.

Mr. Dobson: That is another argument to support our case.

Most London Tory Members have long ceased to recognise that their function is to represent the people who elected them. Apparently they think that their function is to vote with the Government everytime that they shout. In the last two days they have battered the GLC and the ILEA through rate capping. Today the bulk of them —

including the bulky hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Stevens)—have voted for an 11 per cent. increase in the water rate levied by the Thames water authority because the Government have invented a water tax.

Tonight Tory Members will show their loyalty to the Prime Minister, if not loyalty to the people whom they represent, by trooping through the Lobby to support the Secretary of State and his retrospective legislation to put right the consequences of his own incompetence, stupidity and unlawfulness. Some of those words were used by the judge in the High Court. According to the judge, the Secretary of State was also irrational.

Tory Members should remember that their primary duty is to the people who elected them. It is about time that they discharged that duty. The only way that they can discharge it is by sharing the anger expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich.

11.7 pm

Mr. Martin Stevens (Fulham): The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) rants about London Conservative Members sheepishly following the Government into the Lobby no matter what the Government propose, barely 60 minutes after a sizeable Tory rebellion. I did not take part in it because, although I thought my hon. Friends honest, I also thought them mistaken.

Opposition Members want to squeeze the last drop of outrage out of this debate. They are entitled to a bit of a giggle about something that went wrong, but they should not make absurd accusations such as that made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras.

The hon. Member for Crewe an Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) made a number of statements to which I took exception. She asked why the Government did not consult the GLC. Perhaps she can make us a list of the times when, over the last decade, Governments, Royal Commissions and proponents of the Local Government Bill sought discussion and were turned contemptuously away. If I were Secretary of State, I am not sure that I should feel an obligation to seek the views of members of that extraordinary gang.

Mr. Tony Banks: They were elected.

Mr. Stevens: The present team was not elected. The electorate voted for others who were immediately given the chop and the new lot were put in.

While my hon. Friends and I do not begrudge the Opposition their hour of fun and frivolity, I do not believe that hon. Members who served, as I did, on the Standing Committee on the London Regional Transport Act thought that section 49 meant anything different from what the Secretary of State thought it meant. They certainly did not say so.

I do not have the slightest doubt that the GLC leadership were playing tricks, in exactly the way that my right hon. Friend accuses them; I have been in their company too often not to recognise the signs. They resemble the modern Labour party; like a flash city financier who is much too fly ever to break the law. The moment he has done something, we must have a new law to prevent him from doing it again. In a way, that is what we are doing tonight.

Mrs. Dunwoody: And the court case?

Mr. Stevens: For the hon. Lady to exult in the result of the High Court case, she must be able to show that she and her hon. Friends disagreed with the Secretary of State on the significance of section 49, and she has not been able to do so. *[Interruption.]* I would not make an adverse comment about a judicial decision. What we are proposing tonight is to return the Act to what we all thought it meant, and I shall support the Government in so doing.

11.11 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): We are seeking tonight what happens when one divorces the upper tier of local government from its proper role as a transport authority and places it in the hands of civil servants and an arrogant Secretary of State.

I voted against the London Regional Transport Act—I, too, served on the Standing Committee on that measure—and I always thought that it was a lousy piece of legislation. The facts are proving it to have been so.

The breakdown in relations between central and local government, which this debate so typifies—there is much more to come, particularly when the Transport Bill is debated next week and in the many months to follow—is a tragedy not only for this House but for the whole United Kingdom.

I understood that leasing for most bus companies was a proper way of proceeding. Most local authorities have been forced into leasing because they have no means to fund the capital programmes for which there is a necessity.

We have had to adopt that means in my constituency to provide facilities for dealing with our rubbish and waste material. There are no more holes to fill up and we cannot finance a programme out of capital because we do not have any capital receipts, so we must go in for leasing. That is what bus companies have had to do in recent years to acquire the buses they need.

If we are now to run LRT in the way that we are running the water authorities, heaven help the ratepayers.

By introducing this motion, the Secretary of State is admitting that he could not win an appeal and, therefore, that he misinterpreted the law. He is also breaching the undertaking that he gave, when the measure was debated, that the money was to cover running LRT for "the year in question."

It is widely admitted that £50 million is not needed for this purpose. That was the burden of the court judgment. The money included £20·8 million, which did not even feature in the GLC's budget. By this motion, the Secretary of State is trying to appropriate from the GLC money to which he is not entitled, either in law, as the law currently stands, or in equity.

As with the rate precept, to be debated another day, the right hon. Gentleman is proving to be more profligate with ratepayers' money than the GLC, which he frequently attacks. There is a clear element of retrospectivity in what the right hon. Gentleman is doing. Under the law as it stands, the GLC has a duty to pay the Secretary of State £208 million. This provision, and the order—when it comes before us—are changing the rules halfway through the game. I suggest that the probity of such action is open to challenge. We can imagine the screams of horror that the Tories would produce if a Labour Government were to do it to a Tory council. We should not be debating the matter at this time of night; that is certain.

The only honourable course for the Secretary of State to take is to admit that he did not understand his

[Mr. Stephen Ross]

legislation, and settle for the sum to which he is legally entitled under the amendment. He should stop showing his naked contempt for the law and the courts, swallow his pride and withdraw his motion.

11.14 pm

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): I had not intended to intervene in the debate, but the phony indignation that has been worked up by the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), neither of whom was present in Committee, and the somewhat lesser indignation worked up by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross), who did not often attend the Committee, force me to do so.

I want to make just one point. It was abundantly clear during the Committee's proceedings on what was then, I think, clause 42, that money that had been raised by the GLC from London's ratepayers to subsidise London Transport should be paid to London Regional Transport. That principle was not challenged by any member of the Committee.

Mr. Dobson: It was.

Mr. Maples: It was not. The hon. Gentleman was not present in that Committee. The principle was never challenged by any member of the Opposition in Committee. A couple of amendments were tabled. They dealt with what would happen if there were a surplus, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that surplus would stay in LRT, would inure for its benefit and would not be appropriated by the Treasury.

It would be outrageous if money that was raised from London's ratepayers for that purpose were to be left with the GLC to be misapplied for some other purpose and have to be raised again.

Mrs. Dunwoody: It would lower the rates.

Mr. Maples: Does the hon. Lady wish to intervene?

Mrs. Dunwoody: No.

Mr. Maples: The hon. Lady does not want to do so, but she was speaking from a sedentary position.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I was a member of that Committee. The hon. Gentleman has just mentioned the surplus and the fact that the Secretary of State said that the surplus would go to LRT. In fact, the Secretary of State said:

"It is not my intention to take more through the clause than is strictly necessary for running LRT for the year in question, so that we shall not end up with a surplus."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B,* 15 March 1984; c. 1114.]

He gave the undertaking to the Committee and the House that there would be no surplus. It is on that that the court case hinges.

Mr. Maples: The money that was raised by the GLC was raised from London's ratepayers for that purpose. It is indisputable that it would be outrageous for it now to be applied to any other purpose, which is what the result would be. London's ratepayers would effectively have to pay twice. The Opposition's amendment, which is designed to chop off £50 million, is pure political opportunism. It is another example of what we saw again and again during the proceedings on the Bill—the GLC tail wagging the parliamentary Labour party dog.

The people who live in this city, except for the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich and her right hon. and hon. Friends, are sick and tired of the GLC's meddling, interference and games with London Transport. We hope that this is the end of it.

11.17 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I came into the debate to support those of my hon. Friends who had served on the Committee, and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) on this matter. As the debate has progressed, I have become more and more uneasy. The Secretary of State for Transport has not been known for being frank in the House.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): Not so.

Mr. Spearing: If I do him any injustice in what I am going to say, I am sure that his hon. Friend the Minister of State will do him more than justice and put me right. I invite the right hon. Gentleman to intervene if I have it wrong.

My hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight are familiar with the statistical interstices of this argument, but I doubt whether any casual listener to the debate will have been able to gather the degree of what I believe to be the enormity of the Secretary of State's action. That is why I wish to be strictly fair to him. For once we have the time, and he has the ability courteously to put me right if anything that I say is incorrect.

I intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) because I have vivid memories of the debate on the money resolution voted on and passed by the House on 13 December 1983 after the Second Reading of the Bill, and equally vivid recollections of a strange provision in that money resolution. I am testing the Secretary of State on this, as I availed myself of the opportunity in the No Lobby to re-read the *Official Report* of that debate.

The Secretary of State said in reply to that short debate:

"The system will be as follows. In any given year an estimate will be made of the subsidy needed by London Regional Transport which will be based on its own budget and plans. At the end of the year, having levied that amont partly through the rate and partly through taxes"——

presumably that is the Department of Transport contribution—

"the sum will be determined, and may be slightly more or less than previously estimated, and paid over. Consequently, the figures will be adjusted next year. That is how it will work. There is no question of the Treasury making a profit at the expense of ratepayers, or of its pocketing surpluses, as has been suggested."—[*Official Report,* 13 December 1983; Vol. 50, c. 940-41.]

As I understand it, however, that is exactly what is now about to happen. I shall be happy to give way to the Minister if I am wrong, but I am trying to understand this as a user of London Transport. Like most of my constituents, I do not own a car and this issue is vital to the quality of transport available to citizens of the capital which the Government have treated with such scant respect. As no one has challenged me, I assume that I am right so far.

Understandably, there was a clause in the Bill allowing money to be transferred from the GLC in the transitional period of six months or so when London Transport would be under the Minister rather than the GLC. That is perfectly reasonable. Having decided to effect the transfer

in the middle of the financial year and of the calendar year, the Government had to make some provision to sustain London Transport during that period. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has pointed out, that was accepted by the Committee as an administrative arrangement.

It is alleged, however—the Secretary of State has not so far rebutted the allegation—that the amount that was levied was in excess of the amount required by London Transport in that balancing period. The figure has been bruited around and my hon. Friends have stated that the excess is £50 million. Neither the Secretary of State nor the Minister of State has denied that, or indeed anything that I have said up to now—so far, so good.

On the money resolution and the matter on which I intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, it is within the knowledge of all my hon. Friends now present that when I made that allegation both Ministers shook their heads. The money resolution provides that the Secretary of State will be authorised

"to require that body to pay to him any excess of revenues over charges (as determined by that Act) in respect of any accounting year (within the meaning of that Act) of that body, so far as that excess appears to him to be surplus to that body's requirements". —[*Official Report*, 13 December 1983; Vol. 50, c. 933.]

There we have it. There is a power voted by the House, by means of the money resolution, to enable the Secretary of State, if he so wishes — it is not mandatory, but optional—to take back from London Regional Transport any surplus that may in any one year arise out of surplus revenues.

The Secretary of State may say that the subsidy from the GLC is not, for the purposes of the resolution, revenue. That is the only loophole that I can see.

Mr. Ridley: It would be kind to put the hon. Gentleman out of his misery. He does not understand what happened in Committee, when it was carefully explained that all money from the trading accounts of LRT that was excess to its requirements would be rolled over into the following financial year. The hon. Gentleman has quoted what I said. The power in the money resolution was intended to cover the unlikely event of the discovery of oil or of a gold mine on LRT property, or of major property development, the proceeds of which had nothing at all to do with London Transport. Such proceeds would be paid into the Treasury. In no sense would the money resolution power be used for the purpose of paying in the surpluses.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to intervene if his point was a false one. I hope that he will accept that it is false.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for putting me right. Making the point was still worthwhile. Not all the citizens of London, and indeed not all the Members of the House of Commons, can sit in any one Committee. However, it seems strange that such a money resolution was included, because presumably the disposal of capital assets, land values and so on might have had to be considered.

I take it that the Secretary of State has no intention—assuming that the resolution is passed tonight—of taking back any of the moneys that he intends to transfer from the GLC to LRT in the succeeding year, as in the money resolution, or to abate his own contribution out of taxes through the consolidated fund by a similar amount. I assume that all the additional revenue, over and above the requirements for this year, will be used for improving the service or reducing fares. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman can give me that assurance.

Mr. Ridley: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance categorically.

Mr. Spearing: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. I hope that at least we understand rather more than we did before the debate. The disgraceful way in which the right hon. Gentleman tied up the finances and operations of LRT is one of the reasons why we are right to probe these matters. People will always be suspicious of the right hon. Gentleman whenever the word "buses" is spoken, whether in London, Merseyside or any of the conurbations, because the difficulties that he has found himself in tonight will be magnified many times if he pursues other legislation now before the House.

11.28 pm

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): I did not serve on the Committee on the Bill. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) seems to believe that only hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee may speak in the Chamber on matters that may arise once the Bill in question has become an Act and has been queried in the courts. That is a strange doctrine, especially from an hon. Member who may not have been in the House for very long.

What moves me to speak is what, if I were not in the House of Commons, I would regard as the humbug and hypocrisy of the Secretary of State. I understand that I am not allowed to use those words. I shall therefore talk about the right hon. Gentleman's brazen effrontery in daring to talk about the robbery of the four million ratepayers of London. That from a prominent member of the Government who for the past five years, have drastically cut rate support grant for London ratepayers by hundreds of millions of pounds, thus forcing up rates in all London boroughs, irrespective of their political complexion. Only today, the Government have forced through the House the first ever water tax in our history. Charges for Londoners will now rise by 10 per cent. instead of 3 per cent. I remind the Secretary of State, who probably does not know about these things, that there are no rebates on water rates, unlike general rating. The poorer section of the community will suffer as a result of what the House has done today.

The chairman of LRT recently unveiled the business plan. He was kind enough to organise a reception for London Members of Parliament. That was good, this being the first year of LRT's operation. The Secretary of State is suggesting that LRT is running its affairs much more efficiently than the GLC ran London Transport. The forecasts that many of my hon. Friends made in Committee, and which people outside made, are being shown to be true. There have been disproportionate fare increases and cuts in services. The 275 route which runs through my constituency on Sundays is being cut out. It is a double-decker bus route which runs principally to and from the Claybury mental hospital in north east London. Many elderly and disabled people use that service to visit friends at Claybury. Other services are available, but people in my constituency and neighbouring ones will now have to use three or four bus services to get to Claybury on a Sunday. That is expensive and inconvenient.

The 275 service is being cut out only because, according to LRT, it does not have enough passengers.

[Mr. Eric Deakins]

That is what the argument about the control of London's transport has been all about. We cannot expect every bus service to make a profit. We have always accepted that unprofitable but socially desirable services should be cross-subsidised by the profitable ones. The cut would not have been made under the GLC, but it has happened under LRT. It is the beginning of a long process of the attrition of London's bus services.

We will also have more one person operated buses. Some say that they are more economic in that only one person is employed. Some years ago, when London Transport was keen on introducing one person operated buses, it decided after an experimental period that it would limit the proportion of one person operated buses bacause, although it saved money, it held up passengers, held up traffic and was not good for business people. Under LRT's business plan there is a massive increase in the number of one person operated buses. It will save money but I question whether it will make a more efficient service for ratepayers and public transport users.

Many people who support the GLC and oppose its abolition might have thought that abolishing London Transport and establishing an undemocratic quango under the Secretary of State would make no difference. They are wrong. The greatest difference will be felt by poorer people in my part of London. That is insupportable, as it comes on top of many other burdens that the Government have imposed on them. Therefore, I shall vote against this motion and in favour of my right hon. Friend's amendment. I hope that the Opposition will carry its views with it and vote against the Bill when it eventually comes to the House.

11.37 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I apologise for popping in and out of the debate, but the Local Government Bill is in Committee upstairs. The Government are dragging the House deeper and deeper into the affairs of local government, to the point that this place is becoming like a mega town hall. At some stage someone will no doubt suggest that Mr. Speaker should be addressed as Mr. Mayor. All hon. Members must by now think that it is time for the Government to draw back because they are making life impossible for both hon. Members and democratically elected councillors in town and county halls.

The issue can be sufficiently starkly and simply put for even the average Tory Member to understand. It is that the Secretary of State broke the law. What is worse, he broke his own law. The fact that he acted illegally is compounded with incompetence — he did not even understand the law that he had taken through the House. That puts into context the Government's position vis-a-vis local councillors. They lecture councillors about breaking the law and constantly accuse them of abusing their powers.

The Widdicombe inquiry will not be impartial—it is a fig leaf. Tory Members ask when these abuses will be stopped, which shows that they have already prejudged the issue of local government. In reality the purpose of the inquiry is to produce sufficient evidence for the Government to move strongly against local government spending under sections 137 and 142. However, when the Government abuse their position and break the law they merely change the law, and retrospectively at that.

If a councillor had broken the law as the Secretary of State has done, there would have been an outcry from Conservative Members. I can imagine the articles in the loony Right-wing rags, such as *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and *The Times*. While we are getting the Secretary of State off the hook this evening, I remember Claycross in 1972, when councillors did the decent thing and defied an appalling piece of legislation. Many of them are still suffering from the imposition of bankruptcy and are unable to hold elected office. However, when the Government break the law, they simply change that law. Tonight we are witnessing the Government's double standards, which stink to high heaven and call into question their position and statements about occupying a higher moral stand point than local councillors.

In the judgment of 11 January the judge said that the Secretary of State had acted

"unlawfully, irrationally and procedurally improperly in giving a direction which exceeded his statutory powers without consideration of all the relevant material and without consultation with the GLC".

What an indictment of a Minister. He should feel ashamed of himself. I can only hope that at some time in the near future he will do the decent thing and offer his resignation.

I raised this issue at Question Time on 14 January, soon after the High Court judgment. The Secretary of State came to the Dispatch Box and said that the matter was sub judice. At best, that was a deliberate attempt to prevent debate in the House; at worst, it was a deliberate attempt to mislead the House. On that score, too, he should offer the House an apology. The Secretary of State had not appealed at that time; he was only thinking about whether to appeal. One understands now that his officials advised him that there would not be much point in appealing, because he would lose. That is why we have this Ways and Means motion and the Bill that will follow.

The Secretary of State will ask the GLC to pay money to London Regional Transport which that body does not need. That point is crucial, and we discussed it at length in Committee on 15 March last year, on what is now the London Regional Transport Act 1984. I was a member of that Committee, and I looked up what the Secretary of State said. He said:

"It may help if I start by underlining the principles on which I intend to operate the clause."

He was talking about clause 49.

"The normal processes of determining the subvention to LT by the GLC will be gone through, and most of them have been . . . The GLC having determined both the revenue and the capital amount, we shall expect it to pay us that amount for the full year. However, that amount is not to be taken entirely at its face value because we must be careful that neither the Government demand too much from the GLC nor that the GLC gives too little to LRT. I hope that the matter can be agreed sensibly and without difficulty. It is not my intention to take more through the clause than is strictly necessary for running LRT in the year in question, so that it shall not end up with a surplus. That is our firm intention but I am sure that the Committee will agree that it is almost impossible to get it plumb right when we are working for a year ahead and do not know what the circumstances of that year will be."

He went on to repeat:

"There is no intention of trying to make a surplus . . . However, there is no intention of trying to get more out than we should."

That is what the Secretary of State said in Committee, but he is now suggesting that he should be allowed to do precisely the opposite to what he promised the Committee in 1984.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who was leading for the Opposition on that Committee, said:

"I do not think that the Secretary of State's assurance is worth a great deal. If I were a London ratepayer . . . I should not put much store by that promise." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee B;* 15 March 1984, c. 1114-17.]

How right my hon. Friend was. But, of course, that had no influence on the Secretary of State, and the Bill duly received its Royal Assent on 26 June.

As to consultation, officials of the Department of Transport promised that there would be consultation with the GLC before issuing the direction. But no such consultation occurred. That is why Mr. Justice McNeill found this contrary to the principles of natural justice. Had the Secretary of State consulted the GLC and taken account of its reponse, he could have avoided an illegal direction, and especially avoided an error of £10·2 million, which was the amount that the GLC had already paid that year.

The Secretary of State's illegality is compounded by his incompetence and his impoliteness in not consulting the GLC, which could have told him that he was making an error. Indeed, in July 1984, the GLC told him that he was making an error and that, in its view, the direction was unlawful. However, the GLC said that it would continue to make payments without prejudice to maintain the continued operation of LRT's services. The GLC was not prepared to play ducks and drakes with London's transport services, despite all the accusations that have been made by Conservative Members. It told the Secretary of State that he had got it wrong, but the Secretary of State, in his usual arrogant manner, decided completely to ignore the GLC because he did not believe that it was worth consulting that body. We now see the consequences of his incompetence.

I could have raised many points tonight, but I shall content myself with one that was mentioned by Conservative Members. The Secretary of State says that it would be improper for this money, which has been taken from ratepayers for one purpose, to be used for another. He says:

"I cannot accept . . . that the money belongs to the GLC. The GLC precepted the ratepayers of London for the express and explicit purpose of passing the money on to LRT. How it can then be said that because it rated the money it should not give it to LRT baffles me."—[*Official Report,* 29 January 1985; Vol. 72, c. 171.]

Of course, most things baffle the Secretary of State, including his own legislation, but let me answer the point.

The argument that he is putting, which is supported by other hon. Gentlemen, and particularly by the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples), who also raised that point during questions in January, is contrary to all normal local government practices and to all past practices between the GLC and the LTE. The GLC precepted for 1984-85 on the assumption that the council would maintain fare levels, secure close integration between London Transport and British Rail and extend dial-a-ride schemes, concessionary schemes, and so on. That was the reason why the GLC precepted at the levels. that it did. But, of course, all that has since changed, because LRT is now busy changing all the policies upon which the GLC precepted ratepayers in the first instance.

It is outrageous that the Secretary of State should now ask the GLC to pass over money to London Regional Transport which it does not need, in order that LRT should create a revenue surplus. Consider that against what the Secretary of State said in Committee last year. The GLC would not voluntarily hand this money over, but if it is required to do so it will be against all good financial management in local government.

In 1983-84, for example, the GLC's budgeted grants in transport were £235 million, but only £173 million was paid. The balance was used to reduce the precept for 1984-85. It is quite absurd and contrary to the interests of London ratepayers that moneys must be spent for the purpose for which they were precepted regardless of need or changed circumstances. It is absolutely crazy, and no sensible, well-managed local authority would do it. That surplus could be used, as it has been used in the past, to reduce the transport precept being required from London. That is how we could use the £50 million which the Secretary of State is to steal from the GLC by legal means, and we shall be discussing the 35 per cent. increase in the transport precept very shortly.

So much for the good management of London Regional Transport now that it has found itself in the bungling, incompetent hands of the Secretary of State, who is trying to screw the ratepayers of London in order to build up a revenue surplus in LRT which it does not need and should not have because of the assurances which the Secretary of State gave the Committee on the London Regional Transport Bill.

On the question whether the short LRT Bill should be a money Bill, what concerns me is that if it is to be a money Bill—I understand that the Government want it to be, according to a note that I have of the minutes of discussions that took place between officials of the Department of Transport and the GLC—there will be certain constraints operating on the House of Lords when that Bill goes to it. I find it rather strange that the Government should be talking in terms of its being a money Bill, because I have always understood that it was only Mr. Speaker who decided what Bill was to be a money Bill. I hope that we shall be able to decide this at a later date, because it would appear to me that the Government, by insisting that this should be a money Bill, will prevent the Lords from bringing to bear their judgment and their decisions on retrospective legislation, which is what this is all about.

If the Government are able to achieve a compliant House of Lords by denying it the right properly to debate and discuss that Bill, they will thereby continue their practice of acting in a high-handed and undemocratic fashion, using the language of democracy while they ride roughshod over democracy, and in this case over the ratepayers of London, who, unfortunately, now find that their transport system, which was previously under the control of a democratically accountable Greater London council, is in the hands of an incompetent, bungling, undemocratic and unlawfully acting Minister, the Secretary of State.

11.49 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I shall be brief, given the hour and the relevant comments which Opposition Members have already made.

The whole substance of the Secretary of State's speech was to describe the GLC as robbers and tricksters, whereas the court's decision—I do not apologise for repeating it again—was that the Secretary of State

"acted unlawfully, irrationally and procedurally improperly in giving a direction which exceeded his statutory powers without consideration of all relevant material and without consultation with the Greater London Council".

For the right hon. Gentleman to describe the GLC as robbers and tricksters is really a case of him being caught with his hand in the till.

I was reminded of the fact that a few years ago there was a campaign in the east end of London with the slogan

"George Davis is innocent, OK?"

The same could be said of the right hon. Gentleman's speech. He made out that he was innocent, even though the court decision came out against him. I remind the Secretary of State that George Davis eventually got sent down, and the same may well apply to him.

In many respects the right hon. Gentleman has also misled the House. When on 14 January my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) asked a question, the right hon. Gentleman said that his Department was in the process of appealing and, therefore, the matter was sub judice. We have now discovered that he has not appealed and has no intention of appealing, because he knows that he would lose.

The right hon. Gentleman also misled the House on the question of the subsidy. His Department's plans to ensure that LRT had a subsidy was contrary to his assurance to the House and the Standing Committee. This is important, because the subsidy was one of the essential pieces of evidence by which the court found against the Secretary of State.

In spite of the right hon. Gentleman's rantings against the GLC, the council has acted legally and responsibly throughout. It informed him in July of last year that it considered that his direction was unlawful. That proved to be correct. The GLC said that it would continue the payments to LRT without prejudice in order to maintain the operation of LRT's services. The GLC has made it clear that it has always been prepared to pay overgrants to meet LRT's operating needs in 1984-85.

The Minister has robbed the GLC of between £50 million and £73 million. That reveals an amazing level of incompetence, given that the right hon. Gentleman was responsible for the writing of the Bill and for steering it through Committee. It is clear that he did not understand its provisions.

For the Secretary of State now to bring forward this retrospective legislation and Ways and Means resolution is very much a fraud. It merely covers up his own incompetence. However, it must be introduced in this way because the Secretary of State would lose any appeal. It is not in the interests of the ratepayers of London. If the Money were paid back to the GLC, it could be used to reduce the GLC's precept to the London boroughs and thus the London boroughs' rates would be reduced. Taking that £50 to £73 million, which is relevant this year, and applying it to later years will result in London ratepayers being deprived of the benefit that the Secretary of State can claim—only two thirds of the amount in later years, with the Exchequer having to pay one third. The Secretary of State is robbing London's ratepayers of one third of the £50 to £73 million of which they would have received the direct benefit. That extra bill will have to be faced by the ratepayers.

The Government said that the GLC precepted for the amount, so what did it matter? The GLC, of course, was forced to precept for the additional sum. If the same principle were applied to all local authorities in the country, it would send the Secretary of State's rate-capping right through the roof. Indeed, there would never be any savings from underspending. The argument is therefore a phoney one.

The court made it clear that the money is GLC money and should be paid back to be used for the benefit of London's ratepayers. This retrospective legislation and the motion amount to robbery and trickery by the Secretary of State.

11.56 pm

Mrs. Dunwoody: With the permission of the House.

There are occasions when the House witnesses hon. Members who cynically try to distort the truth or who, for reasons of self-aggrandisement or as a result of other less attractive characteristics, seek to obfuscate rather than to clarify.

I believe that the Secretary of State should have come to the House today and said plainly that what he was doing had been found to be unlawful, that he knew himself to be wrong and that he therefore accepted the verdict of the courts and would not seek to bring in legislation. I believe that he should never have put retrospective legislation before the House. It is not in the interests of the House that a Government with a large majority should use that muscle in a blatant and unacceptable manner to insist on legislation which has been tried and tested in the courts and found to be sadly wanting.

I believe that the Secretary of State should have come to the House at least not to hand out cheap jibes against the GLC. He should have come to the House to apologise and to say he was wrong to have sought to suggest that the matter was sub judice because his Department was appealing when he knew that that was not so. He should have said that he was wrong to have insisted on legislation which would have a direct effect upon the ratepayers of London and upon the transport services that the ratepayers of London have a right to expect. Above all, the Secretary of State should have said that he would not move such a motion late on a Thursday night when the entire House could not be present to examine in detail the implications of the Government's proposals.

I believe that there has been a misuse of the Government's large majority. In every sense it has been a discreditable episode. If I were the only hon. Member present in the Chamber, I would still vote against this piece of chicanery. The matter is too important to be handled with levity and contempt. The Secretary of State should have had the decency to come to the House and apologise.

11.58 pm

Mr. Ridley: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall deal with some of the lesser points before coming to deal with the bogus hypocrisy that has effused from the Labour Benches. I shall first ask a question of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). She said in her first speech that, if the £50 million had been

left with the GLC, it would all have gone to reduce the rates. Would that happen? I doubt it, and I do not think that she will be thanked by her paymasters in county hall for having gone so far as to say that.

I confirm to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) that any surplus from the money raised for LRT, either by the GLC or, in due course, by the ratepayer levy, that is surplus to the requirements of one year will be paid into LRT's accounts for use in future years.

Mr. Spearing: Although we do not always agree with the right hon. Gentleman's policies or actions, he is always courteous, so I am grateful to him for giving way. The £50 million over current requirements that he is collecting, which he says will be put to the use of LRT in succeeding years, he is taking from the ratepayers ahead of need. Why did he not go to the GLC and, on a gentleman's agreement, take only the amount that it was not going to send back to the ratepayers? Would that have not been a more satisfactory and businesslike way to go about the matter?

Mr. Ridley: I shall come to that point. I hesitated to give way to the hon. Gentleman because I prefer to make my own speech in my own order.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) said that the service has deteriorated, but I must disagree with him. It is improving rapidly, as is the efficiency of LRT. However, if he has a particular point, about the service, I am sure that he will find the chairman very willing to help. I shall draw the attention of the chairman to the hon. Gentleman's concern, and I am sure that the chairman will take any opportunity to get in touch with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deakins: I have already taken the matter up with the chairman of LRT, and it was on the basis of his reply that I made my brief remarks about the fact that the service is being cut for financial reasons when it is really a social service.

Mr. Ridley: There have been very small, if any, cuts for that reason, but I do not know the circumstances of the case that the hon. Gentleman raised, and I shall draw his point to the attention of the chairman.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is not here.

Mr. Spearing: He is in Committee.

Mr. Ridley: He did not hear my opening speech, and he will not hear my closing speech. He left me several questions—to whom would I be answering if I answered them? To answer one of them, this is a money Bill not by virtue of the Government's wish but because money Bills are things that raise money and are certified as such by Mr. Speaker, and the Government have no choice in a matter such as that.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, and one or two other hon. Members, made the error of saying that rates for LRT will rise by 35 per cent. This is not true. The old total—the figure for the current year—raised by the GLC was £340 million, of which the ratepayers paid just about three quarters. When we debate the levy order the hon. Lady will hear that the total to be raised for next year is £323 million — that is, less. The ratepayers' contribution will be two thirds of that amount. How can two thirds of £323 million be more than three quarters of £340 million? It cannot be.

The rate in London has gone up because the Greater London Council drew down its balances last year and spent them. The result is that this year it has had to raise its rates for non-London Regional Transport purposes by a very great amount — indeed, by more than the relief to ratepayers that removing LRT from it has produced. The GLC has taken the opportunity of not having to finance LRT next year to increase its rate by almost the same amount as has been saved.

The hon. Lady asked how the GLC was going to pay this money. I do not believe that the GLC has any excuse for not paying this money since the London Regional Transport Bill was published in December 1983 and certainly since the Committee stage in March 1984, and for not planning on the assumption that their maximum exposure in 1984-85 would be £360 million. Indeed, even after the judgment on 11 January, the GLC has been told that the Government intend to contest the effects of the court's ruling. There has never, therefore, been a time during the past 15 months when the GLC could reasonably have assumed that it was not liable to pay.

The new legislation concedes £23 million to the GLC. It will have £23 million more than the maximum amount that it might have expected. I should have thought that that was a bonus. When the Department of the Environment proposed to rate-cap in December, the position was that the direction which had been made had not been overturned. But we had conceded the £10·2 million. Therefore the reserve position of the GLC must be £12·9 million easier than when the rate cap was proposed.

Several Opposition Members asked about the surplus. The total amount that was necessary for London Regional Transport this year was not just what it spent. It was what it incurred in liabilities. It has necessarily incurred transitional costs which will now show as accrued liabilities for 1984-85 in this year's accounts. Therefore, LRT is carrying forward a reserve to meet those charges. There is nothing special about that. At the beginning of the present financial year it carried forward £24 million from the previous year. The GLC left it with that amount of money as a working reserve. The Government have left it with a similar amoount of money. LRT needs money. It is not a question of a surplus but of money that is strictly necessary for LRT.

The other point that was made was that I had overturned the judgment of the court or in some way had broken the law. I reject entirely that suggestion. The only way that a judgment can be overturned is on appeal. On this occasion I have invited the House to change the law since it turns out not to be the law that the House was led to believe it would be. I would remind the hon. Lady of the Travel Concessions (London) Act 1982, which was the result of the Bromley case. The House of Lords decided that the Greater London council did not have the power to allow concessionary fares to be paid, although it had been doing so. I suppose that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich would say that that was disgraceful, illegal and unlawful, but the Government legislated to overturn that decision of the courts.

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: No. The hon. Gentleman can sit and listen to this. He had some pretty unfair things to say to me.

Mr. Dobson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that there is extreme delicacy in saying that an hon. Member is misleading the House, but I think that it would be advisable for you to suggest to the Secretary of State that he looks to what the Solicitor-General said——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman is raising a point of argument and not a point of order for me.

Mr. Ridley: I shall repeat the matters which seem to have caused the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) to be puzzled. There are the decisions of the courts on section 49, which we are discussing, and on whether the GLC had power to grant travel concessions. The courts found that what we believed was not the case. When the House was invited to legislate to give the GLC power to grant travel concessions in the 1982 Act, there were no accusations of impropriety and illegality, because the House was invited to change the decision of the courts. Of course there were not. I have never heard such a partial argument as that which has been advanced by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich. I advise the House that there is no foundation for the charges which have been levelled.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) said, "God help the ratepayers." It is the Government who will help them and not God. They will do so by proposing that the money resolution should be accepted by the House. If it is not, London ratepayers will pay twice for that which has been provided by London Regional Transport. There will be an uncovenanted windfall to the GLC which will not be used to the benefit of the ratepayers. They will be made to pay twice for something and they have not been told what it will be. I invite the House to support the motion.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 67, Noes 150.

Division No. 96] **[12.14 am**

AYES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Clay, Robert
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Godman, Dr Norman
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Mikardo, Ian
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Richardson, Ms Jo
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Torney, Tom

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Norman Hogg &
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hickmet, Richard
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Mather, Carol
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Silvester, Fred
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Squire, Robin
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Wheeler, John
Wood, Timothy

Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Ian Lang.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,

That provision may be made specifying as £258,179,588 the amount which the Greater London Council are to pay to London Regional Transport under section 49 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing resolution by the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Nicholas Ridley, Mr. Secretary Jenkin, Mr. Peter Rees, Mr. John Moore, Mrs. Lynda Chalker, Mr. David Mitchell and Mr. Michael Spicer.

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Secretary Ridley accordingly presented a Bill to make provision specifying as £258,179,588 the amount which the Greater London Council are to pay to London Regional Transport under section 49 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 77.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With the leave of the House, I will put the Question on the motions relating to statutory instruments according to subject.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Rating and Valuation

That the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved

That the draft British Waterways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

That the draft Glasgow Underground (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

That the draft British Alcan Aluminium Limited and Lochaber Power Company (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

That the draft Scottish Electricity Boards (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

That the draft British Gas Corporation (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

That the draft British Railways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

That the draft British Telecommunications plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

Terms and Conditions of Employment

That the draft Redundancy Payments (Variation of Rebates) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

Libraries

That the draft Public Lending Right (Increase of Limit) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 16th January, be approved.

International Immunities and Privileges

That the draft International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (Legal Capacities) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Mather.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Human Embryos

12.24 am

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): I beg to ask the leave of the House to present a petition signed by over 1,400 of my constituents who feel strongly about the need to enshrine in legislation protection for the human embryo as a real living individual human being, and the need to oppose those practices which violate his or her human dignity or right to life. I share their concern.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Limited List Prescribing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Mather.]*

12.25 am

Mr. Thomas Torney (Bradford, South): When Nye Bevan introduced our National Health Service, he had to fight on two fronts. One was the doctors who were apprehensive about becoming civil servants and so possibly becoming subject to the dictates of some Government. The other was the Tory party. While the doctors finally agreed to become perhaps reluctant partners, they are now enthusiastic supporters of what was the finest Health Service in the world. They now believe that the welfare of patients counts before savings for the Treasury, whereas the Tory party against which in those days Nye Bevan was battling to establish this great service — from these very Benches — was opposing its establishment. It fought our Health Service every inch of the way.

The Tories have not changed. They believe now, as they did then, that only those who can afford to be sick should be allowed to be sick.

Restricting prescription strikes at the heart of our Health Service. To tell a doctor that he must take into account the patient's ability to pay before he decides what the patient needs is criminal and makes a mockery of the Prime Minister's statement:

"The Health Service is safe with us."

The National Health Service was founded by the Labour party upon the principle that the best health services should be available to all and that money should not be the passport to better or quicker treatment. The Government seek to undermine those unimpeachable principles by stealth.

I have a serious constituency problem created by those proposals. The city of Bradford has a serious unemployment problem. It has well over the national average of unemployment. Those unemployed people could never afford to pay the full price for the drugs at the chemists.

Bradford has an aging population. With the help of many of the drugs that the Government now propose to ban, people are living longer. The forecasters say that Bradford will have even more older people in the years ahead.

Those elderly folk are more likely to fall sick, often with serious and painful maladies. Many are pensioners on supplementary benefit who could never afford to purchase the drugs now prescribed for them under the National Health Service.

I have received hundreds of handwritten letters from constituents. I will quote from just a few. I apologise for any mispronunciation of chemical names as I am not a doctor. One constituent writes:

"I collected my prescription for Fybogel and was informed that the Government propose that it will be on private prescription only, from the 1st of April.

It is the only product I can have for my condition as everything else including pain killers give me a horrible itchy rash from top to toe. I am a pensioner aged sixty eight".

She complains that the cost would be too much for her to pay.

Another writes:

"I am very concerned regarding Propain tablets"

which the doctor gives her for arthritis

"as I suffer mostly in my knees and joints."

That constituent, aged 77, also complains about the high cost which she could never afford.

Another objects to the Government withdrawing the drug Gaviscon from the prescription list as he suffers from a hiatus hernia and has been told that it is

"imperative that I be treated with Gaviscon or a similar drug."

He, too, is afraid that he will no longer be able to get the drug.

Another pathetic letter begins:

"To look at me now you would not tell I am arthritic, but I have suffered from Arthritis for 33 years. In that space of time I have progressed from being crippled to quite active, but believe me at times the pain is excruciating. Obviously after coping for so long I only take painkillers when really necessary.

I am only 35 yrs. old now, so if we take the average life-span I have another 35 yrs. of life left, with the distinct possibility that my Arthritis will worsen. I have faced this gruesome thought in the past, with confidence, as I have known if necessary I can take Distalgesic tablets when the pain is bad, but how can I and thousands of others now face the future, when we are given to understand we will no longer be able to obtain Distalgesic tablets on prescription?"

Many people who attend my regular surgeries tell me that their doctors have said that there is no generic alternative to the antacids asilone and mucaine, the analgesics distalgesic and equagesic or the laxative dobinex.

Branded drugs are made by reputable companies to the highest standards, backed by years of research at very high cost. Generic drugs may not be made by reputable companies. They may be produced in the far east or in eastern European countries. They may be sold cheaply without the Government safeguards and inspections that we have here. Will the National Health Service compensate patients if something goes wrong?

Another example of lack of consideration by the Department is the fact that only one benzodiazepine has been left in the Government formula — diazepam, otherwise known as valium.

I have it on the best authority that medical opinion is very concerned about the effects of the continued use of valium over a prolonged period. There are newer, more effective and less harmful drugs that could be used, but the Government have taken them off the list.

I have had letters galore from doctors, health authorities, community health councils and, above all, the BMA, all condemning the Government's pernicious scheme.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Is not valium some 14 times more expensive than a clinically identical substitute? Does the hon. Gentleman seriously suggest that the Government should, by including valium on the list, waste resources that could be used elsewhere in the NHS?

Mr. Torney: The hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to what I said. I said that valium is one of the few drugs that has been left on the list, although there are newer——

Mr. Yeo: It is not.

Mr. Torney: That is my information. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may scream as much as they like, but I have it on good medical authority that valium is on the list, although there are newer and better drugs. The medical profession does not like valium because of the danger to the patients if it is used for a long time.

In 1982, the informal working group on effective prescribing reported to the Secretary of State for Social Services. According to the report,

"There are in the region of 6,500 preparations available for prescribing at NHS expense and the new BNF lists some 4,500 of these. In comparison, the average prescriber is said to use a range of 200-300 drugs. A number of schemes for the introduction of a national Limited List of drugs has been proposed at various times by different people. We have considered these, but it is our view that a limitation on prescribing at NHS expense would be interpreted by some doctors as an attempt to curtail their clinical freedom. Since we have not seen any convincing evidence that suggested financial benefits would outweigh the administrative problems in drawing-up and maintaining the list, we have concluded that such a move would not be justified and we do not recommend any measures to introduce nationwide a Limited List."

On 9 January 1985, a resolution of the BMA council stated that

"The Government's intention to limit by Regulation the range of drugs available for prescription on the NHS from 1 April 1985 is in our opinion contrary to the spirit of the NHS Act. The Act lays a duty on the Secretary of State to provide a comprehensive health service, including the supply of proper and sufficient medicines ordered by a medical practitioner, free of charge except in so far as charges (e.g. prescription charges) are made under any enactment."

Between 8 December 1983 and 8 November 1984, there was a complete reversal of Government policy. There were no discussions or consultations, and no evidence was produced to explain the reversal of policy. The objections raised by the Department to the introduction of a limited list are still valid and the controversy that followed the announcement on 8 November 1984 proved the accuracy of the conclusion in the departmental paper that the introduction of a limited list would cast doubt on the Government's intentions towards the standard of provision of general medical services in the NHS.

Last but not least, the list makes for double standards in the Health Service. Those who can afford it can have the best that the drug industry can offer, but people who, like most of my constituents in Bradford, are poor, members of a low income group, dependent on pensions or benefits are condemned to suffer pain and hardship for the rest of their lives, and perhaps early death, simply because they cannot afford to pay for the drugs that are available and so that the Tory Government can save money, perhaps to give tax cuts to the better off.

12.39 am

The Minister for Health (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Torney) on his good fortune in the ballot, but I cannot say that I believe that he has made constructive use of it. With respect, his speech on our limited list proposals, on which we are still consulting, comprised an amazing amount of cant and nonsense.

The hon. Gentleman gave his version of the origins of the National Health Service and claimed that we are trying to change it into a service in which treatment is dependent on a patient's means, or ability to afford better treatment. Most of the objections to our proposals come from commercial and professional lobbies, which have obviously spent some of their time briefing the hon. Gentleman. They are perfectly entitled to lobby. The professional interests involved are extremely respectable people such as the British Medical Association. Whatever reasons might be raised against our proposals, I hope to persuade the hon. Gentleman, and anyone else who shares his feelings, that the argument that we face a two-tier service or that the poor and the elderly are threatened with suffering is misplaced.

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

To illustrate his point that elderly patients are at risk, the hon. Gentleman drew heavily on many letters that he has received from patients citing the drugs that they are using. It is obvious that they are not altogether spontaneous letters, because they are written in terms about the drugs that would not ordinarily come immediately to elderly patients. They cite the drugs that they are taking, and most patients do not know the professional name of drugs. Some of the names were given inaccurately, as though a layman was doing his best to give the name. It is quite obvious that, within the hon. Gentleman's constituency, there are some doctors who have been carrying out what I regard as an unethical and unscrupulous campaign by alarming their patients and telling them to lobby their Member of Parliament because they face the risk of pain and suffering because the Government are threatening to withdraw a drug.

A doctor is quite entitled to campaign against any part of the Government's proposals for the NHS if he wants to. We have invited every doctor to make his professional views known to the chief medical officer if he criticises the list that the Government have proposed. It is not right for doctors to alarm patients, such as those who have been writing letters in Bradford, by combining political campaigning with medical advice, thus inspiring patients to write what I accept are heart-rending letters in the hope that the Government will be pressurised into change.

I hope that, faced with these problems, the hon. Gentleman will show his usual concern for his constituents by trying to reassure them and by telling doctors that this is no way in which to conduct a sensible political debate. The hon. Gentleman should tell doctors in his area to respond to the request that they have had. If they are worried about the effect on patients of any changes in the drugs available, they should give their considered opinion, as forcefully as they like, to Ministers and the chief medical officer—our adviser.

The hon. Gentleman has obviously leapt on the opportunity that is provided by the letters to stoke up fears and alarm among the elderly and the poor in his constituency. He is lending himself to an unscrupulous campaign. I strongly regret that he and some of the doctors in his constituency have set about things in that way. If he will not reassure people in Bradford, it is obviously my duty to do so. The Government have no intention of debarring any of the poor or elderly from the treatment, free if necessary, under the NHS that they require. We have every intention that under the NHS it should be possible for doctors and patients to have access to a complete list of preparations, which is sufficient to cope with all the clinical and medical needs of the service.

Mr. Torney: When the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that my constituents would not know the names of their drugs, is he aware that when a doctor gives a patient a presciption to take to the chemist, in 99 out of 100 cases the chemist will write the name of the drug on the bottle for the patient to read? Some old people have been taking a drug for so long that they are well aware of the name of it. How does the Minister account for the fact that the BMA is opposed to the list—surely he does not doubt its bona fides?

Mr. Clarke: The BMA is opposed to the list for a variety of reasons. Some sections of the BMA are advising doctors to campaign in the way that has clearly taken place in Bradford. In some parts of the country pre-prepared letters are presented to patients when they visit their doctor, on which the name of the drug is written by the doctor so that the patient can send it to his Member of Parliament.

Mr. Torney: These are all hand-written letters.

Mr. Clarke: Those are obviously all hand-written letters, but, if the hon. Gentleman explores further, he will discover that one, or probably more than one, practice in Bradford has been inspiring patients in a subtle and varied way to write to him complaining about the proposals. I am not saying that such doctors are bad. All doctors have been asked to give their considered professional opinion, if they wish, to the chief medical officer about a proposal to limit the range of drugs in certain therapeutic categories that will be prescribable on the NHS. Doctors would have been better advised to give their professional opinion and to reserve judgment until they see the final proposals that will be published shortly. It was not right of doctors to campaign in such a way as to cause alarm and anxiety — the hon. Gentleman admitted that — to many frightened elderly patients who had visited the surgery for treatment, reassurance and help.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is it not a fact that the total number of letters received by the DHSS from our doctors in practice amounts to no more than 2 per cent. of doctors and that 1,800 of them either mention a particular commodity or make warm comments about the proposals?

Mr. Clarke: I am not sure of the precise percentage, but I accept that my hon. Friend may well be right. Certainly we have had 1,800 letters from doctors giving constructive comments on the contents of the list and saying which preparations they would like to see on the list, as it was suggested all those concerned should do.

We have not issued a final and definitive list, but a proposal that in certain therapeutic categories it would be wise for the service to restrict the total number of products available because at present the NHS provides a large number of similar, and sometimes identical, products at varying prices. We saw the possibility of making substantial savings for the NHS by restricting that range to the full list that is required to deal with all patients' clinical needs. We therefore issued a list for discussion, and have received the 1,800 responses that I mentioned, and many others from pharmacists and companies in the pharmaceutical industry. The chief medical officer and a panel of distinguished outside experts from all the specialties and areas affected by the proposals are considering what the final list should be. Nothing has yet been taken from the list. Any patient who is told, as the hon. Gentleman was told, that his drug will definitely not be available after 1 April has been misled, because no decisions have been taken about what drugs will be available on 1 April. Anyone who discovers when the final list emerges that the brand of product to which he is used is not available will also discover that the alternative is an equally effective drug, which will do the medical job required at somewhat less cost to the National Health Service.

I cannot emphasise too much the fact that there is no motive to introduce a two-tier service, thus driving

patients to buy their health care, or any of the bizarre theories advanced by the hon. Gentleman. What we are doing here is what we are doing throughout the Health Service — seeking sensible economies that do not adversely affect patient care. We are seeking better value for money for the resources that we put into the National Health Service. We are increasingly trying to maximise the patient care that we obtain for the money that we spend. If we can save up to £100 million on the drugs bill without damaging patients, that will enable us to sustain the increased expenditure on the Health Service that we are planning for next year and the two years beyond that.

The subject of cutting drug costs has been examined for some time, including, in 1982, by the expert committee that produced the report cited by the hon. Gentleman, which is usually known as the Greenfield report. In all the discussions that we have had about drugs costs, one thing unites the Government, the BMA, the vast bulk of the medical profession and the pharmacists: everyone is agreed that it is legitimate to consider ways of reducing the drugs bill. Anyone who is interested in the NHS appreciates that it is undesirable that our drugs bill has continued to increase at the rate that it has. It is increasing by more than 5 per cent. above the general rate of inflation each year, and is now £1,400 million in total. The number of preparations and prescriptions is increasing, as is the cost per prescription. If that money continues to be drawn into an ever-increasing drugs bill, it will be more difficult for the Health Service to maintain other services. Everyone has co-operated in searching for ways to reduce drugs costs.

The Greenfield committee considered various methods, and recommended the system known as generic substitution. I will not burden the House with the details of that tonight, because it is not the issue raised by the hon. Member for Bradford, South. The Government rejected it because of the immense damage that it would have done to the British pharmaceutical industry, and because it was opposed by the British Medical Association. The BMA believed that it would create considerable difficulties if a doctor prescribed one drug and the pharmacist dispensed another. It was worried about instances of a doctor prescribing a drug and never knowing what the pharmacist eventually dispensed to the patient as the cheapest generic equivalent.

It is true, as the hon. Gentleman said, that the Greenfield report mentioned a limited list, and he fairly and accurately quoted the terms, saying that the committee was aware of it. It believed that some doctors would argue that their clinical freedom would be threatened if such a list were introduced. However, only some would do so, because it is extending the concept of clinical freedom a little far to say that it means that not only should doctors have the full ability to treat all the clinical needs of their patients, but that they should be able to prescribe any product on the market at any price, even though a cheaper alternative may be available.

The Greenfield report rejected a limited list because there was no evidence that financial savings could be made. Since 1982, we have done substantially more work on that aspect. We have considered experience here and abroad, and international experience is very enlightening. We realised that the paucity of evidence could be remedied. When one considers the experience abroad, it is plain that, although no country has exactly the same provisions for drugs as Britain does—every country has variants in drug pricing and policies—but every one of the Western developed countries has some element of selection of products and some element of listing of drugs in its health care policy.

More to the point, we are certainly the only country with our present system whereby every product that obtains a licence can come on to the market at a price determined by the manufacturing company and is immediately available for prescription by any doctor in the National Health Service, paid for by the taxpayer without question. The number of products available under the NHS has gone up to 18,000 and doctors can select any one of those.

I believe that the list we are producing will eventually be seen by doctors as useful guidance, based on the work of an expert panel which has sifted through all the advice we have received from the professions and set out a full list that will allow doctors to deal with all needs in these limited categories of drugs. Two thirds of the drugs we are talking about can be bought over the chemist's counter without a doctor's prescription, anyway. The prescription-only drugs are largely the tranquillisers, which are often criticised — the benzodiazepines, many people have argued, are over-prescribed in this country and not always prescribed carefully. Valium is a criticised drug and is not on our provisional list, contrary to what the hon. Gentleman asserts.

We will look at all the drugs and select those which are essential to patients out of the very wide range of very similar tranquillisers available on the Health Service at the moment, and similarly with sedatives and some sleeping pills. But we have very carefully confined the categories of drugs we are dealing with. We have not touched the life-saving drugs; we have not touched many of the more advanced areas. We believe that we can safely introduce a system within this section of the drugs Bill that does not adversely affect patients and saves money for the Health Service.

We are the real friends of the Health Service, by improving its efficiency and its cost-effectiveness, and making sure that its resources are devoted to patient care. The hon. Gentleman is rehearsing old arguments, old prejudices. He has not got any ground for rehearsing them on this occasion. He has been misled by a commercial campaign and the rather odd behaviour of some of his doctors into believing that there is a cause to be pursued here, which I believe, when he thinks about it more carefully, he will realise should not have been pursued on this particular ground.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 8 February 1985

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.35 am

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It gives me great pleasure to move the Second Reading of this Bill. I am pleased that the House is reasonably full on this Friday morning. It is often perplexing to many people that we, who represent a very urban society, always devote great time, effort and care to discussing rural, wildlife and countryside matters. I think that it is no exaggeration to say that this private Member's Bill has probably resulted in the heaviest mailbags that some hon. Members have had for many a long year. However, I do not apologise for that, because it shows the interest that exists throughout the country for the careful preservation of our countryside.

However, we should not be surprised that our countryside is threatened. As the Minister has said, the forces of agriculture have changed dramatically in the past 30 years and we must ensure that we have the legislation not to inhibit agriculture—obviously farmers must do their job and the countryside cannot be "fossilised"—but to ensure that we do not allow the unbridled progress of agriculture completely to destroy our countryside and environment.

As we have so little countryside, we must ensure that it is of a high quality. As a small, densely populated nation, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that we get the balance right. Because there is so much congestion, we often find that the countryside comes right in to many of our towns. I represent, and live in, one of the most highly urbanised parts of the country, the Tyne and Wear metropolitan county. In that small, densely populated county, we have no fewer than 383 miles of footpaths, and 23 sites of special scientific interest, with a further eight in the pipeline. That is an example of how the countryside encroaches on our towns, and I think that that is why both Opposition Members, representing largely urban areas, and Conservative Members, representing rural and mixed areas, are concerned about the issue. That is the background to the Bill.

The Bill seeks to amend the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which was founded on the basis of co-operation and consultation. There was a belief that the problems and conflicts within our countryside could be resolved by negotiation and conciliation. It would be less than honest if I did not say that some of us were at least sceptical about that approach and even now have doubts about it. Given the situation, and the fact that the Act is four years old, we may feel that some forms of planning controls are necessary. But that is not the path that we are pursuing today. Today I am attempting to persuade the House to amend, add to and build upon the basis of that 1981 Act. I move the Second Reading in that spirit of co-operation and conciliation.

We should like to be converted to the idea that conservation could be attained without this legislation. In drawing up the Bill, I felt that I should take the philosophy of the 1981 Act as its basis. I apologise for the fact that that has meant that the process has been long and slow and that we were, therefore, not able to bring the Bill to the House until Monday. That has meant, however, that it is an agreed Bill and that hundreds of man hours have been spent in drawing it up. I doubt whether any other Bill dealing with the wildlife and countryside has been presented to the House with such wide backing not only from the House but from those concerned with the countryside.

I was pleased to receive a letter signed by most of the active noble Lords saying that they will not attempt to alter the Bill, apart from any amendments made in this House. Of course, the noble Lords can do what they want, but 20 or 30 of the main Lords have given me that pledge. That is useful, because it means the Bill is manageable. That support negates one of the Government's main arguments against introducing it. The Government argue that countryside matters are not manageable. I believe that they are manageable, and I hope to prove that in this Bill.

We have the backing of the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association, all the amenity societies represented in Wildlife Link, the Ramblers Association, the Open Spaces Society and the Nature Conservancy Council, which is the Government's adviser. I was delighted to receive yesterday a telex from the chairman of the Countryside Commission — another Government adviser—saying that his commissioners had met yesterday in Bristol and had decided to endorse the Bill fully.

As if those credentials were not sufficient to show the breadth of the Bill's backing, I was delighted to note the support of the Environment Select Committee. I pay tribute to the Committee's members, including many of those present in the Chamber. I am pleased that the Committee's Chairman, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), is present, and I know that he will probably try to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, to make his point. I am pleased also that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) is here, because he supports my Bill and has worked hard to achieve consensus.

It is difficult to imagine a body interested in the countryside which does not support the Bill. I hope that I am wrong in saying this, but there have been strong rumours that one body of opinion opposes the Bill. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will reassure the House that the Government do not intend to oppose the Bill. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will tell the House that he not only supports clause 2 but realises that this is a minimum and agreed Bill supported by his advisers and all the countryside bodies. This Bill must not be decimated.

[Dr. David Clark]

I hope that the rumours and press leaks saying that the Bill is opposed by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are wrong. If those rumours are true, the Minister will be doing a great disservice to the House and to the countryside.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will my hon. Friend note for the record that, despite the posturing on environmental affairs outside the House by the alliance, alliance Members have not even bothered to attend this debate and hear my hon. Friend's major contribution?

Dr. Clark: The House will note that no member of the Social Democratic party or Liberal party is in the House. That is not surprising. Alliance members occasionally turn up—all four, so to speak—often in the middle of the night. I regret that they are not here today. The Bill has two sponsors among those parties, and I should have liked them to be here today to show us their support. The House and the nation will judge them on their record. I do not want to cast aspersions on them or speculate about why they are not here.

I take seriously one point made in the report by the Select Committee on the Environment. I believe that there has been a general improvement in certain aspects—notably in the attitude of the farming lobby. The National Farmers Union has acted in an exemplary manner towards this legislation. Their assistance in creating the farm and wildlife advisory groups has been a great support. I am more optimistic today than I was four years ago, and we want to build on that optimism. That is why I took so much trouble in trying to achieve such a breadth of support for the legislation.

I do not believe that any hon. Member is surprised to note that the farmers and countryside people support the environment. It is their environment and most of them love the countryside. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the NFU and its supporters support the Bill.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): The hon. Gentleman deserves great praise for getting the NFU so involved in the Bill. It is encouraging to note that, for the first time, the NFU has openly declared that all farmers must seek a balance between production and conservation in the countryside.

Dr. Clark: I happily agree with that point. Without hesitation, I pay tribute to the NFU and the Country Landowners Association, which have tried hard to bring the Bill forward. I am grateful for the time and effort their officers have put into drawing up the Bill. Although the majority of farmers try to conserve the countryside, there are mavericks. I guess that most of those mavericks are not members of the NFU, but I hope that the union will monitor the activities of those who are members of the NFU.

Statutory authorities in rural areas are often dominated by the farming community, and naturally they are reluctant to act against recalcitrant farmers. For example, in the county of Northumberland on two occasions during the past 18 months Farmer Benson was caught polluting a burn, with the result that trout were killed. I have it in writing from the Northumbrian water authority that that farmer was responsible for that pollution, but that the authority was not prepared to take action against farmers. I believe that whoever pollutes a stream—whether he is a farmer or an industrialist—must be punished. I hope that the message will go out from the House that, although we want to work in a spirit of co-operation, people must adhere to the law. That same farmer—he is certainly a maverick—erected a gate across one of the county roads and put up a sign: "Private. Keep Out." Fortunately, Northumberland county council is Labour-controlled and would not stand for this. The sign was quickly taken down.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): The hon. Gentleman can rely in general on the support of farmers and Conservative Members. It would be helpful, however, if he refrained from making too many strongly party political points. It is wrong to suggest that Conservative-controlled councils do not take action against such farmers. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to try to make the point that only Labour-controlled councils are prepared to take such action.

Dr. Clark: I did not want to be too party political but the Labour party is particularly proud that it controls Northumberland and the five northern counties. I apologise to the hon. Member if he thought that I was trying to make a party political point. There are recalcitrant farmers, and we all know that.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): It might help the hon. Gentleman and the House if the hon. Gentleman addressed the House from one of the empty Liberal Benches. He would be able to adopt a more impartial policy there.

Dr. Clark: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman made that point. I hope that he was trying to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Liberal benches were empty. A Liberal representative—the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—has just come into the Chamber. I happen to be the Labour party spokesman on the natural environment and my Bill has the full backing of my colleagues on this side of the House.

I know that the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) is a fair man, but I must remind him that on two occasions last year the Opposition formally offered the Government our co-operation in amending the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. I do not want to labour that point, but the offer was not taken up. As the hon. Member is aware, the Government were not prepared to make time for it. No Conservative Member was prepared to take up the matter—I am not making a party political point—so I took it up.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): If Labour Members wanted to make a party political point, they would want something much stronger. They accept that my hon. Friend has put forward the Bill in a spirit of compromise because it is essential that we make some immediate progress on this matter. If the matter were left to us, we would be aiming for a much stronger measure.

Dr. Clark: I agree with my hon. Friend. We are discussing the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Bill which has been introduced in a spirit of reconciliation. It has wide backing from amenity and farming bodies. We must recognise that there are still problems. I have identified one of them. Such problems must be tackled.

My second main worry—I am making a general, not a party political, point—is that, while the NFU and the vast majority of farmers support the Bill, the main objections appear to be coming from the Ministry of

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. One can only surmise that, because one is not privy to what goes on in the Cabinet and its committees.

I understand that the Ministry is reluctant to take any action which might inhibit it, but it has made noises which suggest that it wants to try to extend environmental control of the countryside. The Bill is a way to do that. That is my second caveat.

I shall run through the main clauses. Clause 1 deals with the badgers. I have sought to amend section 11 of the Act, which deals with the control and killing of wild animals. Many of us thought that the badger problem had been overcome. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) got a Bill through the House with the support of Conservative Members, and we thought that the problems had been overcome by the Badgers Act 1973 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Unfortunately, they were not. It is illegal to take and kill badgers. If people are caught doing that they are punished. However, there have been too many cases lately where people have been caught digging badger setts, but they claim, time and time again, that they were not doing that. I have details of a case in Gosforth park nature reserve in my region where young men all aged about 22 were caught digging a badger sett. It was not possible to convict them, because they claimed that they were not digging for badgers. On occasion, people have been found with fox cubs to try to show that they were digging for foxes.

Such cases have caused many people a great deal of anxiety, because badger digging and baiting is a nasty pastime. I am sure that the House agrees with that statement. Therefore, anything that we can do to tighten up that legislation is welcome. It is a complicated subject to tackle. I am pleased to say that the Home Office has helped me. The Home Secretary saw a deputation of which I was not a member, and offered general support to try to tighten up the legislation. The clause was given to me by the Home Office. I am grateful for its assistance and the time it gave me to try to get this point right.

If the Bill receives a Second Reading, the House may wish, as it has the right, to amend it in Committee. I wish to emphasise that the draft of the clause was given to me by the Home Office. It spent many hours in consultation with interested bodies and its legal experts to try to come up with the right formula. The purpose of the clause is to block the existing loophole and to put the onus of proof on the defence to show that people were not digging for badgers. That is the only way to block the loophole. We are of course prepared to listen to other views in Committee.

Mr. Nicholas Lyell (Mid-Bedfordshire): I support the hon. Gentleman's broad objective of trying to tighten up the Badgers Act 1973. If he studies the clause carefully, he will notice that there is a serious mistake in it—as drafted, it does not seek to change the onus of proof, and it would be a grave mistake to make that its objective. The clause seeks to introduce the concept of recklessness, which will be helpful in stamping out badger baiting. That is what the hon. Gentleman should seek to do.

Dr. Clark: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for making that point. He is parliamentary private secretary to the Attorney-General, so he will have studied the matter. He will be aware that there have been wide consultations among Government Departments on the point. However, of course we shall listen to such points and discuss them in Committee. He is almost certainly right in what he says. That is our objective, and if the form of words is incorrect, it is the one that I received from the Home Office.

Clause 2 is one for which I believe there is overwhelming support; even the Minister is keen. This clause was given to me by the Department of the Environment. It spent many weeks on this clause, which is incredibly complicated. We hope that it blocks the loopholes contained in sections 28 and 29 of the original Act. It provides that, once a site is notified as a designated site, it is protected. There is no loophole. As hon. Members are aware, 14 or 15 sites of special scientific interest have been destroyed as a result of loopholes in those sections. I thank the Government for their help with the clause. I do not need to spell out the need for it, because all hon. Members are aware of it. I hope that the clause will receive overwhelming support.

Clause 3 relates to marine nature reserves. When we discussed the Wildlife and Countryside Bill, there was a feeling that as an island nation we should have some marine nature reserves. It is disappointing that we have not been able to create any. Seven were suggested. Some of them were apparently innocuous—for example, around Lundy island, which is a bird reserve. We were unable to reach agreement on that. When I and my advisers considered the matter, we realised that people thought that the Act was too cumbersome. It gave the power of veto to a number of interested bodies.

No one would deny that interested bodies have a right to be consulted, but I am not sure that they should have the right to veto something of national interest. It would be unheard of in any other sphere of life for one vested interest to have the right of veto. We want interested bodies to be consulted, but the Minister will have the power to make the final decision in the interests of marine nature conservation. I feel that that is the right way to do this, as we might then get some marine nature reserves.

Clause 4 is one of the most important. It deals with the duties of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. We have heard many hot words from the Ministry about how it wants to do something to further conservation, and it has a duty to do so. I have already paid tribute to the wildlife advisory groups and I know the effort that the Ministry has made. I know what it does and that it is trying hard, but there comes a time when we legislators have to give officials a little push. The whole point about bureaucrats and the official machinery is that their own inertia keeps them where they are. It is up to us, as parliamentarians, to give officials a shove in the right direction.

Clause 4 builds on a section in the original Act by which water authorities were required to take account of nature conservation and the environment when carrying out their duties. The clause is taking the Government's form of words and intentions on water authorities and extending them to the Forestry Commission in clause 6 and to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in clause 4. People expect this clause to go through.

The hon. Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) made the point earlier that our agriculture Acts are largely based on the Agriculture Act 1947, which was introduced to try to overcome food shortages in Britain, Europe and the world. We live in a different world now, and, although it is important to produce food — that is the vital role of

[Dr. Clark]

agriculture — we must at the same time protect our environment. That is almost equally important. As the general public — urban as well as rural — gives a fair subsidy to the agriculture industry, the Minister should listen to the voice of the nation on this point.

I hope that clause 4 will influence the philosophy of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the making of grants to farmers, in the provision of advice, which is important because we are talking about conservation and conciliation, and in the Minister's consultations on EC matters. We are told that grants cannot be given because of EC rules, but I am advised that the Dutch Government take a different view. I know that the Minister is interested in, and supports us on, this point. If, when he went to Brussels, he could say that we have domestic legislation that requires us to take into account, and further nature conservation, that would help him in his negotiations.

Clause 5 is also important. As hon. Members know, national park authorities are required to map moors and heathlands. That has been a success, with the one problem of some inconsistency, because each local authority has to judge for itself what is moor and heathland. We felt — we had the support of everybody in this — that the mapping should be extended to cover a wider area, and to cover those areas that it is particularly important to conserve. The decision of the National Parks Authority as to which areas it should map will be taken in consultation with the Countryside Commission so that there is some uniformity, bearing in mind the different characteristics of the national parks.

I want my final point to ring loud and clear from the House today. We are discussing a consensus Bill—that cannot be said too firmly. It has been agreed by all interested parties. I believe that it represents the broad wishes not only of the House but of the overwhelming majority of people. The only rumours — whiffs — of opposition seem to be coming from the Government. I hope that they will listen to voices in the House and will be able to acknowledge that there is a tide of opinion so great that the Bill is the minimum that people will accept. It is less than the Select Committee suggested. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will make it plain that the Government, subject to technical amendments to ensure that the clauses are correct, will accept that this is the right Bill and should have not only a Second Reading but the blessing of the Government in Committee.

10.4 am

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clarke) on his success in the ballot. This is a matter of some envy for me, because, in my 18 years in the House, on the only one occasion that I have been successful in the ballot a general election was called in the middle of the Committee stage. We are glad to note that the hon. Member is at no risk from that.

I also thank the hon. Gentleman for his choice of a Bill giving effect to some of the main recommendations of the Select Committee report on the "Operation and Effectiveness of Part II of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981". The report identified a number of defects in the Act which were admitted to by officials in the Department of the Environment when giving their evidence. However, they told us that no Government time could be made available in this Session for introducing the necessary legislation. Therefore, sites of special scientific interest would continue to remain at very high risk but for the hon. Gentleman's initiative in introducing the Bill.

In passing—this is a matter for the House—it is a pity that urgent legislation such as this has to depend on the lottery of a private Member's Bill. It is sheer coincidence that the Select Committee's inquiry, with the evidence that it was making available, was virtually concluded at the same time as there happened to be an available successful Member in the ballot with a particular interest in this subject. Perhaps the House will consider enabling its Select Committees to promote legislation and to make time available in similar circumstances should they arise again.

Clause 1 deals with badgers, a subject which was not considered by the Select Committee, as it falls outside part II of the Act. However, I am sure that the Committee, if it had considered the matter, would have wished to afford greater protection to badgers than exists at the present. However, I was a little alarmed by the explanatory memorandum to the Bill, which suggests that the burden of proof should shift from the prosecution to the defence because that would imply that we were abrogating a time-honoured principle that a man is presumed innocent until proved guilty. The House will have to think carefully before abrogating one of the most fundamental of principles affecting the liberty of citizens. I was reassured to hear in the exchanges which took place between the hon. Member for South Shields and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) that this is not necessarily the case. Perhaps the explanatory memorandum is wrong, but if that is not so that can be cured in Committee.

Clause 2 is most welcome because it closes what is known as the three-month loophole under section 28. This allows a farmer to damage or destroy an SSSI in the three-month period immediately after receiving a notice from the Nature Conservancy Council, but before formal notification. Many witnesses before our Committee expressed anxiety and gave examples of damage that could be caused, and, in some instances, was caused. I am delighted that the Bill follows the recommendations that the first notice takes effect as if it were formal notification and removes the pre-notification period while allowing the farmer the same time in which to object. However, I regret that the Bill does not follow the Select Committee's recommendation about closing the loopholes in section 29 of the Act.

A similar lacuna to that in section 28 results from the time that it takes the Department of the Environment to consider and prepare nature conservancy orders applicable to sites of special scientific interest which are of national importance. These sites remain vulnerable during the period before an order is made. During that period a farmer may, without fear of sanction, damage or destroy an SSSI of particular national significance. I appreciate that extending the period from three to four months for a potentially damaging operation affords a modest amount of protection as extending the period in which counter action may be taken by making an order.

However, many of the witnesses who appeared before the Select Committee favoured the use of a temporary stop order while a section 29 order was being prepared. The

Committee recommended accordingly. It noted that the intentions of the Department were not sufficiently clear. This was recorded in paragraph 28 of the Select Committee's report. It seems that the hon. Gentleman has allowed the Department to distract his attention from imposing a completely watertight closure of the loophole. I hope that he will give further study to this very technical matter during the Committee stage, when he will have been able to make a closer study of evidence to the Select Committee.

Dr. David Clark: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I raised this point with the Department of the Environment. It is a very complicated matter. In the end we had to use diagrams. I have been assured that this loophole is closed. If it is not, we shall seek to close it at the Committee stage.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but I fear that there may still be gaps through which people can slip, and I think that it would be better to deal with the matter by means of a temporary stop order. There will then be no problems.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I have misunderstood what he is seeking to do, but clause 2(7) seems to create problems. Under this subsection a farmer can make an agreement with the Nature Conservancy Council not to carry out specified operations without obtaining consent. As far as I recall, this was not suggested by any witness who gave evidence to the Select Committee. If my understanding of the subsection is correct, a farmer gives notice that he wishes to carry out a potentially damaging operation under section 28 of the Act. He then agrees to carry it out only if he has obtained consent under the proposed new subsection (6A). He can follow this up by cancelling the agreement that he has made, under the new subsection (6B). If he cancels the agreement in this way he will be entitled to carry out his potentially damaging operation. Therefore, a clever farmer could reduce the four-month protection period to just over one month. I hope that I am wrong in my interpretation of the clause, but I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to that possible further loophole which may unwittingly have been created by the way in which the subsection has been drafted.

Clause 3 gives me particular satisfaction. The failure to create marine nature reserves under the 1981 Act was a matter upon which the Committee received a great deal of evidence. This failure caused great disappointment and acute concern. It was clear from the evidence we received that the Nature Conservancy Council had insufficient powers in the face of determined opposition by the sea fisheries committees and the reluctance of the Ministery of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to intervene. Witnesses posited three possible solutions to the deadlock which had been reached. I note that the hon. Gentleman has decided to go down the route of a weak SSSI-type designation. The evidence that we received from departmental officials showed that this was possibly the most inappropriate route, because SSSIs are all about management and management agreements, whereas marine nature reserves are about regulation and control. Emphasis should be placed upon byelaws and the power of the NCC to initiate those byelaws so as to enable the Secretary of State in appropriate cases to override the obstacles raised by the fisheries committees. That is a point which the hon. Gentleman may wish to reconsider in Committee.

Clause 4 is the Bill's most far-reaching clause. It brings together several recommendations in the Select Committee's report which have attracted the greatest public attention. It requires the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to further wildlife habitat and countryside conservation in the exercise of his duties. It imposes a positive duty which does not at present exist to the extent that was wished for by the majority of witnesses. In paragraph 24 of the Select Committee's report we noted that not only conservation groups but farmers and landowners want agricultural policy to place more emphasis upon conservation.

We also noted that there had been a welcome shift of emphasis in MAFF, but that it had not moved far enough nor fast enough. This is quite understandable. The whole ethos of MAFF, certainly during the majority of the post-war years, has been to increase farming efficiency and productivity in the interests of the nation. However, this has been at the expense of the countryside. As the National Farmers Union told us, the change would involve a major retraining policy by MAFF.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), who gave evidence for the Department of the Environment, told us:

> "It would be easier if MAFF grants were not available for some things that may be damaging environmentally."

This view was supported by the NFU and the Country Landowners Association. The Committee therefore recommended a fundamental change in the approach by MAFF so as to redirect resources towards conservation-conscious methods of farming. The Bill also picks up the specific recommendation that conservation should be a greatly increased priority in the work of ADAS, the agricultural advisory service for farmers.

I am not quite sure of the extent of the several exhortations to MAFF in the latter part of the clause. However, there will still be a need, in accordance with recommendation 4 of the report, to set up a working party to investigate how the duties and structure of MAFF could incorporate a strong conservation element in all agricultural policies. Recommendation 5 of the report is that the Government should urgently undertake a review of the whole use of the rural estate and produce a White Paper. These recommendations are not legislative matters. They are for administrative action. However, I thought it only right to emphasise this aspect of the matter in view of the evidence which so clearly emerged from all those who had an interest in the countryside. The Select Committee made similar observations concerning the Forestry Commission because of the weakness of its conservation policy. That has now been corrected by clause 6.

Sir John Farr: As a country boy, I am following my hon. Friend closely, as he speaks with the benefit of a good deal of experience, but surely he is not suggesting that the main duty of the Ministry of Agriculture should be in the direction of conservation rather than the improvement of agricultural efficiency.

Sir Hugh Rossi: If I gave that impression, I wish to correct it at once. If my hon. Friend studies the Select Committee report he will see that we seek a better balance between the need to produce food and the need to conserve the countryside. Our criticism has been that in the past the

[Sir Hugh Rossi]

thrust was entirely in one direction, to the detriment of the countryside. We suggest that conservation should be considered by MAFF in overall policy matters.

Clause 5 carries out the recommendations for the mapping of moors and heaths. Thus, every clause, except clause 1, follows one or several recommendations of the Select Committee. As I have said, some of the recommendations are not capable of legislation but require administrative action — also, for instance, financial guidelines in respect of management agreements for SSSIs. Others, such as the section 29 loophole and landscape conservation orders in national parks, however, are capable of legislation, although I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's anxiety not to risk losing his Bill by being overambitious and insisting on too much from the point of view of the Department.

Despite my wish for further consideration of certain matters, I regard this as a most welcome Bill and I congratulate and thank the hon. Gentleman once again for introducing it. I am also gratified to know that the hard work of all the members of my Committee has been of some help to the hon. Gentleman in doing that. I look forward very much to the Bill reaching the statute book.

10.21 am

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I too congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on his preparation of the Bill. I am glad that the Chairman of the Select Committee has welcomed it so warmly, and I hope that he and many of his hon. Friends will join us in the Lobby in the event of a Division.

I am, however, disappointed that the initiative has had to come from a private Member. Members who have spoken in various environment and Adjournment debates during the last 12 months have shown the depth and breadth of the consensus in favour of change. One would have hoped for an initiative from the Department of the Environment, perhaps jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture, so that wider proposals could be implemented. I appreciate that discussion would have been necessary and the Department might have seen fit to issue a Green Paper on its proposals before intiating a policy change. It is disappointing to have to rely on a private Member to introduce legislation of this kind.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields referred to the consensus. We are all aware of the pressure both from the unorganised public and from amenity groups. Reference has been made to the change in attitude in the agricultural community and to the development in the philosophy of the National Farmers Union. The Country Landowners Association has also welcomed the Bill. Conservative Members may be interested to know that the CLA has said in relation to the operation of the 1981 Act:

"we accept that its continued success depends on closing loopholes in the legislation which are found to exist."

The Bill must be considered in the light of that. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) spoke for many Opposition Members when he said that if the Bill had been introduced in a politically partisan spirit we should have sought far stronger and more detailed legislation, but we accept that in a private Member's Bill we must confine our attention to closing the loopholes.

We all appreciate the change of attitude in the agricultural community and the Government's appreciation of the stresses and strains between that community and the environmental lobby. Clearly, there is a basic incompatibility between the two interests. Successive Governments have pursued the objective of food production in a way that has inevitably led to the expenditure of public funds on schemes that we now regard as environmentally damaging or even disastrous. I believe that the public, too, recognise that incompatibility between MAFF and the Department of the Environment.

The consensus also depends on greater public awareness and there is now far greater public interest in the countryside and environmental issues than there was 15 or 20 years ago. There is also, especially in my native Wales, a general realisation that unless action is taken quickly to close loopholes and prevent abuses there will be precious little left to conserve.

As a result of serious damage, Wales has lost seven SSSIs since 1981. Details of the damage were given in a parliamentary answer to me on 22 January. Gwent has lost 67 per cent. of its natural broadleaved woodland because of the operations of the Forestry Commission, individual landowners and agriculture. The predations of the Forestry Commission have affected broadleaved woodlands especially in upland areas, with the loss of some 200,000 hectares since 1946. That reservoir of flora and fauna is important not just scientifically but for the enjoyment of the wider community, but in the past 30 years south Wales has lost about 50 per cent. of its moorland and upland.

For those reasons, I especially welcome clauses 2, 4 and 6, which block the loopholes. Those clauses are widely welcomed, although I suspect that clause 1 will be somewhat contentious. I understand that clause 1 may provoke objections from some Conservative Members for two reasons. The hon. and learned Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) referred to the Bill changing a time-honoured principle in that the burden of proof would be on the defendant to prove his innocence, although my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields has said that that is not necessarily so. In this context, I refer to some of the evidence on badger digging. I cannot for the life of me understand a law which allows the acquittal of individuals caught at a badger sett with terriers, spades and transporting equipment. Many prosecutions have failed because the defendants claimed that they were searching for a terrier down a rabbit hole. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields referred to one such case.

This is a grey area, and I realise that some reservations exist because we may be impinging on the rights of the fox-hunting fraternity. In other cases, individuals take along a live or dead fox or fox cub, and if they are caught they say, "We are digging for foxes, not for badgers". As someone who is reasonably familiar with the countryside and who knows the difference between a fox hole, a rabbit hole and a badger's sett, I cannot accept that anyone who lives in the countryside would not know the difference. Those familiar with the countryside will know the location and characteristics of a badger's sett, and we cannot believe those who claim that they are in pursuit of foxes.

This loophole must be closed because there can be no question of innocence, and we must make no concessions to those who go badger hunting. In this case, the term "country sport" is offensive. Badger hunting is not a sport or a pastime that can be endorsed. It is one of the most barbaric of human activities. No one can claim to be a

country lover if he engages in the sort of activities that we know are carried out by badger diggers. We must make no concessions. It is a vile, cruel and barbaric practice. It inevitably leads to the death of badgers and to the horrifying mutilation or death of terriers, and it must lead to the brutalisation and degradation of those involved in it. We must pursue vigorously all attempts to close the loophole.

Those involved in badger digging are invariably involved in other crimes, such as trespass and theft. In many cases, if they cannot find badgers to torment, they become involved, through disreputable organisations, in the pitting of terrier against terrier. Such practices must be stamped out in any way possible, and clause 1 will help to block the loophole. The loophole was not inherent in the 1981 Act, but has been created by those who wish to get round the Act. I ask Conservative Members to accept that the loophole has been created by those individuals. No one can have any complaints if the House says that the loophole should be closed by making it clear that anyone who is in pursuit of badgers, without reasonable cause, is deemed to be guilty. All the evidence will show that he is.

I realise that some objections will come from those associated with fox hunting. It is a matter of regret to me that people are still allowed, with the full blessing of the law, to find their enjoyment on Tuesdays, Thursdays or Saturdays in killing animals for fun. That is the be-all and the end-all of the argument about fox hunting. But the Bill is not about the outlawing of fox hunting, although some Conservative Members have reservations about clause 1 because of its association with that activity. They believe that a tightening of the law in relation to badger digging will impinge on their rights as fox hunters.

I draw their attention to a letter from the Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office relating to the proposed amendments:

"What we think may work is something on the lines of making it an offence under the Badgers Act to permit a dog to enter the underground retreat of any wild animal other than a badger when it is known, or should be known, that a badger may be encountered. We do not think this will interfere with hunt servants."

Some of us may wish to interfere with the activities of hunt servants, but the Bill will not. Conservative Members should think about the opprobrium that they will bring upon themselves if they oppose this tightening of the law on badger digging as a defence of their sport of fox hunting. They will do their cause a great deal of harm, and they will be guilty by association.

There is much good will for the Bill on both sides of the House. I know that there are reservations about it, but I hope that the House will give it a Second Reading.

10.35 am

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). As a member of the Nature Conservancy Council, I can tell him that the input from Wales is first class and most important to our work.

The hon. Gentleman overestimates the objections to clause 1. Indeed, he is pushing at an open door. All of us want as much protection as possible for the badger; it is simply a matter of getting the wording of the clause right, which I am sure can be achieved in Committee.

I support the Bill of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and congratulate him on taking the opportunity obtained through the ballot to introduce this legislation. I hope that the Bill receives a Second Reading and that we can add to it in Committee.

I was much involved in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and I believe that it is still too early to judge the success of the Act. However, it is fair to say that it has brought new attitudes to conservation. It has been the only major legislation in about 15 years, with the exception of some valuable private legislation introduced by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), and it helped to focus opinion on important issues of habitat conservation and the encouragement of wildlife. The voluntary organisations appreciate that fact, although I sometimes wish that they would be more encouraging and complimentary about the Act, bearing in mind the important objectives that I am sure it will achieve in the long run.

Too often I read about the Act failing and the Nature Conservancy Council having no money. That is not true. No site of special scientific interest has been damaged through lack of money, and the Government have made it abundantly clear that money is available for management agreements or purchases. This year, the additional £7 million from the Department of the Environment was greatly welcomed by the NCC. It will enable us to accelerate our efforts on notification and renotification.

The NCC is enthusiastic about the Bill as it relates to section 28 of the original Act. It has been realised for some time now, and it was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) in the Select Committee, that a stop power during consultations had been omitted. That is corrected in the Bill, although in a complicated piece of drafting, and I hope that it will achieve what it sets out to do.

We must accept that relatively few owners of sites of special scientific interest have damaged their properties during the consultation period, but every loophole that we can close must be closed to prevent this from happening again. Some owners believe that the notification of an SSSI means complete sterilisation. Of course it does not. Many operations are allowed within an SSSI, provided that they do not damage the scientific reason for the designation. That is when management agreements can be and usually are of mutual benefit. We are making great progress in changing attitudes towards sites of special scientific interest. Many landowners now feel proud that their estates have SSSIs and make great efforts to look after them. However, there are a few irresponsible landowners, and the proposed amendment to the Act should close the loophole. For that reason, I hope that the measure will be enacted soon. Like other hon. Members, I regret that this is not a Government Bill. We all recognise the fragility of private Members' Bills in regard to time and amendment.

I wish that the hon. Member for South Shields had seen fit to limit his Bill to the one significant point that concerns most hon. Members, and had drafted the long title accordingly, so that discussion on parts I and III of the original Act would be avoided. Had he done so, I would gladly have accepted his decision. From practical experience, we know that legislation on the countryside and the heritage is relatively rare. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity to introduce valuable amendments it should be accepted.

[Sir Hector Monro]

I strongly support clause 1 in regard to the protection of badgers. As I said to the hon. Member for Caerphilly, I think that he is creating concern where none exists, but we must get the wording right. That can be dealt with in Committee.

The words in the explanatory memorandum with regard to clause 1 cause some concern, as the clause requires the proof of innocence rather than guilt. It is a matter of concern in regard not only to badger digging but to any legislation. I am sure that that aspect will be dealt with in Committee. I am keen to ensure that badgers are not molested in any way, and I welcome the opportunity to visit setts near my home.

Speaking for myself and not as a member of the NCC, I am glad that the Bill provides the opportunity to correct a failure in the 1981 Act to implement the wishes of this House and its own declared policy. I spoke on the subject at some length in Committee and on Report when I was the Minister in charge of the original Bill. In this respect I know that I have the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr). If we had a guiding principle on bird protection and quarry species, we should have stuck to it. The principle was that birds remain on the quarry list unless the NCC specifically recommends their removal for conservation reasons. In another place, the curlew and redshank were removed from the list, but they were put back on it in Standing Committee in line with Government policy. That position remained on Report. However, during the spillover Session in October 1981, the Lords reinstated the provision. Unfortunately, because the Government — of which I was then no longer a member—said that they had not time to deal with Lords amendments, they accepted the position and failed to fulfil their duty of maintaining the policy and judgment of this House. It was a rather miserable procedural defeat.

My hon. Friend the Minister can put the matter right with an amendment in Committee. To do otherwise would involve a U-turn on policy. There is no conservation reason for the removal of curlew from the quarry list. There are hundreds of thousands of curlew and redshank, and the NCC advice of 1980-81 still stands. The facts can be argued in detail in Committee.

With regard to the Brent goose, the chairman of the NCC in the 1950s—Sir Arthur Duncan, who died a few months ago—made it clear, when the Brent goose was protected, that it would be back on the quarry list when the numbers became substantial again. That position had almost been reached in 1980-81, and it has now been reached. Therefore, Sir Arthur's undertaking should be implemented.

There should be a much more flexible approach in the schedules to movement of species, as seems appropriate to the NCC. The world population of the Brent goose is between 180,000 and 200,000, and probably 85,000 or more are in Britain. Wildfowling is a traditional sport and the Brent goose is becoming a great pest to farmers. Therefore, a return to the quarry list should be considered. It is interesting to note that the population of the Brent goose now exceeds that of the grey goose, on which there is at present a full open season.

I have never seen so many barnacles as there have been in the Solway this winter. Consequently, there has been considerable agitation by the farming community. If the barnacle could be removed from the protected list, it would remove a great deal of aggravation and unhappiness on the island of Islay.

We should consider the arrangements for the cold weather ban. I support the ban, but almost invariably we seem to get the dates wrong. That causes great unhappiness among wildfowlers.

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the British Field Sports Society and other bodies, including farmers, play a great part in protecting the habitat of birds, and their rights and interests have to be considered together with other shades of opinion. It is totally unacceptable that saboteurs and others should take action against country sports. They should receive short shrift from the police and the law.

There are vast numbers of stock doves. They were put on the protected list as a result of misunderstanding in the Ministry. There is no conservation, and many of them are shot, together with pigeons. The shooting should be made legal again.

There was no provision in the original Act for marine nature reserves. The provision was put in in another place because the Government foresaw certain difficulties. The NCC has found the establishment of marine nature reserves to be very complicated. I fear that the provision in the Bill may make the consultative processes marginally more difficult. There are many interests involved — fishermen, water sports, recreation bodies and landowners on the shore line. There is no point in trying to short-circuit those interests by legislation. We should take people's rights and interests into consideration and try to proceed by agreement.

I note with interest the new responsibilities that are to be placed on agriculture and forestry.

Dr. David Clark: Although the hon. Member is a very respected member of the NCC, I do not think that he is speaking for the council in regard to marine nature reserves. I have a letter from the council in which it says that it supports the proposed new clauses and welcomes the possibility of the Minister taking overriding decisions. The NCC's official position is that it supports the clause dealing with marine nature reserves. However, I know that the hon. Gentleman made it clear that he was speaking for himself.

Sir Hector Monro: Yes, I made it clear, after I referred to section 28 of the principal Act, that I was speaking for myself. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be the first to accept that, as the Bill appeared only on Monday, the NCC has not had an opportunity to look at it. I am aware of the views of our experienced officials and, I am sure, the chairman. The point that I am seeking to highlight is that we shall not necessarily make it easier to obtain marine nature reserves by following a legal process rather than consultation.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State is not here at the moment but it would be fair to say that, following the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had the greatest conversion since St. Paul to nature conservation and the improvement of the habitat. Now, having been converted, as so often happens, it is proceeding with tremendous zeal, and I am delighted at that. The appointment of experienced officials and the promotion of conservation through the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service is good

news. It has all been made so much easier for the Ministry of Agriculture by the splendid lead given by the National Farmers Unions of England, Wales and Scotland and the farming and wildlife advisory groups. The Stanton survey in Suffolk is a fine example of what is being done.

All that is a great plus for the movement towards greater understanding of conservation, led now not only by the voluntary groups which have played such an important part, but also by the farmers, the country landowners and others.

I too am particularly pleased that there is emphasis now on the Forestry Commission. I welcome the commission's recent appointment of Dr. Morton Boyd, who used to be the director of the NCC in Scotland, to advise it on conservation. I hope that all the private forestry groups will make a particular effort to play their part along with the Forestry Commission in the promotion of countryside conservation and wildlife. I encourage all private groups and the Forestry Commission to go and see the Economic Forestry Group's headquarters at Eskdalemuir in my constituency, where it runs the most splendid operation to the benefit of wildlife. We must look after pests and predators if we want to promote wildlife, and foresters in the commission and in private groups, other than the EFG, have not played their full part.

Far too many people tend to underplay our achievements in recent years in the attitude to wildlife and the countryside, and over-emphasise our failures. There is much good in between. The biggest "but" is the future profitability of farming. As incomes decrease, so will the input to conservation. Therefore, we must look at the broad picture of a profitable agriculture and a great swell of enthusiasm for wildlife in the countryside throughout the nation.

The Select Committee's recommendations are excellent. I support nearly all of them. I hope that we shall have an opportunity to have a full debate on those recommendations, and, in particular, to go into the issue of the rural estate, a matter which I have tried to promote in the House for many years.

My final word is a wish for harmony. I wish the Bill success, but there will need to be some give and take. The Government, the voluntary bodies and the public will have to accept some compromises if we are to get the Bill through, as I wish. That is not complacency but a fact of life and practical politics. We must look at the matter in broad terms. I particularly hope that the amended section 28 goes through as it stands and I am sure that in that way we shall prevent unnecessary damage to SSSIs.

10.53 am

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): I want, sincerely and warmly, to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). He is undertaking a task with which all of us would agree. He is trying to bring about real protection for the badger. I was pleased that he said he would be prepared to look at any amendments, because we must make illegal what is happening in the so-called sport of badger baiting, and we must ensure that we close all the loopholes so that we finally get rid of that practice in the same way as we have to a great extent got rid of cock fighting, although some still takes place, and bull baiting.

It is wrong that this measure should be a private Member's Bill. It should, as other hon. Members have said, be a Government measure. To describe badger baiting as a sport is something that I cannot understand. It is a barbaric practice and I cannot understand what kind of people partake in it. Yet much of it takes place in the north-west, some even in the urban areas there.

I saw a video film of badger baiting which the *Sunday People* had obtained from those who had partaken in such baiting. The League Against Cruel Sports showed it to me, and it is believed that the action took place in an urban area in Liverpool. The badger had been taken from its sett and was then attacked, not by one, but by countless dogs, which continued to attack it. As one terrier got tired another was put in, and at one point an alsation was used. That went on for hours. It is beyond belief how anybody could not only witness such an act but film it and then show it to clubs to get a wider audience. To hear those creatures laughing at the distress, pain and suffering that they were causing to that defenceless animal is something which, as hon. Members, we must ensure does not occur again.

We have all had a large postbag on this subject. Only this week I had a letter from a lady in west Wales, who said:

> "Only this week a trial took place in Haverfordwest of five men who carried out the most horrific cruelty on a badger, which included breaking the badger's back with a spade to make things easier for the dogs."

We are beginning to try to frame measures against that kind of background.

The real difficulty, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) referred, is to prove that people are going after badgers. Their defence has always been that they are digging for foxes. In 1984 the police brought a prosecution at Retford. They failed to establish the fact that the defendants were digging for badgers rather than foxes and, as I understand it, the police have not brought another prosecution. A private prosecution was painstakingly brought at great length and expense by the Derbyshire Naturalists Trust. I think that that is the only case that has been successful, because of the difficulty of establishing the fact that it is badgers rather than foxes that are being dug for.

After seeing the film, an all-party delegation went with the League Against Cruel Sports to see the Home Secretary. It may be of some comfort to my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields to know that two categorical statements were made at that time. The Home Secretary said:

> "We are entirely sympathetic with your objections to badger baiting."

Secondly, perhaps more importantly, he said:

> "If it is possible to stop badger baiting in a way that would not affect legitimate hunting, I think your proposals would have Government support."

That is what we are asking for this morning — Government support.

We are always up against the sacred cow of this so-called other sport called fox hunting, which I do not describe as a sport at all. I fail to understand how anybody can think that it is a sport to chance a defenceless animal such as a fox. Nevertheless, we were told that if the Bill did not affect legitimate hunting, it would have Government support.

We do not want my hon. Friend's Bill to go by the board because it runs up against opposition from the fox hunting fraternity. That is the difficulty that we must overcome. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly is right. There is a great distinction between a fox hole and

[Mr. Doug Hoyle]

a badger sett. However, members of the fox hunting fraternity might chase a fox into a badger sett and then put a terrier in, which I believe should be considered illegal and they should face the consequences.

Already voices have been raised in dissent because if we were to accept the Bill clause 1 would place the onus of proof upon the defence to prove that those people were not digging for foxes. I think that that is absolutely right. However, I hope that my hon. Friend will take on board

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It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER, *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).*

Business of the House

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short business statement.

Following discussions through the usual channels, the draft Regional Transport (Levy) Order 1985, which was not moved yesterday, will now be taken on Tuesday 12 February.

That day's business will now be as follows:

Transport Bill, Second Reading, followed by related money and Ways and Means resolutions

Motion on the draft Regional Transport (Levy) Order 1985.

A motion relating to the Housing Benefits (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 1984 will now follow proceedings on the Representation of the People Bill on Wednesday 13 February.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I thank the Leader of the House for accommodating the housing benefit regulations debate, which is on a prayer tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends. Wednesday will be the proper time not only for that debate but for the first day of the two-day debate on the Representation of the People Bill. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Leader of the House pay attention to the fact that the change of business was necessitated by virtually all yesterday being taken up with discussion on Ministers sailing close to or across the margins of the law? Will he draw it to the attention of the Prime Minister, who has views on and expertise in the matter, particularly so that she might draw it to the attention of her next-door neighbour at No. 11, the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Biffen: While I could not for one moment accept the premise of that request, I shall see that the request is passed on.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend make it clear that two days will still be devoted next week to the Representation of the People Bill?

Mr. Biffen: Yes, Sir.

Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. Hoyle: I should like amendments to be tabled to the Bill to ensure that no dog is put into a sett, or even a foxhole if necessary. I realise that that would not be acceptable to the Conservative party or the fox-hunting interests represented by Conservative Members. However, I should like to suggest an alternative, which my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields might support. I emphasise that clause 1, amending the Act, was suggested to him by the Home Office. These people are guilty of trespass. Will my hon. Friend consider making an amendment so that they could be found guilty of trespass unless they had received permission from the landowner to go on the land?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I should like to correct the hon. Gentleman. Unfortunately, there is no criminal law

against trespass. It is a civil offence, which can be proceeded with only by the landowner himself, and the only penalty is for damages done by the trespasser. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's apparent concern to see that a criminal law on trespass is introduced.

Mr. Hoyle: I was trying to get over the difficulty that I see even now with what my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields is doing. The police might be reluctant, if the onus is on the defence, to bring any prosecutions unless people are found in possession of a badger that is dead, alive or injured. I was trying to find a way round the difficulty and to prevent the sett being entered and the badger being attacked. I hope that there is a way round the problem.

Those concerned always say that they have permission to do what they are doing. I realise that there is a difficulty in relation to the law on trespass, and that at the moment it is a civil offence and the penalty is only for damage done. All that I am asking for is the opportunity to prove that such people are acting illegally in being at or near the sett. In that way we might overcome some of the difficulties and prevent the injury or death of a badger.

I welcome my hon. Friend's Bill. He deserves the gratitude of all hon. Members. I am pleased that he will consider amending it. Perhaps we can find amendments that will give greater protection to the badger. As my hon. Friends have said, we believe that the Act is too weak, and we shall do all that we can to assist my hon. Friend in what he is trying to do, which is once and for all to get rid of people who think that it is a sport to bait a defenceless animal.

11.6 am

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I am anxious to welcome the Bill promoted so effectively and clinically by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). I unreservedly welcome some parts of it more than others. Before I address myself to its contents, most of which I admire, I should like to refer to what was said by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). He suggested that there is always a clear distinction between a badger's sett and a fox's earth. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take my word for it that that is completely wrong. Many dwellings are in multi-occupation. In Northamptonshire, where I live, there are setts and earths on our land, not far from Northampton, that today are occupied by both badgers and foxes, sometimes exclusively by badgers. The local conservation society was so keen that it placed ladders on trees so that people could film the badger family, with all the antics of the badger cubs at night. It is a large sett, and two years ago it was taken over by foxes. Now, two years later, it is in multi-possession, with the families of both foxes and badgers in the dwelling. Therefore, it is impossible to say that one hole or another is occupied by a fox or a badger or that no rabbits are in the same complex.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's knowledge of the fox and the badger. However, does he accept that the sett that he is talking about is likely to be of considerable antiquity, and the badgers will have carried out excavations for many human as well as badger generations? The sett is likely to be so large that it can accommodate both fox and badger. I know setts that accommodate both, but does not the hon. Gentleman accept that it is highly unlikely that the badger will occupy the same part of the sett as the fox? I believe that he could tell the difference between the part of the sett occupied by the badger and the part occupied by the fox.

Sir John Farr: I should like to get on with my speech. I was merely saying that in most cases that I know of—I could take hon. Members to quite a few setts—there is multi-occupation, and unless one is a real expert, a Sherlock Holmes, on one's hands and knees with a magnifying glass looking for hairs, it is impossible to tell which animal is in occupation at any time.

Mr. Ron Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Farr: I should like to get on with my speech. I shall come back to clause 1 in a moment, but I should like to deal with some other important aspects of the Bill. I especially want to congratulate the hon. Member for South Shields on choosing this subject. Clause 2 is badly needed and I congratulate him on his initiative.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who is a member of the Nature Conservancy Council, said that it may be too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the 1981 Act. I know that that is also the view of the chairman of the council, who says that parts of that mammoth Act, which was put on the statute book largely through the good work of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries, are imperfect, but that it would be best to wait for at least five years before implementing any major restructuring or surgery on that legislation.

I welcome clause 2 and I would give the Bill more support if it were merely a one-clause measure. There is nothing to be gained by putting too many clauses into a private Member's Bill. I have initiated a number of such Bills, but I was successful only with the Deer Act in 1982. I had to cut that from 23 clauses to four before I could get it through.

I hope that the hon. Member for South Shields will understand that hon. Members on both sides of the House unreservedly wish him well with clause 2, but he could be in trouble on other clauses.

Dr. David Clark: The NCC is on record as supporting clause 2, but it has also said:

> "The NCC welcomes the extension of the duty to 'further' nature conservation proposed for MAFF and the similar new duty on the Forestry Commission."

It says of the marine nature reserves:

> "We welcome also the possibility of Ministers taking overriding decisions."

Those are the official views of the NCC, but I note the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

Sir John Farr: I am grateful for that helpful intervention. The NCC undoubtedly welcomes the hon. Gentleman's initiative in promoting the Bill, but the chairman told me in public at a meeting here on Wednesday that he thought that the 1981 Act should not be restructured for a few years because of its complexity.

There is no doubt that section 28 of the 1981 Act has proved to be inadequate, and the sooner that we can get on to the statute book the amendment set out in clause 2, the better. There was much debate in Committee when the 1981 legislation was going through the House about whether the structure in section 28 was sufficient to protect SSSIs. The Standing Committee in 1981 intended to set up a structure for countryside management till the turn of

[Sir John Farr]

the century, based not on compulsion or direction, but on guidance on how best to run the countryside in the national interest.

Parts of the 1981 Act are imperfect and may need some muscle put into them in due course. Originally, the Government looked for co-operation rather than coercion, and they were right to do so.

Although the exploitation of the three-month loophole has not been widespread, the cases that have occurred have been significant. I understand that since the 1981 Act came into effect, only about 20 notified SSSIs have suffered damage, and most of that was accidental. By June last year, more than 160 management agreements had been signed and about 600 such agreements are being negotiated. There are a potential 5,300 SSSIs, so the percentage of sites that have been damaged is minute. Nevertheless, the House will welcome the resolute way in which the hon. Member for South Shields has dealt with the problem in clause 2.

Clause 3 deals with marine nature reserves. I remember the excitement of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and other Ministers when we established the concept of marine nature reserves in the 1981 Act. It met with the approval of conservationists, scientists, biologists and everyone else. My hon. Friend was careful throughout to avoid compulsion, and some of the original drafts of the 1981 Bill were restructured many times so that we could bring along with us people living near marine conservation areas.

There are no marine nature reserves in operation, but can the House be sure that three years is an adequate time in which to ensure co-operation on such a new concept as marine nature reserves? Is the House also sure that the hon. Member for South Shields is right to give power to the Secretary of State to override local objections?

How can a marine nature reserve work effectively without the willing co-operation of local fishermen and others? Is it not the duty of hon. Members to protect the rights and interests of individuals? The safeguards may be cumbersome, but they exist to protect the rights of individuals and it would be wrong for us to take short cuts and sweep away those rights. It is too soon to introduce the measures proposed in clause 3.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: What sort of time scale does my hon. Friend envisage before compulsion should be introduced?

Sir John Farr: I understood from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries when he was piloting the 1981 measure through the House that there was to be no compulsion. We do not want compulsion in the management of our countryside. We do not want compulsion in the operation of marine nature reserves. If there are objections from local people in the vicinity of marine nature reserves it would be better to iron them out by Ministers and others visiting the area to see how the views of local people could be accommodated.

Clause 4 imposes new responsibilities on the Minister of Agriculture. I am not quite sure what is covered here because the Minister already has a statutory duty to further conservation.

Mention has been made of what is known as the FWAGs—the farm wildlife advisory groups. The farm wildlife advisory groups system has become widespread since the passing of the 1981 Act. When the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 was passed, I had never heard of these advisory groups, but they are now established as a network. They have been pushed, paid for and promoted by the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association hand in hand, and they are available to give free advice to all farmers and others engaged in agriculture to improve the conservation of the land with which they are associated.

The hon. Member for South Shields may not be aware of it, but every two months, through the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, the Ministry produces a booklet which is sent free of charge to all those engaged in farming. The last three or four have contained page after page explaining how a farmer can sensibly utilise a spare bit of land in the interests of conservation. With the purpose of making Britain more beautiful, odd corners of agricultural land which are not in full production can be turned into little reservoirs for water life or into small plantations or coppices — however tiny they are. Although grant money is not available, free advice, free help and the guidance of the plans in these booklets are available to all those engaged in agriculture. That has been a new and welcome feature of ADAS advice to farmers in the last two or three years.

I do not recall that these very helpful articles on conservation appeared before the passing of the 1981 Act, but they have since and they have played a major role in making those engaged in agriculture very conscious of the need to try to make the best use from the conservation point of view of spare corners on their farms.

Our Minister has been pressing in Brussels for a provision in EEC legislation allowing the promotion of farming systems in environmentally sensitive areas which are especially helpful to conservation. Recent important changes in our capital grants system have also had an emphasis on the promotion of conservation.

The hon. Member for South Shields has drafted clause 4 in such a way that it places too much emphasis on the duties of the Minister of Agriculture to promote conservation. First and foremost, a farmer's duty is to try to make his farm pay. He has to try to make it profitable. In recent times our farmers have experienced extraordinary difficulty, especially those in some of the hill areas and in the parts of the country where milk production is concentrated. Some of them are in real financial difficulty. The main job of the Minister must be to help farmers in all parts of the country to get through this period of financial uncertainty — not knowing where the next market is coming from or where tomorrow's crop is to be marketed—rather than our giving him the prime duty of promoting conservation. Long before the passage of the original Act, conservation was in the responsible hands of the farmer, and he has not made a bad job of it. He has made Britain's landscape and countryside the envy of the world.

Clause 5 deals with maps. This again is an innovation introduced by the hon. Member for South Shields. However, it is too soon, and I think that it would be very costly. As I understand it, there is nothing in the present law to prevent most of the items suggested in clause 5 being put into operation. In my view, this provision could be dispensed with and we should concentrate on the very necessary clause 2.

Clause 6 deals with the Forestry Commission. Again I think that this is a very sweeping step to take so soon after

the passage of the original Act. The Forestry Commission is well aware of its major role in promoting conservation. It has already piloted many successful schemes with an emphasis on conservation rather than on production. No one is more aware of the unsatisfactory nature of purely softwood plantations than the Forestry Commission. It is now encouraging landowners and others to engage in broadleaved and softwood plantations, with special emphasis on the former which are attractive and which get a bigger planting grant from the commission.

As for clause 1, of course everyone in the House respects the badger. At the moment, his greatest enemy is the Minister of Agriculture, who is engaged in his TB eradication scheme in the south-west. I understand that he is persisting with this scheme despite expert reports that it is probably of little value in eliminating bovine TB. I hope that my hon. Friend will have a chance to reconsider the scheme in the south-west and whether it is necessary to continue it with its present ferocity.

The explanatory memorandum places the onus of proof on the person digging. I am sure that the House supports the hon. Member for South Shields in what he is trying to do, but this is the wrong way of going about it. There is no recognition in clause 1 of the fact that a badger does not live alone. As I explained earlier, he may share a sett with a fox or even with rabbits.

Funnily enough, in October and November of last year I received a communication from the Thurnby and Bushby society in my constituency about illegal badger digging. It wrote to me in October alleging that badger digging was going on in Leicestershire and asking me to see what could be done to stop it. It also urged me to support the Bill.

I first wrote to the chief constable of Leicestershire asking how prevalent this had been in recent times in the county and whether he thought that the existing law was adequate for the police to deal with people suspected of badger digging.

The chief constable replied on 31 October saying that he had had only one case in the county of alleged badger digging and that it had been denied by the youths involved. In response to my question about whether the existing powers in law were sufficient for the police to prosecute, he said that he thought they were. He wrote:

"I agree that the present law provides the police with sufficient powers of search and arrest . . . I must accept that a police officer who is not familiar with the provisions of the Badgers Act may advise a complainant to take civil action for trespass."

Judging by our experience in Leicestershire, there is little or no justification for clause 1.

I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries said about the quarry list. He reminded me of how the curlew and redshank escaped that list. In 1981, it was the intention of the House and the Committee to keep them on the quarry list, but due to parliamentary procedure and the lack of time for considering Lords amendments, those two birds were lost as quarries. My hon. Friend also built up a very convincing case with regard to the shooting of Brent and barnacle geese. There is every reason for putting them on the quarry list now. In some parts of the country they are prolific, because there has been a population explosion, and they are doing a good deal of agricultural damage to some areas. However, we did not put forward statistical evidence earlier because we, too, felt that three years was perhaps too short a time for there to be a meaningful change in events since 1981.

Dr. David Clark: I do not want the House to go down that path, because it is outside our control. Unfortunately, barnacle and Brent geese are protected under EEC directive 79/409. The Government cannot alter that without abrogating the treaty of Rome. Those who voted for the Common Market are responsible.

Sir John Farr: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman has got it wrong again. Indeed, about the only part of the Bill that I unreservedly welcome is clause 2. The hon. Gentleman had got that 100 per cent. right, and if he concentrates on that I wish him the best of luck.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Several more hon. Members wish to speak, and I remind the House that long speeches are made only at the expense of other hon. Members' time.

11.31 am

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): In an article on Wednesday 30 January, Martin Linton of *The Guardian* wrote:

"The entire bill does, however, enjoy the support of the National Farmers' Union and the Country Landowners' Association as well as the 30 largest conservation groups."

I have just listened to the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr), who is a farmer, and I wonder whether the NFU's support for the Bill enjoys his support. One wonders, because he seemed to disagree with the Bill in many respects.

I assume that it is true when the article says:

"Ministers have long ago acknowledged that its 1981 measure has a number of defects but it has refused to bring forward its own amending bill, offering, instead, to back a private member's bill."

I wonder whether the Government's support is solid, but that will be revealed later.

Obviously, we would love to have Tory support for the Bill, which does its best to plug certain loopholes. I do not know the technical details about badgers, foxes and so on, which are a little above my head. Nevertheless, I have listened with interest to the debate and have learnt a great deal. I want to protect the countryside and our wildlife. I have been a lifelong rambler and have a passion for preserving the countryside, so I should like to comment on the Bill.

The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) made clear his reservations. I want to speak about clause 4—not the Clause IV that I have often mentioned, but clause 4 of the Bill. It embodies some of the things which I should particularly like to see happen.

The Wildlife and Countryside Bill, as it was, had my enthusiastic support, probably because of its title. I thought that we finally had something that would defend the countryside and our wildlife. That Act has many good aspects to it, but, probably due to omission rather than commission, it had many major loopholes which led me to believe that certain provisions were anti-wildlife and anti-countryside. My fears were confirmed some years ago when I made a rare train journey from King's Cross to Edinburgh. I had not made that journey for some years. Although I often go to Edinburgh, I usually go from Sheffield and use a different line.

As the train left London, I was appalled at some of the things that I had never noticed before. I usually ramble in Derbyshire — mainly based on Bakewell — and south

[Mr. Martin Flannery]

Yorkshire, and such things had not really begun to happen there. Until that railway journey, I had not noticed something which probably most other hon. Members had seen. Following what I saw, I asked a few supplementary questions and tabled one or two other questions, but I received no support from Conservative Members. Sadly, there were howls of abuse when I said, coining an expression, that I was appalled at the prairieisation of the countryside. I remember that my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) said, "That's a new word to me." I said, "Well, Jim, it reminded me of the Canadian prairies when I looked out of the window." I realised that the rape of the countryside was beginning, and I started to take notice. Since then, many hon. Members on both sides of the House have begun to worry about it.

Clause 4 has the backing of the first report from the Select Committee. I am not a member of that Committee, but the third recommendation states:

"Conservation should be given a greatly increased priority in the training and work of ADAS staff, with increased formal guidance from MAFF on conservation objectives."

Clause 4 commends itself to me. Indeed, I hope that it commends itself, along with the rest of the Bill, to Conservative Members. It states:

"In the exercise of such of his functions as relate to agriculture and forestry, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food shall, in so far as its consistent with his statutory duties, further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside".

There are then certain suggestions.

The prairieisation of our countryside made me consider other aspects. I often go rambling in moorland areas. In our area we have one of the many ad hoc committees which have sprung up as a result of the loopholes in the Wildlife and Countryside Act. We have a Sheffield campaign for access to moorlands. There are many moors in Yorkshire, and as I walked along one day I suddenly realised that I was witnessing fields which I had never seen before, and that the heavy new earth-moving equipment which can move boulders, and so on, with which we had had trouble hitherto now enabled local farmers to carve new fields out of the countryside. Of course, we had no say in that, because there was nothing to stop them doing it.

Then I saw a couple of programmes on the television. In one programme there were 20 or 30 farmers, and three or four conservationists were asking them questions. I am sad to say that not one farmer did other than defend the 1981 Act and call himself a conservationist. The conservationists questioned the farmers, but the voices of the conservationists were overwhelmed by those of a number of farmers trying to interrupt, all of whom were making vast amounts of money as grain producers.

On another programme we heard farmers saying that if someone was a grain or cereal farmer and owned more than 300 acres he was automatically a millionaire. They pointed out that nothing like that had ever occurred before. This was due to the immense grants, many of which were made before these moves to deprive the countryside. The NFU's support for the Bill is welcome, because it shows that the union realises the impact of the attacks on the countryside with the removal of hedges, ditches and walls. When one is out rambling, the noise of the chain saw is heard almost all the time. Trees are cut down, and tree stumps are left scattered around the countryside.

The fact that a great organisation like the NFU—which boasts that its people are at the House every day and that it has never lobbied for any measure which it has not finally achieved—is on our side means that the NFU realises, as we do, that lasting damage will be done to nature if the union does not protect the countryside and join us in supporting Bills such as this. In the long run, agriculture will be injured if prairieisation continues. People from the towns and from all over the country have offered help with this measure. The mailbags of Members of Parliament show how many people are deeply worried about the need to preserve the countryside. We welcome the help of farmers in this struggle.

Clauses 4 and 6 apply to the Forestry Commission. Deciduous trees are being destroyed on a large scale. Afforestation and reafforestation with conifers is occurring in areas where those trees do not grow naturally. Conifers en masse are dark and gloomy and militate against the beauty of the countryside. I note that some Conservative Members are nodding in agreement. They are as aware of this aspect as are many people who love the countryside.

We are not struggling against moves to produce food in the countryside, nor are we opposed to a good life for the farming community. I point out, however, that little of the money gained from the land finds its way into the pockets of the agricultural workers on those farms. That aspect must be considered, and anyone who disagrees should provide evidence to show that the money does find its way to those workers.

There is immense support for the Bill. I am one of those who have not taken a technical interest in matters involving the countryside, but I believe that my voice represents those of millions of people who, without technical data or knowledge, have seen what is happening in the countryside and want to investigate. They include organisations such as the Ramblers Association and local rambling clubs which are intimately connected with the countryside, whose friends are often farmers and farm workers and who will note what is happening in this minor, but important, debate. It is my dearest wish that the Conservative party will give strength to our elbow with this small measure and help us to make this legislation a real Wildlife and Countryside Bill, which we shall amend if we find further loopholes.

11.44 am

Mr. Nicholas Lyell (Mid-Bedfordshire): It is not all that often that I have an opportunity to fulfil the dearest wish of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), but I am glad to give my strong support to the Bill. I congratulate the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on the balanced way in which he promoted the Bill. He has emphasised that his objective is to improve the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. That is the right way to put it, because the benefits already conferred by that Act have often been unstated and people have not publicly recognised those achievements sufficiently.

I speak with confidence because I represent a number of interests and wear a number of hats. I am glad to speak for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which has its headquarters in my constituency; it has gone out of its way not to run down the existing legislation but to point to the way in which it can be improved. I speak also for

the many millions of people who enjoy legitimate country sports and whose help is so much needed in promoting conservation. I speak as a small member of the NFU who has just a few acres. I join hon. Members in welcoming the fact that the Bill has the strong support of the NFU and the Country Landowners Association.

I emphasise conservation and habitat. No fewer than 5 million people take part in country sports which depend upon a good habitat for wildlife in our rivers, on our moorlands and over all our countryside. Their support for and keen interest in something that they enjoy is one of the safeguards of a secure future that we all wish to achieve for the habitats of flora and fauna.

Clause 2 contains the Bill's central objective. I believe that all hon. Members agree that it is high time we closed the three-months loophole. The Bill does so with the Government's strong support. I am confident that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will confirm that strongly. The RSPB asks whether the terms on which that loophole is being closed will also achieve what are sometimes referred to as the "stop" powers which have been thought to be necessary in respect of section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), with his great knowledge about this matter, asked whether it would be effective. No doubt my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will provide some guidance.

I support in principle the idea of marine nature reserves. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) has some reservations about this, but I do not believe that we have been unreasonably compelled in relation to land nature reserves. There are problems involving feeding grounds below high water level which are important to bird life. The principle of marine nature reserves has a place in the 1981 Act, and so far we have not made any practical progress. I hope that this legislation will assist.

I should like to refer to the balancing of the pressures on the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I have the feeling—I speak with a strong interest in farming with respect to my constituency and members of my family—that the Ministry is sometimes blinkered in its attitude to the projects it supports. In recent years, we have unnecessarily damaged uplands and wetlands by unwise schemes—sometimes promoted with EEC money—and unwise drainage projects on which, examined in a cooler light and without artificial subsidies, no farmer in his right mind would ever have embarked.

Food production is of course the primary function of the Ministry of Agriculture, but if we said in legislation that there was to be a better statutory balance between food production and conservation we would make an improvement that would be in the interests of the country as a whole. That is why the NFU and the CLA support the Bill.

Clause 1 relates to badger baiting. I think that there will be support for its objective on both sides of the House. No genuine sportsman has any truck with badger digging and badger baiting. If there are loopholes in the present legislation which can be sensibly closed without destroying or damaging other legitimate interests and those of legitimate sportsmen, it is desirable to close them.

I have had the benefit of speaking to the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), and I know that what I say has his blessing. The clause seeks to introduce the concept of recklessness. People who kill badgers recklessly deserve short shrift from the courts, but at the moment the concept of recklessness in this context does not exist. There is a real practical problem, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough said, in that we cannot tell whether a series of underground holes happens at any particular time to be the home of badgers or foxes, or badgers, foxes and rabbits together. That underground system can be approached in a way that need not harm badgers. Our objective is to protect the badger.

If we introduce the concept of recklessness into the legislation—that is embodied in the clause, although it is profoundly mis-stated in the explanatory memorandum —we should all be satisifed.

Mr. Sidney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I recognise the legal expertise of my hon. and learned Friend in this technical matter. Are there not many precedents for what the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) is proposing? I draw my hon. and learned Friend's attention to section 25 of the Firearms Act 1968, which uses the phrase, "has reasonable cause".

Mr. Lyell: There are plenty of precedents in our law for introducing a criminal offence if someone does something recklessly which is dangerous to a member of the public or indeed to an animal. We are not there trespassing on difficult legal ground. But to do what is erroneously suggested in the explanatory memorandum and change the burden of proof and put it on to the defence is something that we rarely do in our law and a principle that we should approach with abhorrence. I am glad to understand from the hon. Member for South Shields that he does not intend to do that.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): As always, my hon. and learned Friend has researched his case carefully, and I bow to his knowledge of the law. Will he reassure the House that, in whatever amendments he and my hon. Friends seek to put in the Bill, no further loophole will be left? I understand what he says. I come from the country, and I am aware that setts are used by various animals. If he is going to err at all, will he err on the side of the badger?

Mr. Lyell: I can reassure my hon. Friend, although as a lawyer I always seek to err on the side of justice; I think that my hon. Friend will agree with that.

We can always protect something to the nth degree, but if we go to the nth degree we may find that we are doing a grave injustice to individuals, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would not wish to do that. My objective and that of the hon. Member for South Shields is to do away with badger baiting and digging. We can make a real advance on that by using the concept of recklessness.

I should like to reassure the House that generally the Badgers Act 1973 works quite well. There may be occasions when it does not work, but Home Office figures show that in 1983 there were 57 prosecutions, of which no fewer than 50 were successful. Many prosecuting officers would be happy with that rate of success. I do not know the rate of successes for 1984, but my researches show that there have been at least 33 successful prosecutions in 1984. People are being brought to book. If we introduce the concept of recklessness, we shall help substantially if not wholly to close every reasonable loophole. I shall work to assist the Bill in that respect.

[Mr. Lyell]

The improvement of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is something which I, in common with so many of my hon. Friends—as their presence shows—welcome wholeheartedly.

11.55 am

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I shall be extremely brief, largely because every hon. Member who has spoken has accepted the Bill's broad principles. There have been reservations about some details but not one hon. Member has signified his intention of opposing the Bill. The main purpose of my remarks will be to try, first, to set an example to the House by being brief and to urge every other hon. Member who follows me to be brief. I should have been even briefer had it not been for the long speech of the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr). He let down the cause of conservation with which he has so long been associated and which in recent years he seems to serve so inadequately.

When discussing the Wildlife and Countryside Bill, the hon. Member for Harborough may recall that we were always on opposite sides of the argument as he sought to extend the list of creatures which could be destroyed and weaken the protection that hon. Members sought to confer on our natural heritage. He has done that again this morning. That is sad, because 10 years ago at about this time of the year, I moved the Second Reading of the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Bill. That went through the House and it had the hon. Gentleman's support. The Bill received its Second Reading before 11.30 am because fewer hon. Members sought to take part in the debate.

One hon. Member who took part in that debate was the former Member for South Shields and I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who succeeded Arthur Blenkinsop, has maintained that north-eastern tradition—a tradition that has long been served by my party, which has been far more devoted to the natural heritage than it has to individual privilege and fortune in rural shires.

I am not seeking to be aggressive, because there are Conservative Members who have served the cause of conservation. I was glad to hear the intervention by the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) in the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell). I trust that there will be no further nit-picking in the debate to imperil the Bill. My hon. Friend said that the Labour Opposition had sought to co-operate with the Government to ensure that there would be a broad Government measure so that we could see a proper advance. The Minister took the view—there is a great deal to be said for it—that we need a sustained and serious review of the operation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and that there would have to be major legislation some years hence.

My hon. Friend's approach, which has dominated this Bill, and the approach that I adopted in the summer when I tried to block the three-month loophole, was not to contradict the Government's view that there must be a major review and reappraisal of the Act, but to try to close those loopholes which needed urgently to be closed. That is my hon. Friend's purpose. Those who think that he may have gone too far should recognise that we have already made enormous concessions to try to meet the problems of Government timetables and parliamentary procedure. We could not seek any further reduction in the provisions of the Bill unless we were prepared to accept that this would affect millions of people and scores of organisations that are passionately concerned with the conservation of our natural heritage.

There will soon be further pressure for amendment of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, although perhaps not in the next two years. I have been given approval by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to start a detailed monitoring of the Berne convention in every member state. The Minister knows that that Act was the British response to that convention. The Assembly seems dissatisfied with the situation in many member countries and serious monitoring will take place this year. I hope that, when I carry out that monitoring and report to the Parliamentary Assembly in a year or so, I shall be able to say that the Government have been helpful to this Bill.

I trust that, on badger baiting and such barbaric practices, there will be no more attempts at a nit-picking approach to justice. The sort of people to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) referred in a distinguished speech should not be allowed to get off. If people who are more concerned that the law is neat allow that species to be eradicated, they will deserve condemnation. In my area, 20 years ago, there were 29 occupied badger setts. Today there are two, and that small population is in threat of being wiped out if something is not done urgently. Unfortunately, with a continuation of the cautious response displayed by the hon. Member for Harborough who has been in possession of large areas of land long enough to know rather more about badgers and foxes than he displayed today, the badger will be wiped out in many areas. There will then be fewer prosecutions.

There may have been fewer prosecutions in 1984 than in 1983, but that is because, in south and west Yorkshire, Merseyside, west Lancashire, large areas of the south-west and in the county areas around every conurbation there are few badgers left. That is why I hope that my hon. Friend will insist that clause 1 remains in the Bill. I hope that with it will go an acceptance by the Government that the Ministry of Agriculture and the Forestry Commission must start to pay heed not to the small minority of those who farm the land but to the vast majority who want a decent countryside retained.

12.6 pm

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): I am always glad to follow the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), whose interest and sincerity in protecting the countryside is well known.

I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clarke) on introducing the Bill. I saw him in the preparation of it, and I was greatly impressed by the intelligence and courtesy with which he got everyone together and his understanding of the issues at stake. I also admire his tenacity in insisting that the Bill went further than was immediately welcomed. It is always important to push bureaucracy in the right direction.

We always welcome extra protection for the badger, and therefore I do not intend to dwell on that part of the Bill. I shall move on to what I consider to be the heart of the Bill and the heart of all our efforts on conservation and that is the effort to protect habitat. It is no use protecting animals or plants if their habitat has vanished. For example, one can protect absolutely the shoveler duck, but

if its wetland breeding grounds are drained it will simply disappear, as brutally as an hon. Member whose consituency is redistributed.

Part II of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 sought to protect habitat. It was a hugely complex Bill, but it made a brave attempt to protect the most special sites. Some flaws in it have appeared, the chief of which are the two major loopholes to which we have referred. We all welcome the plugging of those two main loopholes by clause 2. In particular, I admire the ingenuity with which the deficiency in clause 29 is made good. Given the right attitude of the Nature Conservancy Council, that provision will work. Clause 2, which must be passed, will stop the ignorant or malicious destruction of our best sites, which has occurred since 1981.

I also welcome the determination of the Bill to make marine nature reserves a reality, for, after all, that was the intention of the 1981 Act. That intention has always been frustrated, and therefore the House should not object to efforts to try to make that intention a reality. I understand the dilemma of my hon. Friend the Minister in this respect. After all, we all believe in persuasion, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) said, but there must come a time when, if persuasion fails, regulations must come to the fore.

I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to examine this point carefully. At some stage, we must have marine nature reserves. When is the first one likely to be set up? Is it likely to be set up at all? If not, is it not perfectly reasonable to ask for some regulation, which we already have, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) said, on the land. Some 60 countries already have marine conservation areas, yet we, who pride ourselves on conservation, have none. Our coasts form perhaps the most magnificent and unusual of all aspects of our national heritage. We are right to seek powers to protect those areas for posterity.

Since 1981 the public's and the Government's concept of conservation has changed. The remarkable success of farming means that we have entered a period of agricultural surpluses, and the whole system of support for agriculture is under question. Increasingly, agriculture and farming must become more sympathetic to conservation. At the same time, it remains a principle that farming has to be profitable if spare resources are to be available for conservation and if the fabric of country life is to prosper.

This excellent Bill reflects the change in attitudes towards farming and the countryside. In 1981 our efforts were concentrated, rightly, on protecting the most important habitats. Now we are starting to serve important habitats elsewhere in the wider countryside. Isolated SSSIs dotted around the country like oases in a desert are inadequate. The intervening farmland must also provide habitat. That is why I welcome clause 4. It is right that Ministers at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should have a duty to further conservation. After all, we accepted that principle in 1981 for the water authorities. In an era of costly surpluses it is one thing to farm existing farmland as well as we can, but another to destroy scarce habitats with the help of subsidies to add to costly surpluses.

The Ministry of Agriculture has a great challenge to see whether it can adjust this policy and develop it to achieve the harmony that we wish to see in the countryside. In this respect, I greatly welcome the support of the Country Landowners Association and the timely conversion of the NFU. The NFU is wise to say that it wishes not only to have successful agriculture, but for that success to take place in a countryside that is seen to have the right balance between production and conservation and to make farming attractive again to people in all parts of the country.

Ultimately, the farmer has to be the steward of the countryside. The protection of the habitat outside those very special sites must depend upon his actions. Therefore, it is welcome news that the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union have joined forces to play a constructive role and to support the additional burden that will be placed upon farming in order to bring about harmony in the countryside. The Ministry of Agriculture has a real duty and responsibility to respond to the wishes of people outside the Government.

The challenge of conservation in the wider countryside opens up a huge subject for debate. Many important matters of principle are at stake. No doubt my hon. Friend the Minister is having many sleepless nights as he ponders the conflicts to which the Bill gives rise. Our aim today is not to address those wider aspects, but to take a modest but nevertheless very important step forward. All of our efforts to protect the countryside depend upon progress being made step by step. We have to meet the problems as they arise and provide for them. We have to be practical in so doing. I believe that the Bill is practical and that it deserves a Second Reading, because it reflects the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the British people.

12.11 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On behalf of my party, I strongly support the tribute that has been paid to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). I fully endorse the Bill. I know that the hon. Gentleman has tried to achieve as much as possible by introducing it. Many hon. Members realise that if he had had his way he would have wished to achieve much more, but that is not a criticism. The hon. Gentleman has sought to advance the cause with which he is associated and for which he has campaigned for many years. I hope that the Minister will respond favourably to the initiatives that have been taken.

It is an anomaly that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment is described in the most recent edition of *Countryside Commission News* as representing an entirely urban seat. The constituency of the hon. Member for South Shields, who is the spokesman for the Labour party, is described as one of the few constituencies with probably no green field in it. As spokesman for the environment on behalf of the Liberal party, I can hardly be described, as the Member of Parliament for Southwark and Bermondsey, as representing the most rural seat in Britain. This shows that the issues transcend geographical boundaries. The Bill affects not just those who live in rural areas but those who live in urban areas. They need the rural environment to be preserved for their own cultural and recreational enjoyment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): I must have a word with the Countryside Commission about this, because there is no green field in Bristol, West.

Mr. Hughes: I do not deny that fact. However, it confirms that although the three spokesmen all represent

[Mr. Hughes]

urban constituencies we have much wider interests. I hope that today it will be evident that the Under-Secretary has taken a considerable step forward. On 2 May 1984, in answer to a question from his hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) about representations relating to the amendment of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, he listed the representations which had been received from the Nature Conservancy Council, the Friends of the Earth, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy).

Yet on 9 May 1984, when the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and I appeared at a rally held by the Green alliance prior to the European Parliament elections, he said that there was no real evidence that the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 had failed, although the Government were monitoring it closely. I believe that the Minister must accept that it was seen very early to have failed and that therefore urgent steps were necessary to remedy those defects. That is the first reason why we welcome the Bill so strongly and accept entirely what was said by the hon. Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) that we must continue to make sure that other steps are taken and that we do not just stop here.

The greatest loss to our heritage has occurred since the war. That loss has continued alongside our understandable drive for agricultural self-sufficiency. Before the second world war, only two thirds at most of our food was produced in Britain. Now we have surpluses, including about 3·8 million tonnes of surplus grain. The race for food production is encouraged by the Government who, understandably, have subsidised the farmers to bring new land under tillage. This is all well and good, but when ancient woodlands or hay meadows containing rare species of flora and fauna or ponds, bogs or marshes which support wildlife populations are threatened — examples were given by the hon. Member for Lincoln — our farming policies have to be reviewed. Therefore, the prime objective of the Bill is to close the loophole relating to sites of special scientific interest.

The most fundamental change represented by the Bill is the beginning of a realisation that agriculture as well as other elements of the use of the countryside have to be brought under the hand and the influence of environmental policies. We cannot continue to lose our natural heritage in this way. My party takes the view that, when dealing with farmers and the agriculture industry in general, there is little room for compromise when trying to preserve what remains of our heritage.

Since 1981, sites of special scientific interest have been destroyed at the rate of 13 per cent. a year. Therefore, we have to do all that we can to ensure that the inbuilt delays in the system, which are specifically dealt with in clause 2, and the inbuilt inadequacies, are overcome.

Last year, I saw a report that was put before the other place by the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Council for the National Parks, which stated that a large part of Suffolk has lost four fifths of its hedges, that Devon has lost one fifth of its woodland in a decade and that 1,500 acres of the Norfolk broads are being drained every year, and 5,000 acres are under imminent threat. Prehistoric parts of Britain, like the south Dorset ridgeway, have been ploughed up.

During the past year, I have asked questions about the loss of moorland by ploughing and afforestation in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The figures are substantial. In England, the recorded annual average decrease of rough grazing, excluding common land, during the last six or seven years amounts to 3,000 hectares.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has produced a report dealing with the effects of hill farming on birds. Its statistics show that neither the Ministry of Agriculture nor the Department of the Environment knows exactly what the effects have been. There has been no monitoring of the effects of hill farming on birds. Therefore, we have to ensure that there is a Department which can protect the environment and act as a proper counterweight to other less good influences.

Every hon. Member knows what is needed. When a wood is about to be destroyed, people make representations and say that they do not want that wood destroyed. In the borough of Southwark, part of which is in my constituency, Sydenham Hill wood, one of the remaining very old woodlands in the south of England, is under threat. There is a very strong lobby against its destruction by the London Wildlife Trust. But it is primarily the local people who are fighting by means of a public inquiry to protect that wood.

It is important, let me reiterate, to view the Bill as a trail blazer for a new attitude of compromise and consensus. That does not mean compromise upon principles of conservation but compromise to prevent vested interests from standing in the way of what should be our environmental priorities.

We strongly believe that we need to go further not only in setting up a proper environmental protection section at the Department of the Environment but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said in response to the 10th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, in ensuring that all legislation includes an environmental impact statement, because planning, housing and trade and industry legislation, for example, may all carve up our heritage sometimes without our realising it.

At the end of 1983, Friends of the Earth sent my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) a proposal for a natural heritage Bill. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and many other Members share our hope that that will soon be possible. My party and its leader have no reservations at all about that. I do not seek to be exclusive about it. We all pay tribute to the hon. Member for South Shields for his long campaign on these issues and to the many people in all parts of the House and in parties not even represented here who have argued so strongly and effectively for that kind of approach. The proposal for a natural heritage Bill is my party's policy and I believe that it is increasingly supported outside as the right way to proceed. The Countryside Commission has asked for a comprehensive White Paper on the management of our rural estate. That might be the best move to make next.

It may be thought that the Bill does not touch many chords for people in north Southwark, but I have received letters about badger baiting which show that people trapped in inner-city tower blocks feel equally strongly that what has been proposed must be carried out. I believe that the wording set out in the Under-Secretary's letter to Lord Melchett of 7 January is better than the wording in

the Bill, but perhaps that can be discussed in Committee. We must ensure that prosecutions are effective and that we do not have to rely on private prosecutions.

I quote from just one of the many letters that I have received. A constituent, now a pensioner, living on the Heygate estate in Walworth, writes for the first time ever to a Member of Parliament because feelings have become so strong. My constituent concludes:

"All my friends and neighbours are with me on this, for there is so much cruelty practised on animals that we must do our utmost to avert some of it. Therefore, if you would vote in support of the Bill we would be very grateful."

I could scarcely do otherwise, as the League Against Cruel Sports has its headquarters in my constituency.

Clause 2 is urgently needed and is very welcome, as is clause 3, dealing with protection of the marine environment. The latter recognises that the voluntary option does not always work and that one needs to go further when response is inadequate.

Clause 4 is perhaps the most important, as it puts agriculture in the context of the environment, as it should be although we appreciate the need to seek progress by conciliation. In this context, the House of Lords Select Committee stated in paragraph 129 of its 20th report on "Agriculture and the Environment":

"The Committee believe that common ground can increasingly be found, especially if Government departments are prepared to take steps to encourage conciliatory moves."

In the context of an EEC draft resolution, paragraph 138 states:

"The Preamble and Articles . . . should be altered to establish that, as an element of the improvement of farming, care of the environment should have comparable status with the production of food."

We need to press even more strongly for that.

The House of Commons Select Committee fell short of some of the recommendations that I should like, such as making agriculture subject to planning constraints, but I was glad to note that it recommended not just that the existing system of prior notification in national parks should be extended to the whole of the countryside, for which I pressed last year, but also in paragraph 73:

"Without fundamental changes in the structure of agricultural finance, conservation will continue to be set in weak opposition to the forces of intensive and, paradoxically, frequently unwanted production, instead of being an integral part of good husbandry, as it should be."

It goes on to make the straightforward statement:

"MAFF must reappraise its attitudes."

In all its aspects and each of its clauses, the Bill should, and I hope will, be supported. It has frequently been said that this is a time of change. The National Farmers Union and others have moved. But if the climate is one of change, it is also a time of trial and we look to the Government not to be found wanting. As I have said, there is little room for compromise or concession if our environment and our heritage are not to be lost. As we know all too well, once lost means lost for ever.

12.26 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): In adding my voice to those who have expressed support for the Bill, and in adding my congratulations to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), I must express one or two reservations abut the Opposition's attitude to farmers and farming. I declare an interest as a farmer. As a member of both the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union, I am delighted that those organisations also support the Bill. I have no doubt that what is proposed is correct, although some details will require examination in Committee.

I am, however, saddened by some of the attacks made by the Opposition from time to time. They have not been so bad today, when we are generally in unison in supporting the Bill, but there is still an undercurrent of hostility to the farming industry. I wish to say a word or two in defence of my farming colleagues and of the industry as a whole. Many of the attacks on the way in which farmers look after the environment are ill founded and based more on ignorance than on malice.

I say that the attacks are ill founded because farming is not a static industry. There seems to be an underlying assumption that if the farmers left the land altogether we should return to the idyllic scenes portrayed by John Constable — little fields with cows grazing, hedges blooming and birds flying everywhere—and everything would be marvellous. Nothing could be further from the truth. There were no hedges or little fields until the enclosure Acts altered farming 200 or 300 years ago. Indeed, before that we had something far more akin to the prairie farming to which the Opposition take such exception today. I do not like it either. I regard it as extremely unpleasant and I hope that, partly thanks to the Bill, but largely thanks to the 1981 Act, there will be a return to a far more conservation-minded approach to farming.

It is wrong to single out farmers as the villains of the piece. Since the 1960s and 1970s, in planning and other aspects, there has been an unfortunate falling away from the standards which we now all recognise should be followed. We must regard farming in the context of the European scene in which we operate. Anyone who travels abroad and drives through France will notice that the prairie farming in the once-beautiful countryside round Paris makes the prairie farming in Britain look like paddock farming. Our farmers must be able to compete, as every industrial business must be able to compete, in its markets. Although I regret bitterly the fact that prairie farming is increasing, it would not be right to blame the British farmer for that development.

Mr. Flannery: I accept most of what the hon. Gentleman says, but is it not true that, from the point of not producing enough food, we have reached a stage of over-production? Should we not have regard to that fact in the context of conservation?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I accept the accuracy of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The over-production of food is a subject for much wider debate, because we over-produce food only for the markets which are currently capable of buying our products. If we could find better ways of introducing the Third world into the international market and generating new revenue there, there would be no shortage of people who wished to eat the food produced by the European Community and the United States. We must be careful, having made the mistake of going from under-production to over-production, that we do not swing back again during the next 20 years to 30 years and return to a position where food is in short supply.

History shows that it is more than probable that that will happen, because almost always when one takes corrective action of the sort proposed in the Bill one swings it too far. I hope that we can avoid that pitfall and that Opposition

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

Members will join my hon. Friends in ensuring that we do not place so much emphasis away from food production that we fall into that danger in the longer term.

I have said enough about farming and the approach to the environmental controls that are proposed. I shall say a few words on each of the clauses. The most important is undoubtedly clause 2, which closes the loopholes which people have used to get round the 1981 Act and to destroy deliberately and maliciously those parts of the countryside which the Government and the Countryside Commission had decided should be preserved. Clearly, that was wrong, and something had to be done to prevent such abuse. However, we must realise that only a very few people behave so appallingly.

One must put in a cautionary word. Where only one or two people are breaking the law, it is not always the answer to make controls tighter and criminal legislation even stricter. If we did that, we should burden the entire state with over-strict regulations and make life impossible for the innocent, in order to catch the few who are guilty. However, there have been enough cases of people taking no notice of the laws which have been passed to justifiy the steps being proposed today, and I fully support the way in which the loopholes will be closed. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir. H. Rossi) asked whether loopholes would remain at the end of this procedure, and we must consider that carefully in Committee.

The other clauses are also important, and I am glad that the hon. Member for South Shields has included them in his Bill. I appreciate, having tried to introduce a private Member's Bill without success, the balancing difficulty of putting in what one wishes to get through and not overburdening the House with detail so that the time allowed is inadequate. I hope that it will be proved that the hon. Gentleman has judged it nicely and that we will get through the proceedings in Committee swiftly and without problems.

The badger-baiting clause has received most publicity, and it is extremely important. With my hon. Friends who have spoken today, I support the idea of cracking down on those appalling thugs who take pleasure in baiting, trapping, maiming, wounding and killing badgers, but I must join my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) in wondering about the wording of the clause. We must not do anything that will bring innocent people to the dock. I am thinking of people who might be walking their terrier, which then goes down a badger sett and kills a badger. That would not be a criminal act unless the man had been reckless in his approach to his dog's behaviour. We must distinguish between the innocent who inadvertently cause the death of a badgers and those who, using dogs, set out maliciously, and using many excuses to get round existing law, to kill badgers.

The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) complained that, of the 29 badger setts in his area, all but two had disappeared. That is sad, but during the past 20 years the badger's real enemy has not been the badger baiter, the gamekeeper or the people who go out occasionally and kill badgers for one reason or another. His main enemy has been the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. We know of the apppalling way in which the badger has been hounded, killed and destroyed in the south-west of England as a result of what now appears to be a gross error in the assumption by the Ministry that the badger was the carrier of bovine tuberculosis. That is regrettable. It is not now reversible. As real doubt has been thrown on the belief that badgers carry tuberculosis, I hope that all such practices will cease and that badger setts will be reintroduced wherever possible so that those lovely animals can be put back into the countryside, thereby giving great pleasure to people, and be able to live the full lives that we would wish for them.

I agree with what has been said about mapping. There is no reason for mapping only moorland and heathland. Indeed, it is difficult to know what should be mapped and what should not. I welcome the prospect that all sites of special scientific interest should be mapped, to make it easier for people to enjoy them and to know what is being preserved.

I believe that it is right to make a change in the duty of the Minister of Agriculture. The Minister is beginning to take into account increasingly the environmental aspects of his job, and I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend will approach the problems outlined in the Bill with all the enthusiasm that Opposition Members and my hon. Friends and I would wish. However, it does no harm to underline his responsibility by laying a general duty upon him and his Ministry to ensure that the environment is properly protected. That is what the Bill seeks to do.

I think that the effect of the Bill will be largely dependent on the good will of the Minister of the day, because it can be interpreted very widely. I hope that, given the universal approval for the Bill that has been shown in the House today, Ministers, of whatever persuasion—and at whatever time in the future they may take control—will give due weight to the fact that the House has seen fit to pass such a measure.

I have a slight reservation about the provisions for marine nature conservation. Unlike Opposition Members, I feel that all controls of the environment should, if possible, be introduced voluntarily rather than compulsorily. My information from my hon. Friends in the Ministry is that they are not satisfied that the period of consultation and voluntary agreement has yet been exhausted, and that we may well reach the stage of being able to achieve marine conservation by agreement rather than by statute. If that can be done, I am sure that it will be a better approach to the problem.

With those few reservations, I warmly endorse the Bill and hope that it will have a swift and happy passage.

12.33 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I rise briefly to give my wholehearted support to the Bill. I am very pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has had the opportunity, through the private Members' ballot, to introduce it.

I should perhaps declare an interest, in that I have for many years been a co-opted member of the Council for National Parks. Its evidence to the Select Committee on the Environment and the support that it has given to my hon. Friend in preparing his Bill have been much valued by all of us. I speak also as someone with a firm belief in the need for us as a nation to conserve our national heritage, to cherish it and to ensure that our children can inherit it. We all too often forget that need in the rush for progress, either industrial or agricultural. We forget that

aspects of our countryside, our landscape and our wildlife are under pressure and under threat, and we should all pay the greatest attention to their conservation.

The Bill is of great concern to my constituents who live in an inner city area of great dereliction. They face increasing pressures in the area and look to the countryside —and their ability to enjoy it—as an escape from the conditions in which they live. Therefore, the Bill is of concern not just to myself but to my constituents, and many of them have written to me to give their strong backing to my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields.

I hope that today's debate will continue to be non-partisan and non-party political, but I am deeply disappointed that the Government have not come forward with legislation in their own time to close the loopholes in the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The Government seem to be able to find time for many other matters. We have before us in a week's time a Bill which has only just been thought up by the Government on the amount of money that the GLC should pay to London Regional Transport. They can find time easily and readily for such legislation, and it is unfortunate that they have not been able to find time for this measure, which they themselves told the House on several occasions last year they were anxious to see carried forward.

The Bill does a number of major and valuable things. I shall not dwell too much on some aspecs of it, such as the desperate need to clarify the law relating to the horrible practice of badger digging and badger baiting, the need to close the loopholes in sections 28 and 29, which are widely acknowledged on both sides of the House and the mapping duties of the national park authorities, because it should be obvious that, in order to carry out the job of conservation of all aspects of landscape and wildlife in an area, a national park authority must have detailed information on the nature of the area under its protection, which is not provided by mapping just the areas of heath and moorland. All those are extremely welcome measures.

I want to concentrate on the particularly welcome provisions of clauses 4 and 6, which seek to place a duty on the Ministry of Agriculture and on the Forestry Commission, not just to have regard to the interests of conservation, but to further the interests of conservation. It is an extremely important push in the direction of conservation, which is much needed.

At the moment, the way in which the law is framed, and the way in which the Ministry of Agriculture all too often operates, is directed too much on the side of food production. Of course, as many hon. Members have said, there must be a sensible balance, but the balance at the moment is too far weighted on the side of food production against other considerations. Food production is not everything. Agricultural development is not everything. Other values have to be taken into account as well.

When we consider that we have lost about 20 per cent. of the wild moorland on Exmoor since the second world war because of the ploughing up of land for agricultural development, when we look at the way in which agricultural tracts are being bulldozed across the western side of the Cairngorm mountains, when we look at the great battle which was had, and the honourable role which was played, by the Secretary of State for the Environment over Halvergate marshes, when we look at the ploughing up of wild land which is still happening throughout Britain, we must be concerned at the way in which agricultural grants given by the Ministry are operating to encourage the process which is going on.

It is extremely important that we give the Ministry of Agriculture the duty to further the interests of conservation and set that duty alongside its duty to encourage the production of food for all of us. At the same time, I believe that that same duty needs to be placed on the shoulders of the Forestry Commission. If one looks at the way in which its grants operate, the tax incentives available for forestry production, its policies on the planting of broadleaved woodlands and the shape and siting of forest developments, and the way in which all too often the creation of forestry destroys the landscape rather than enhances it, as it can in the best circumstances, one sees that there is undeniably a need for the Forestry Commission also to have that duty to further conservation placed upon it.

The response by the Forestry Commission to some of the evidence which the Select Committee on the Environment received is instructive. I believe that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds rightly stated to the Committee that

"in a variety of ways . . . the Commission has little regard for conservation."

The commission replied thus to that allegation from the RSPB:

"This is not so. As has already been explained, the Commission gives considerable weight to the needs of conservation and"——

this is the important point—

"is not inhibited by its remit in doing so."

That is not enough. The fact that the commission is not inhibited from paying heed to conservation is nowhere near enough. What my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields wishes to do in the Bill, and what I wish to do in supporting him strongly, is to place a duty on the commission to further conservation. We want, not just to remove inhibitions, but to place upon the commission a positive duty to further the interests of conservation.

There have been considerable improvements in the way in which the Ministry and the Forestry Commission have operated over the past 10 or 15 years, but those improvements have not yet gone far enough. The Bill will do a lot to push them further in that direction. The Bill will also give the House the opportunity—it is important that the House seizes it—to make an unequivocal statement that we, as the House of Commons, believe that environmental concern and protection of our natural heritage and environment are of overwhelming importance, and wish to see that heritage and environment improved by the passing of the Bill.

12.47 pm

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) because we are both members of the Select Committee on the Environment, which recently inquired into and reported on the effectiveness and operation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. I should like to join hon. Members on both sides of the House in congratulating the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on introducing the measure. The House knows of the interest and expertise of the hon. Gentleman in matters environmental. Once again, he has done the House a great

[Mr. Sydney Chapman]

service in introducing the Bill. I am proud to be the Conservative sponsor of his measure and to be able to say a few words in support of it.

I wish the hon. Gentleman's Bill greater success than mine had. One of your predecessors, Mr. Deputy Speaker, refused to allow me to propose the closure of the motion when my debate on Second Reading had been going a full 45 minutes. That scuppered my measure and my opportunity of greatness. My Bill was 10th in that Session's list of private Members' Bills. I thought that, numerically, that showed the prospects for my ministerial career, but I have been sadly disabused of that notion since then. It led one of our national papers to report on my private Member's Bill, which was concerned with the discouragement of felling trees, with the succinct headline, "Trees Bill axed".

I am a member of the Select Committee. It might be prudent to mention my completely non-financial interests as an honorary member of the Landscape Institute, president of the Arboricultural Association and president of the London Green Belt Council.

I wish to concentrate on clause 4 of this important Bill. It is appalling to read the statistics of the dramatically changing nature of our countryside in recent years. In the past 35 years, over half our lowland heaths have been lost, half our fenlands have been drained, one third of our ancient woodlands have been felled, one quarter of our upland heaths and grasslands have been destroyed and one quarter of our hedgerows—over 150,000 miles—have been uprooted.

Anyone who has at heart the interests of sensible conservation of our countryside must be profoundly worried about the changing nature of our landscape. Yesteryear, nothing was allowed to stand in the way of maximum home food production. That was right in those days, but we must accept that times have changed and we are members of the European Community which has food surpluses such as butter and beef mountains and milk lakes. Many of our fields are being suffocated by the profusion of oilseed rape and other cereals. The message from both sides of the House is that care of the countryside should have at least as much consideration as the production of food.

I am perturbed that the Ministry of Agriculture is not responsible for collecting land use statistics. That is left to the Department of the Environment. Therefore, it is necessary to have the closest co-ordination and co-operation between the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture.

I welcome the recent establishment of the environment co-ordination unit in the Ministry and I hope that co-ordination between the Departments will be at ministerial as well as official level. Two of the principal recommendations of the Select Committee on the Environment tried to spur the Ministry of Agriculture into taking more interest in the care and conservation of the countryside.

Clause 2 has been unanimously welcomed by every environment organisation, the Government and the National Farmers Union. I pay tribute to the farmers who have become much more environmentally conscious in recent years. I hope that that trend continues.

If there is any doubt about the precedent for clause 2, I remind the House that the provisions are along the lines of well-established town and country planning legislation which gives power to the Secretary of State to issue, instantly and provisionally, preservation orders on listed buildings and trees.

I recognise the emotion involved in the protection of badgers, which is covered by clause 1. I believe that the existing legislation is not working and is being abused. The World Wildlife Fund backs up that contention.

I am not a lawyer, but I do not believe that clause 1 involves a great breach of legal principles. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) spoke about the introduction of the concept of recklessness. When I intervened in his speech, he agreed with me that section 25 of the Firearms Act 1968 contains a similar mechanism, as does clause 1 of the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Bill which is going through the House. If it is a legal mechanism which should be used only as a last resort, I suggest that we have reached the last resort in our attempts to conserve the badger.

There is wide support for the Bill. The Council for the Protection of Rural England describes it as "an important step forward." The Nature Conservancy Council "support it, but it doesn't go far enough in one or two respects." The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds "warmly welcomes the Bill." The World Wildlife Fund describes its provisions as "necessary, bare minimum steps. . . all the clauses are entirely beneficial to the conservation of the British countryside." We have heard of the support, although anxieties have been expressed about the need for amendments to be made. We have also heard of the support of the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union. I am also told that the Government have drafted two of the clauses.

I ask the House to give the measure a Second Reading. If we do not, I believe that we shall deserve the opprobium of the vast majority of the nation. If amendments are necessary, it is a matter surely of dotting the i's and crossing the t's of the Bill in Committee.

12.56 pm

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): I join hon. Members on both sides of the House in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) not only on winning a place in the ballot but on submitting the Bill for our consideration.

I enter this debate with some diffidence, since most hon. Members who have contributed to it have far more expert knowledge in these matters than I do. But I want to echo the remark of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that people who live in urban centres of our country care passionately about these matters. Like him, I have had many letters on the subject of badgers, probably from people who have never been fortunate enough to see one. They care passionately that they be protected from some of the revolting practices about which we have heard. I give a great welcome to clause 1 on that account.

My only fear is whether clause 1 goes far enough. Although the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) is not in his place at the moment, I have to say that I found some of his words a little ominous. He said that we had to get the language right when we legislated for the control of and killing of badgers. No one can take exception to that sentiment, but then he added the words, of which I took careful note, "as long as no other country sport is

affected." The direct implication of that is that this practice of digging out and killing badgers or subsequently using them in badger baiting is a form of country sport. It is no sport of any kind. It is a revolting practice engaged in by some of the most unspeakable elements in our society.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept, as I do, that that was not the intention of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and that the way that the hon. Gentleman has interpreted my hon. Friend's words was not what my hon. Friend wished to say or wanted the hon. Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert) to understand.

Dr. Gilbert: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is right, and I am happy to accept his interpretation of his hon. Friend's words. It may have been a slip of the tongue, but that is what the hon. Member for Dumfries said. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that this practice must be stopped, with all the powers and resources that the Government and the police can deploy.

Clause 3 relates to marine reserves. We do not yet have a marine reserve, and there is precious little sign of progress on our acquiring one. We are way behind many other countries in this respect. I understand the need for a balance between special interests and the need for conservation, but more than 60 other countries have already managed to strike that balance. It is quite wrong that we should be so far behind and falling further behind. Up to now, special interests appear to have had a veto. I welcome the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State on 9 January, when he said:

"I am concerned about the problems over making progress and am considering what more might be done." — [*Official Report*, 9 January 1985; Vol. 70, c. *476*.]

That was said in the context of marine nature reserves. I very much hope that the Minister will say a little more today about the progress that he hopes to make.

Like some of my hon. Friends, I criticise the Bill not for what is in it but for what is not in it. I quite understand the difficulties of my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields and the fact that he is anxious to pilot a Bill through the House that will encounter the minimum obstruction and controversy, but it is right to make it clear that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) said, we would wish to go much further than the Bill suggests. I should like to see an extension of planning control procedures to cover major agricultural operations. I know that, in paragraph 17, the Select Committee rejected that approach, but it seems nonsense that such a huge range of activities affecting the environment in which we live perhaps for all eternity should be exempt from public scrutiny and consent. That is quite wrong.

After all, if somebody puts up an offensive, ugly building in a city centre, it can be pulled down, but a lost marshland can never be replaced. It is gone for ever. Most farmers are responsible people, and the farming community understands no doubt that it holds its land in trust for the rest of the community, that it is not some asset to be exploited at whim. But until we introduce some system of planning consent for agriculture, we shall never make universal the principle of democratic community control of the environment.

Paragraph 33 of the Select Committee's report concludes by saying:

"The further measures we proposed would need a wider Bill than is currently acceptable and in the absence of Select Committee powers we expect the Government to introduce one in the next Session of Parliament".

I should be grateful if the Minister could say whether this Bill is the end of the road for this Parliament, or whether he and his colleagues are prepared to consider introducing legislation going further down that road before the end of this Parliament.

I am still very concerned about the general attitude displayed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I am quite prepared to give the Minister the benefit of the doubt, but I hope that he knows the impression that is created by his civil servants among responsible conservation groups. I have been given a selection of adjectives or epithets which come from conservation groups. They describe their impression of the Ministry's attitude. There are descriptions such as, "wholly unsympathetic to environmental issues", "devious", "hostile", "indifferent", "bored" and "ignorant". If I was a Minister and I knew that the civil servants in my Department were giving that impression to responsible conservation bodies, I should be very concerned.

The Government accept clause 4, which lays down the duty of Ministers of Agriculture to further conservation and protection of the countryside. That is extremely welcome. I trust that those Ministers will be energetic in drumming into the heads of their civil servants the fact that clause 4 must not become a dead letter and that the Department must henceforth deal with its new responsibilities for the protection of the countryside conscientiously, energetically and comprehensively.

It will not be easy to change entrenched attitudes. I am not making any political point. When I was at the Ministry of Defence and we were trying to do something about protecting the whale, we found equally entrenched attitudes then, under a Labour Government, and the Ministry of Agriculture was consistently and deviously obstructive in preventing anything being done in that regard.

If the Under-Secretary of State takes seriously his new responsibilities under clause 4—he has my every wish for success—he will make a far greater contribution to the cause of conservation than any other legislation, however beneficial, that can be passed by the House.

1.5 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on introducing the Bill. It is a splendid and necessary attempt not only to stiffen the Government's resolve to enhance the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 but to implement our constituents' desire to enhance the credibility of our conservation policy generally.

I endorse the point made by the right hon. Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert) about the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the difficulty faced by hon. Members over the Ministry's attitude to conservation. To date, the Ministry's behaviour towards the salmon conservation programme has been nothing short of shameful. The gassing in the so-called badger control programmes in various parts of the country has been absolutely disgraceful and has threatened the badger's survival—to no good effect.

This week, in *The Field*, the author of one article stated:

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"The Ministry of Agriculture admit that their trapping procedures are so slack in badger 'control' areas where there is TB in cattle that they have 'lost' no fewer than 108 caged traps, worth £35 each. Perhaps digging is not the only source of supply."

I hope that we shall pay more attention to that aspect as we consider the Bill further.

It has been said many times during the debate that no respectable person, and certainly no one who considers himself a sportman, can find badger baiting anything but utterly repugnant. There is no shadow of doubt that the hon. Member for South Shields has the support of the House for his proposal. We should find ways of tightening the definition of clause 1, and the hon. Member for South Shields is assured of my support for his efforts.

Other hon. Members have referred to the excellence of clause 2. It is high time such a measure was introduced, and I hope that there will now be an end to the rape of the sites which have been so appallingly handled.

I agree with the views expressed on clause 4. I accept the reservations of those who feel that one can go over the top in criticising the farming community. I agree with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) that there has been an extraordinary reshaping of the countryside for the worse. I share the hon. Gentleman's views on how one feels when travelling around the countryside and seeing that the places that one remembers from a long time ago are now totally different. That is certainly a change for the worse.

In referring to clause 5, I make a point that is not entirely connected with the specifics of the clause, but I believe that the House should pay attention to it. I refer to national parks' policy and access to the countryside. I agree that it would be desirable to map all areas within national parks. The trouble is that we have stored up some dreadful folly in our approach to access to the countryside.

It is interesting to note that at a symposium on international conservation a learned gentleman said that

"man wanted reserves for his benefit and the benefit of animals. When these reserves are created he wishes to visit them, but when he has visited them long enough there is nothing left to conserve. If we do not refrain from being over permissive, then we shall lose many more species."

The unhappy conclusion of that symposium was that more research was not the remedy, and that the immediate problem was the loss of breeding habitat for other human uses. The problem is socio-political and not biological. Although that is a little wide of the Bill, I am sure that the hon. Member for South Shields will agree that one of the major problems in the national parks is the way that people behave.

I have a letter from a friend of mine who has a property in a national park on the West Yorkshire moors. He refers to the countryside code, the first paragraph of which says:

"Enjoy the countryside. Respect its life and work."

He had two beautiful memorials on his property. One has recently been stolen, and the other has been grossly vandalised. He said:

"Egg stealing has increased alarmingly, decimating stocks of merlins and raptores. Rustling has greatly increased. Poaching has increased on a scale that is unprecedented."

The litter that is left on the national parks' famous walks and other places is a deplorable blot on the countryside. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can incorporate some further tightening up of such matters. I hope, too, that the Government will support the Bill. The House and the country will be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his initiative and courage in bringing forward the Bill.

1.11 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): There is no doubt that the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 was a major step forward. It was the first comprehensive attempt to legislate specifically for the protection of wildlife habitats. The Act has been instrumental in stimulating the public into giving greater consideration to conservation.

Having lived with that Act for the past three years, we have found it wanting in certain respects. A number of loopholes have allowed unscrupulous persons to dig up badgers, shoot protected birds and either destroy sites of special scientific interest or hold the Nature Conservancy Council to ransom for large compensation payments for doing nothing. It must be right to make changes to give a holding period after the preliminary notification papers are sent to the landowner, during which time nothing may be done to destroy the scientific interest and that which is worthy of conservation.

I shall give one example of how the Bill may help in Oxfordshire. People there have been fighting for the safety of one of Oxfordshire's sites of special scientific interest in the present three-month loophole period at Lashford lane fen at Dry Sandford. That site of some 17 acres was owned by the Thames water authority, which divided it into two lots and put it up for sale.

The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire naturalists trust tendered for 15 acres at £1,000 per acre. Its tender was accepted, but the authority had divided the site so that lot one, of just two acres, included all the road frontage, and a property speculator tendered some £25,000 for it. That was accepted by the authority. At the same time, the potential buyer was advertising part of the lot as 12 one-seventh-of-an-acre plots with no planning permission, for £5,000 each. That is a return of some £60,000 on his £25,000 investment. That site of special scientific interest could be bought by 12 people. They could do nothing with it.

Fortunately, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security and others took that matter up with the Department of the Environment. They pointed out that the water authority had a statutory duty to further conservation and under that pressure the property speculator withdrew. We now await the water authority's decision on the fate of lot one. The tender made by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire naturalists trust still stands, but if the SSSI notification had been immediate, none of this need have happened.

I am sure that everyone who is interested in the welfare of the countryside will welcome the tightening up of the law on SSSIs. This change will protect areas of particular scientific interest, but one has also to have regard to the wider countryside. Good conservation will always need a system of consent by all those who have the trust of the land, and it should be emphasised that many farmers believe in the same objectives as good conservationists. Many farmers in north Oxfordshire are excellent conservationists. New hedges are being laid and over 2,000 new trees have been planted in the past four years in Oxfordshire alone. There is a climate of change in the farming world. Many farmers are keen to work with

conservationists to help protect the countryside and our rural heritage. Conservation based on co-operation is the way forward.

The badger is the emblem of the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire naturalists trust, of which I and many others are proud to be members. I recognise that the deplorable practice of badger baiting still exists and I, and I am sure every hon. Member, wish to see an end to such practices. I hope that it will be possible to tighten up the wording of the clause even further to ensure that we can help stamp out badger baiting. Above all, this Bill will help to stimulate consent, co-operation and conservation.

1.16 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Mr. Deputy Speaker has made an appeal for brevity, so I shall keep my remarks as short as possible.

The House should wholeheartedly welcome if not the letter, the spirit of the Bill, particularly the clause that aims to protect badgers. In my county of Derbyshire, organised gangs of badger sett diggers are at work. The vice-chairman of the Derbyshire naturalists trust, Mr. John Varty, recently stated that setts were being dug out at the rate of one a week, and that that could be just the tip of the iceberg. Therefore, I was rather surprised to hear the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr). He said that in the adjoining county of Leicestershire, there has been no problem with badger baiting. He based his conclusion on a letter, which he read to the House, that he had received from the chief constable of Leicestershire. The letter said that in the past 12 months there had been only one court case in Leicestershire concerning badger baiting.

Therefore, my hon. Friend concluded that there was no problem. I am sorry that he is not in his place, because I point out, with the greatest respect, that he should have inquired how many instances there have been of complaints to the police, on which the police have taken no action. I thought that the letter from the chief constable smacked somewhat of complacency when it went on to say, if I heard my hon. Friend correctly, that police officers who did not know about the Badgers Act may have advised a civil action. It is a disgrace if such things are taking place.

The hon. Member for Warrington (Mr. Hoyle) referred to the recent case brought by the Derbyshire naturalists trust and correctly said that private citizens can, if they so wish, bring actions in the courts for the offence of badger baiting. However, he did not say that in that case the trust was only partly successful. The charge of digging for a badger was quashed, although the other charge of attempting to take a badger was upheld. More important for those who are concerned about badgers, the trust's costs were estimated to be a little less than £2,000. The judge in the case ordered the defendants to contribute £500 towards those costs. It is not on to expect private citizens who are concerned about this disgusting practice of badger baiting to dig into their own pockets to the tune of £1,500 if they wish to see justice done.

The police are perhaps reluctant to prosecute if they are concerned about the evidence, but there is a case for saying that the law is totally inadequate in this respect and that steps should be taken to tighten it up. Those who dig up these setts are not novices. They are well organised and ruthless people. These countryside muggers, if I may so describe them, very often get away with what they do. The House has a duty to take action to stop this practice.

A large number of badgers have been killed and tormented during the past 10 years. Quite apart from the badgers that are dug out of their setts by the people to whom I have referred, I understand that approximately 20,000 badgers have been killed at the direction of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, although only a few of them were suffering from tuberculosis. Therefore, I hope that in future the Ministry will act in a more enlightened way. The badger needs to be protected. It would be a disgrace if the House failed to take action today.

1.21 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on introducing the Bill. I do so on behalf of the half million people who live either in the Lake District or in the surrounding district, which includes a large part of my constituency. I have perhaps the most beautiful constituency in Britain. It includes a number of lakes—Bassenthwaite, Derwentwater, Thirlmere, Loweswater. The people who live in that area are grateful to my hon. Friend for introducing the Bill. Many newspaper columns in Cumbria have beem filled with correspondence relating to the efforts of my hon. Friend.

I wish to say a few words about what I believe to be one of the most significant clauses in the Bill—clause 4 which puts into context the whole of the environmental debate. It tries to establish a balance between the development of the environment, the pursuit of economic growth and conservation. In his article in last Sunday's edition of *The Sunday Times* Mr. David Bellamy misunderstood this approach. I should like to take this opportunity to correct what he said in his article. Clearly, he does not understand what is happening today in our political institutions.

The article is entitled "The Green Rustling" and was written by David Bellamy and Brendan Quayle. It says:

> "Though we, too, have our green spokesmen, our political parties and the ranks of elected representatives have shown themselves less than sensitive to the environment."

Mr. Bellamy is completely wrong. During the last two years, there has been a transformation in the attitude of the Conservative Government towards nuclear waste. A decision has been taken by British Nuclear Fuels, in conjunction with the Department of Energy, to spend £150 million upon reducing the discharges from the Sellafield plant into the Irish sea. That is a large sum of money. Controversy surrounds the spending of such large sums of money, but that money is to be spent upon the basis that on this occasion the environmental lobby has been proved to be absolutely right. It has maintained that money must be spent upon safeguarding the environment. For Mr. Bellamy to state that we are insensitive to these issues means that he does not understand what is happening and, furthermore, does not follow the debates in this country on green issues.

The fact is that the Government do not intend to resist the changes that we are seeking to make to the legislation relating to sites of special scientific interest. Three years ago, a major row took place in the House when the Government refused to accept that voluntary arrangements

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could not be relied upon. There has been a transformation in the Government's attitude. They accept that the voluntary system has not worked.

I believe that both the Government and Opposition parties accept that there are responsibilities over and above the use of public resources for industrial regeneration and development and that we must ensure that a proportion of those resources are devoted to securing the protection of the environment. It is most unfair for people who are well respected outside the House to use the columns of major newspapers to misrepresent the position in the House.

I do not say that what has been achieved so far is sufficient. We are at the beginning of a period of decades when vast public resources will be expended on improving the environment. For example, the Government have not yet given way on acid rain, but in 10 years they will not only have given way but have implemented major schemes to reduce acid rain as the European Commission suggests. We must not assume that because there is resistance today that is the final position. All these arguments are steadily being won and Ministers know it. At a dinner with the Norwegians the other day, the chap from the CEGB was embarrassed by questions about the CEGB's response on acid rain, but he knew in his heart that it would eventually be forced to give way and was merely waiting for the Government to budge or be compelled to budge.

My hon. Friend's Bill is just part of a major shift taking place in British politics. The politics of the 1940s, the 1950s, the 1960s and to some extent the 1970s pursued growth at almost any cost. That is now coming to an end and we are moving into a period in which people are far more committed to the environment and understand that whenever we spend money on the development of our economy or society we must ensure that adequate protection is provided for the areas that others will inherit and which we have a duty to preserve.

1.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): It is always a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), as he never speaks to a party brief. He says what he believes, which is sometimes uncomfortable for the Government and no doubt sometimes uncomfortable for his own party. He reminds us, however, that some issues are broadly above partisan politics, and this is one of them. I am grateful for his comments about the action on Sellafield, about which we have had many discussions. I, too, felt that Mr. Bellamy's article was a little unfair, not just to the Government, but to others in the House. He might at least have been gracious enough to mention that the Department makes a considerable grant to the organisation with which he is associated. I doubt whether that would have been so 10 years ago. I was therefore grateful for the remarks of the hon. Member for Workington, who raised the standard of a very good debate even higher.

I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on his good luck, but also on the way in which he has set about making his reforms. He has been in close discussion with officials at the Department, to whom he paid a generous tribute. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) who started the ball rolling on the three-month loophole. Had we been able to get through the drafting complexities, which he acknowledged was not achieved in his Bill, we might have been able to act more quickly. The hon. Member for South Shields, however, will confirm that it has required a very complex process of drafting and redrafting, with his help and that of officials at the Department, to close the section 28 and section 29 loopholes.

It is always tempting in Friday debates, when everyone speaks with a little less partisanship, and perhaps with less reliance then normal on prepared briefs, to speak a little more like a Back-Bench Member. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, whom I genuinely welcome to the debate, will forgive me if I make some remarks about his responsibilities.

I wish to follow the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). During the 50 years in which my father has been a farmer, he has seen the cycles to which my hon. Friend referred. He remembers the time when the leader of my party, Mr. Chamberlain, said that it would be the midsummer of madness to support agriculture in Britain when there were food surpluses in the world. The Minister of Agriculture at that time was later a Speaker of the House, Mr. Speaker Morrison. British agriculture was consigned to dereliction and to bankruptcy, which was not good for conservation. It was certainly not good for the rural economy or for the British people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster made the good point that it is necessary to use the politics of rhetoric to move the great ship of state and old policy-making procedures in one direction, but we must remember that once the movement has started it can sometimes be carried too far. I must declare an interest here. As I said, my family is involved in farming, and I have discovered plain bewilderment in the farming communities. This is similar to what happened with the nuclear industry. Ten years ago farmers were public heroes—the industry was doing all that was asked of it, including increasing food production, it had massive bipartisan support, started by the Labour party's 1947 Act and supported by my party, and it was built into the foundation of the European Community—but then, all of a sudden, they were told that not only were they not the most successful producers, doing what was asked of them, but they were regarded almost as public enemies. That is not the way to treat people.

I hope that no hon. Member doubts my commitment to the protection of the environment, and I do not doubt the commitment of the hon. Member for South Shields. I say this because it is easier for me to say it than it would be for my hon. Friend the Minister. We must remember that farmers followed the leadership of the House and did what was asked of them; now they are told that they did the wrong thing. Times have changed, and we need a change of strategy, but we must also remember the stresses and strains that can be involved. If pressure groups were to say about other industries some of the things that are said about farmers, I am sure that there would be protests from the Opposition.

Recently, the European Community introduced a minor piece of Community legislation on the recycling of tin cans —not a bad idea, one may think. Not one, but two, former leaders of the Labour party, and not just the Welsh TUC, but the Welsh CBI, have told me that it will mean the destruction of the tinplate industry as we know it. That may be right, and we must take into account their views,

because employment is vital, but let us remember that the farming industry must be shown what it is that we want. If we can show clearly what we want, from everything that we have learnt in the past, it will do it. No industry is better at doing that.

Having departed from my brief and trundled over the territory of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, may I now defend his Department? Those who do not wish to attack farmers usually vent their spleens by attacking my hon. Friend and other Ministers with responsibility for agriculture, which is not fair. For example, the hon. Member for South Shields, who paid tribute to the movement that has occurred, talked about the destruction that can be wrought by the misuse of capital grants. I mentioned that in my evidence to the Select Committee. I would be the first to say that since my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture and my hon. Friend the Minister of State have been responsible for such matters, there has been a complete reorientation of the approach to capital grants.

The Ministers at the Ministry of Agriculture now talk of the conservation impact of grants as one of the principal criteria which they use in sorting out their grant regime. Within a very short space of time there has been a shift in policy from having grants available for the removal of hedgerows to grants for the planting of hedgerows. That is a symbol of the way in which things are changing very much for the better.

There have been many admirable speeches in the debate. I think I can say, without fear of being accused of flattery, that there has not been a bad speech in the debate.

Mr. Ron Davies: Will the Minister accept from me that at least one hon. Member welcomes the fact that a spokesman from the Department of the Environment is now trampling on the ground of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? It is a welcome initiative. Some of us have argued for a considerable time that there should be a greater degree of co-operation between the two Departments.

There seems to be a general recognition of the difficulties facing agriculture and that the Ministry is pursuing policies which are not always in the best interests of the environment. There seems also to be a general recognition that the Department of the Environment has shifted its attitude, particularly over the past two years, and is now genuinely anxious to pursue conservation measures, but there has been no sign of positive co-operation between the two Departments. There has not been a statement of Government policy to resolve the conflict between them. Will the Minister consider whether some new initiatives can be developed so that there can be a concerted approach to the problems, instead of the two Departments working separately?

Mr. Waldegrave: My response is that only in the past week we have published the details of an interesting joint programme between my Department and the Ministry of Agriculture. We have seen the establishment of an exciting new scheme for the management of the Broads. It will be financed jointly by our two Departments and by the Countryside Commission and the Broads Authority. It is not only a symbol but an example of practical work on the ground, showing how the Departments work together. That exciting proposal came from a joint working group of the two Departments with the Countryside Commission.

I was grateful to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) for his remarks about the Broads. Indeed, I feel rather guilty in regard to the hon. Gentleman. When he was engaging in some routine Government bashing at Question Time recently, I let a touch of irony creep into my tribute to his expertise in these matters. We know that his expertise is real, because he has had a long involvement with the national parks movement.

It is often difficult for campaigning groups to notice when they are beginning to win their cause. As people who are more interested in the outcome than in the rhetoric, they should try to recognise when and where they are winning. The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) has a saying that all political careers end in failure, in the sense that if politicians achieve what they set out to achieve, no one has any further interest in them. There is some truth in that. We must not forget the progress that is being made in environmental matters. We must not put it under our belt as if it were nothing. A completely new approach to the issues has been put forward by the two Departments concerned and it is widely welcomed in the House.

The purpose of the Bill is to close a loophole; that is at the heart of it. I am able to reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), who told me that he would be unable to be present for my reply to the debate because of an important engagement elsewhere. He doubted whether we had closed the section 29 loophole. The fact that I use the word "we" shows the amount of co-operation that there has been on the Bill. There is no doubt that the hon. Member for South Shields has closed the section 28 loophole. I think that he has also closed the section 29 loophole.

By extending the period to four months, if the NCC were to feel at the end of three months that it needed a nature conservation order to produce the effect of a stop power, it could get into action and start to prepare for one. It could do that easily in under a month. It usually takes two or three weeks, although it has been done more quickly on some occasions. Therefore, that is not a serious worry. It does not worry the NCC. In a note that it circulated before the Bill it accepted that

"there are advantages in building the additional month's protection into the framework of section 28 rather introducing a completely new stop power exercise separately by the NCC."

Therefore, it supports that part of the Bill. I think that that is all right. We must look at the matter closely in Committee, assuming that the House gives the Bill a Second Reading today.

Nor need my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green worry about the danger of manipulation. He seemed to think that if he was clever enough a farmer could manipulate the reformed procedures in such a way that the NCC would have only a month in which to act. Under the proposals of the hon. Member for South Shields, there is a minimum of four months' protection following notice of a potentially damaging operation. Therefore, I think that the Bill as drafted is all right. We must go over it carefully in Committee, but the hon. Gentleman is on the right lines and we certainly welcome what he has done in that area.

We also welcome the aim of clause 1. The digging and baiting of badgers is utterly repulsive and the Government are anxious that those who attempt to do so should be caught and punished. The present law, as has been said,

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has not been wholly ineffective. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) gave the 1983 figures. There were 57 prosecutions and 50 convictions, and that is a high rate. There were prosecutions in 1984, and again the figures were given. The Government accept that the law could be and should be improved, and we must consider whether clause 1 has been correctly drafted. We shall look at that in Committee. We certainly welcome the principle of taking further steps to stamp out this repulsive activity and we shall give all the help that we can to the hon. Member for South Shields in Committee to see that we achieve what we want.

The worries of those who have the interests of legitimate field sports at heart have been put forward, and the boundaries must be carefully drawn in this matter. I have mentioned the acceptance of clause 2 and the blocking of the loopholes. Of course, there has been damage. In one or two cases we have been able to use the nature conservation order procedure to limit damage in the past few months, but that is not really what the procedure was meant for. It would be better to close the loophole, and we welcome the proposals of the hon. Member for South Shields.

It has not been referred to in the debate, but it is worth putting on record that the NCC has powers available to it to deal with any of the doubts which were expressed at some stages by farmers about conservation aspects. The fact that that has not been raised in the debate is evidence of the diplomatic skills of the hon. Member for South Shields, who has successfully quieted any of the fears that might have been expressed by the NFU. However, it might be worth while to put on record the situation.

It is possible for a farmer to undertake work which is then found to be a potentially damaging operation when the SSSI is notified. He would, under the clause, have to cease such work while discussion took place with the NCC. Should the NCC decide that the operation should not proceed, the farmer might have incurred some costs. In such a case the NCC would offer compensation, provided there was satisfactory proof that financial loss was incurred under the terms of the management agreement. That is in accordance with the existing financial guidelines. Therefore, the powers exist to deal with that potential unfairness. If anybody is worried about that, I think that his worries are groundless.

Mr. Simon Hughes: There is also an argument, which I hope the Minister and the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) accept, that the NCC is under resourced in terms of the number of people, particularly in the regions, to do the policing work. Where there is not an equally valid argument about costs, there is an argument for greater resources so that the operation can be carried out as intended.

Mr. Waldegrave: I know that it is the role of Opposition parties always to act like Oliver Twist and ask for more, but there can be few programmes in this financial year which have had more privileged treatment than that of the NCC, which has had an additional £7 million. A member of the council is present, and I believe I am right in saying that more money would not be effectively useable by the NCC within the year for the deployment of trained people. Therefore, we have taken steps to put our money where our mouth is and make the resources available. I assure the hon. Gentleman that in the present climate that is not the easiest of tricks to pull. Therefore, perhaps it is fair to say that we have not done too badly in relation to the NCC and its resources in the past year.

I was particularly interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for South Shields in introducing his proposals for marine nature reserves. Many hon. Members referred to the unsatisfactory outcome so far of the search for marine nature reserves. In my evidence to the Select Committee I freely accepted that the original intention of the Act had not yet come about, and we must look at it carefully. We must ask ourselves whether that is a result of inherent weaknesses in the Act, or whether there are other reasons——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: When will we get them?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is waiting with impatience. I hope that I can encourage him. "When will we get them?" is the question that we must ask ourselves. Is the delay in getting them a result of weaknesses in the Act, or is there some other reason?

We accept that progress has been disappointing. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green who is the Chairman of the Select Committee, said that there were three choices — I think that three were discussed by the Select Committee. The hon. Member for South Shields picked one of them. The hon. Gentleman is proposing to extend quite considerably the area of compulsion in the Act. What he said was echoed by his sponsors and by my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman). He referred to the consensus behind the Bill. It is very good that the hon. Gentleman has achieved such consensus on the principal agricultural aspects of the Bill. However, there is no consensus on the part of the Bill concerning marine nature reserves. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman has had discussions with the fisheries interests. We must discuss the matter in Committee, but unless the hon. Gentleman can tell us that we have the agreement of the fisheries interests, we must recognise that in that respect we are advancing in an area in which there is not the same consensus. Therefore, we need to consider the matter carefully.

I have had long discussions with the NCC about the marine nature reserve problem. Initially, when I arrived in my Department, the line that the NCC was taking was that its principal duty and the direction of its resources was towards the SSSI renotification programme. That was its first priority. It wanted a little more time to see whether it was possible to negotiate, through the undoubtedly complex procedures in the Act, for marine nature reserves. The NCC is beginning to get impatient. We are all beginning to get impatient. I am not quite convinced of this, but we have to judge whether we should go straight into an extension of compulsion at this stage. We must look at the evidence and discuss the differing views in Committee. We must recognise that on this matter there are sharply differing views, whereas there are not about some other parts of the Bill; above all, about sections 28 and 29 of the Act.

Perhaps this answers the cry of "How long, O Lord, how long?" I am pleased to tell the House that there have been some encouraging developments in the last few days. At Skomer, off south Wales, constructive and helpful discussions have taken place with the sea fisheries

committee and local fishermen. I understand that there is broad agreement in principle on the NCC's objectives and that the one major point of difference is to be resolved by controlled scientific tests to be carried out in the spring. Against that background, I am worried that a move towards further compulsion might be counter-productive.

If we are on the verge of getting the first agreement, it would be a pity to say that the Act had failed at the very moment when it might be about to produce a success. I am not committing myself. When we were looking at the Broads last year and I was cross-examined by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), I learnt not to make promises which cannot be fulfilled. I do not say that the Skomer deal is sewn up, but we are making progress, and it seems that some of the fears about impossibility may be exaggerated. Let us wait a while.

The hon. Member for South Shields is changing the nature of marine reserves and is trying to create a sort of marine SSSI. Powerful arguments were put against such a move in the debates on the 1981 legislation. It was pointed out that difficult problems would be involved.

I have asked my officials to work urgently with the Ministry of Agriculture, the NCC and other interested parties to find a way of preserving the voluntary basis that is the major success of the 1981 Act. Indeed, the Select Committee has endorsed that voluntary approach as the major success of the Act, and the Government welcome that endorsement. Select Committees often like to get major reforming programmes under their belt, and it is a great tribute to those who did so much work on the 1981 Act that their approach should have been endorsed by a Select Committee three years later. I hope that the same will be true of marine nature reserves.

The Bill would impose a duty on the Ministry of Agriculture to further conservation where that was consistent with the Ministry's other duties. I hope that I and my colleagues at the Ministry of Agriculture have shown that we understand whence that demand derives. There have been worries about the Ministry's commitment to the environment, but I hope that what I have said has persuaded hon. Members that things have changed.

The Bill could set a dangerous precedent. I am not sure why there should be more of a duty on the Ministry of Agriculture to pay attention to conservation than there is on my Department to pay attention to the legitimate needs of agriculture and industry. We should do that in all our planning and other aspects.

We write into some Acts a duty on Departments to take various actions. Section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968 states:

> "In the exercise of their functions relating to land under any enactment every Minister, government department and public body shall have regard to the desirability of conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside."

We shall doubtless return to that issue in Committee if the Bill is given a Second Reading, but I am sceptical about expressing the anxieties and fears of the House in the form of statutory duties on Departments. It would be a good parlour game to invent the statutory duties that should be laid on each Department. I imagine that the Treasury would have a long list of duties laid upon it. I hope that, in considering the budget of my Department, the Treasury will have the interests of conservation more at heart than the interests of other Departments against which I might be competing for resources. I think that there is a certain danger here in allowing a perfectly understandable wish for a declaration to carry us into some logical absurdity in the way that we look at Government Departments.

In another clause, the Bill proposes to extend the scope of the maps which national park authorities are required to prepare under section 43 of the 1981 Act to include areas in addition to moor and heath. This has been welcomed by a number of hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) pointed out the difficulties that face those in national parks who are involved in this difficult business of trying to balance access and conservation all the time. It is a hard task, but not an impossible one, as the success of the national parks movement shows. It needs work, care, intelligence and resources, but it is not an impossible task.

I am a great supporter of the national park authorities. There is clearly a growing body of opinion in favour of broadening the range of section 43 in some way. However, we have to recognise that many people who live and work in the areas of national parks are concerned about the proposals and about that use to which the maps would be put and how their livelihoods and freedom of action would be affected. The proposal will need to be considered further in Committee, and I am sure that it will be.

At first sight the hon. Gentleman's proposal to extend the duty to further conservation to the Forestry Commission seems to land us in fewer problems than extending duties round the central Departments of Whitehall. We have such a duty laid on the water authorities, as several hon. Members have pointed out. In a functional Department, I can see the logical argument more clearly for saying that in carrying out this defined function we are required to pay particular attention to another aspect of policy, whereas for central Government Departments it is the collective responsibility of Ministers together to see that the policy is right.

We ought to give the Forestry Commission due credit for the initiatives that it has taken. In the last few years there has been a great deal more sensitivity to the concerns. I have seen in the constituency of the hon. Member for Workington how the commission tries to take care, for example, to contour new plantations and not to have those terrible straight lines of trees marching across the hills, which many of us regret and feel desecrate the countryside. There has been progress, and my impression is that the commission's awareness of the needs of conservation is much sharper than some of its critics suggest, and is improving. I am sure that there is room for further improvement, and I am well aware of the cases where there has been conflict between conservation and forestry in the past year or two. There are still cases where that conflict can be quite sharp. Although we have to put some doubts on the record, we can return to that matter in Committee and see what the balance of the arguments is.

Mr. Soames: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in view of the very serious damage that has been done by afforestation, especially in the north, we should try to adopt the policy that, where conservation and forestry clash, the interests of conservation should always overwhelm those of forestry?

Mr. Waldegrave: I hope that in many cases the spirit of compromise and consensus which has been called upon today can show ways forward where it does not have to

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be total victory for one side or the other. There have been some conservation gains from afforestation. It is not all loss. As usual, there is a balance to be struck.

I have not referred to all the speeches in the debate. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) spoke of the new dangers that derive from our technological capacity to do more than in the past, and that is true. My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle), who is one of our leading lights on this subject, encapsulated a lot of the present-day understanding of the need for balance between good farming and good conservation. I pay tribute to him for that.

Dr. Gilbert: I realise the difficulty of the hon. Gentleman in trying to deal with all the matters raised in the debate, but may I invite him to answer my question? Does he consider that the Bill is the end of the road for conservation in this Parliament, or does he contemplate his Department introducing any further legislation in the life of the present Parliament?

Mr. Waldegrave: As a senior Minister in a former Government, the right hon. Gentleman will doubtless remember the procedures whereby legislative time is shared out. My Department certainly does not rule out going back to the powers that be and asking for further amendments in due course. I certainly do not rule that out.

I apologise to those whom I have not mentioned. The Government broadly welcome the Bill, despite their reservations, which I have already put on record, particularly about the duty on the Minister of Agriculture and about the marine nature reserves. I think that a record number of amendments for any Bill in the history of the House were tabled to the original Bill, and that shows that there is a need for a certain self-discipline, which, indeed, the hon. Member for South Shields has shown. Some of my hon. Friends may be thinking of tabling amendments on wider matters than are dealt with in the Bill, but, in the interests of enacting the principal clauses which we all want, perhaps they will consider refraining this time. However, they will of course make their own decisions about that.

The Government broadly welcome the Bill. We certainly welcome the closing of the loopholes. There are some problems with some of the other clauses, but such matters can be discussed in Committee in a constructive spirit.

2 pm

Dr. David Clark: With the leave of the House, I shall respond briefly to some of the points raised. I very much enjoyed all the contributions, and I was encouraged that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members on both sides of the House supported almost every clause. I know that the Minister was present for almost all the debate, and he will have heard most of his hon. Friends supporting every clause.

I should stress that this is a minimum Bill. The Government's job has been done for them. All the interested bodies have put in hundreds of man hours to obtain a consensus Bill. Therefore, I was a little disappointed that the Minister should say that he would accept one provision involving the closure of the sites of special scientific interest, that the Government would look favourably on the badger clause and that they might possibly consider the Forestry Commission provisions, although there could be difficulties. But I cannot see any difficulties there. Under section 48 of the original Act, the water authorities were empowered to undertake exactly the same responsibilities, so there is no case for saying that the Forestry Commission should not be included.

I turn to the marine nature reserves. The World Wildlife Fund was responsible for drawing up the provision, and the NCC gave its clearance and approval. As I have already said twice, the provision has the full support of the Nature Conservancy Council.

The Minister and I perhaps disagree most about clause 4. Incidentally, I echo the Minister's sentiments, and I hope that hon. Members will not try to wreck the Bill. For example, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Munro) suggested that he might want to table an amendment to change the birds in various schedules. But under section 22 of the 1981 Act there is no need for that, because the Secretary of State can simply lay an order under that Act, and birds and other animals can be deleted or added to the schedules. That is the way to proceed, and it would not be in order to include such an amendment in the Bill. I hope that the hon. Member for Dumfries will not pursue that point.

I was surprised to hear the Minister's statement about agriculture. He was talking about agricultural technology and techniques, and said that they were the engine of destruction for the countryside. Those words graphically describe the situation. As the hon. Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) clearly said, there is a general feeling throughout the country that agriculture is concerned not only with producing food in a very tightly knit country but with preserving the environment. Farmers realise that. The mushrooming of the wildlife advisory groups has proved the point. The NFU has supported the clause. The Country Landowners Association has specifically said that it welcomes the measure.

I ask the Under-Secretary of State to listen to hon. Members and the voices of people outside and to nudge his colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food — I know that the right hon. Gentleman has listened to the debate and I am aware of his interest in it —into taking this legislation on board. It will buy a lot of good will and will help the farming community and the cause of conservation.

I thank hon. Members for listening to the debate and for contributing to it. I hope that they are prepared to give the Bill a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

Education (School Budgets) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.5 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a small Bill but, if it becomes law, it will bring about a vital improvement in the growing debate on education spending and the relationship between spending, falling school rolls, equipment and general school provision. Clauses 1 and 2 are at the heart of the Bill and, in view of the time, my remarks will be basically directed towards those clauses.

Clause 1 refers to the publication of certain financial information. The problem of school closures is an issue that has raged fiercely around the country. When a school closure is proposed, ratepayers, and especially parents and friends of the school, feverishly try to find out from the local education authority the actual cost of running the school. So often parents are told that a school must close because "it costs the authority too much" or "the authority thinks that it could make better use of the money saved." How much money is saved from a school closure? How much better will that money be used?

If the Bill becomes law, the level of debate will immediately be raised and parents and friends of schools where closures are threatened will be greatly helped, especially in dealing with the growing problem of whether small village schools should or should not be closed. The closure of those schools, especially in the shire counties, generates as much heat as any other matter.

Unfortunately, at the moment there is a dispute between the local education authorities and the teachers over salaries. I do not want to be drawn down that path, save only to say what would happen if parents and the people interested in schools knew the actual salaries paid per school. First, the necessary extra financial information would be provided. Secondly, if information came out school by school on the balance between how much is spent on teachers' salaries and how much is spent on equipment, those who are interested in the education system would benefit.

Clause 1 covers the salaries not only of teachers but of those who cook meals, clean and maintain. The total salary bill will be available for parents to see.

I refer to capitation allowances and where the money goes. Parents in some areas rightly complain about the shortage of stationery and about the amount spent on books and equipment generally. Information sometimes comes from a local education authority that a large sum of money has been spent on a computer and that there is no money left for books, stationery and other things. That information is critically important to parents. They want to know where money is going and whether it is going on large items of equipment.

Other Departments are involved. It is not just the local education authorities and the Department of Education and Science that pour money into schools. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Manpower Services Commission are indirectly pushing money into the education system. We need to know who is contributing what. There are three tributaries of money going into schools — DES-LEA, DTI and MSC. It is vital that parents should know who is paying what.

If the figures were presented in the way that I envisage in the Bill, councillors would be able to see how costs varied from school to school and that would help them. It is plainly not possible for councillors to visit all schools in a large shire county. I wish that they could. If the Bill became law they would be able to compare schools within an authority's area and schools in other areas.

There is an interesting article in today's *Times Educational Supplement*, talking about the ups and downs of local education authority spending. The article makes the significant point:

> "Whether there has been any widening of the gap between the 'top' and 'bottom' authorities is not clear."

The authors mean the top and bottom spending authorities. The article continues:

> "But it is apparent that local autonomy has been exercised to the extent of radically different behaviour between 1979 and 1980."

In other words, in the past five years there has been a variation in the way that local education authorities have spent money. It would be beneficial for local education authorities and those interested in education to see who is spending what, authority by authority. The Bill refers to church and voluntary-aided schools, and information relating to them would also be helpful.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On the subject of capitation allowances—I am not asking the hon. Gentleman to answer this point; it is for the record—I visited some schools in Surrey recently with the Select Committee. The capitation allowance for some schools is of course fixed. The parents in those schools double the capitation allowance. That could not possibly happen in an area of unemployment and in down-town schools as it happens in Surrey schools. It is as well to be aware of that reality at the moment.

Mr. Madel: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I remember that we used to talk about that in the previous Select Committee. I was coming to the point about allowances and whether schools received money from outside. To present the figures in the way I seek would not just be helpful to councillors; it would help parents who were trying to convince their authorities that their school was falling to pieces.

The Bill would require local education authorities to show what was being spent on equipment and maintenance year by year. Parents often argue strongly that a school needs more money spent on maintenance, yet are never fully told what the figures are or how much has been spent in the previous five to 10 years. It would help authorities more easily to identify where money will have to be spent on maintenance in the following three to four years.

It would be helpful to parents to be able to say to the local education authority, "Seven years ago you spent this on that school. What are your plans? When will you have to spend more money there?" It can only be a good thing for parents and potential parents to know what has been and what will be spent on schools. It would encourage more financial help from local businesses and donors if they could see what others had given in the past and what was needed for the school. I am convinced that, if more financial information were available and the local education authority genuinely could not do what was necessary for equipment or maintenance, the school might find help from outsiders and those interested in the school —firms, local businesses and individual or groups of donors.

[Mr. Madel]

Clause 3 would merely make it administratively easier for the local education authorities and those involved to publish this information. I have suggested that it is done in a manner similar to that set out in the Education Act 1981 and the Education (School Information) Regulations 1981.

Clause 4(2) refers to the timing of getting this information. The information does not have to be published before the first day of the autumn term of the school in 1985. In other words, the first time that this information would be available to parents, if the Bill should become law, would be in the autumn of 1986. Those elected in May in the shire counties local elections would have had almost six months to settle themselves down and play themselves in before they would be required to get this information in to parents.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): I have been listening carefully to what my hon. Friend has been saying. Many of these proposals should be commended to the House. However, before he concludes his speech, can my hon. Friend tell the House what the approximate cost would be to an average-sized education authority should the Bill be passed?

Mr. Madel: I am just coming on to estimates of cost.

Clause 4(3) says that the Bill will extend to England and Wales only. I did not think it appropriate to plunge into the difficulties that there could be in Northern Ireland and Scotland where Secretaries of State are responsible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) asked what this Bill would cost local education authorities. I have had a number of letters on this matter and a number of discussions with local education authorities. The general view is that, in this age of education technology, there would not be much cost. Initially, it would cost a bit to set up the project, but once it had been set up, given the technology that we now have, it would not cost local education authorities much to administer.

What is more, it would save money in the future because local education authorities would be required to have accurate information as to when they had bought particular equipment and in which school it had been put. Also, those parents involved in business or the building industry or who knew something about the general costs of either equipment or maintenance would swiftly be able to bring the matter to the attention of the local education authority when they thought that a particular school needed more money spent on it. In other words, extra information would do nothing but enhance the level of debate, and that is basically the object of the Bill. It would raise the level of debate on education and the level of public knowledge as to how money is spent in particular schools.

I realise that, because of the time factor, we have not been able to have a full day's debate on this matter. We should at least consider the Bill in Committee. Many stumbling blocks that we find in the Bill could then be turned into stepping stones for the better, more knowledgeable education service. Above all, if the Bill became law, it would be doing the very thing that my party and Government have been so keen on for many years —getting more information for parents and ratepayers who are genuinely interested in the way in which money is being spent and in the quality of service. The Bill would help local authorities, teachers, parents and the country, and I commend it to the House.

2.20 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The Opposition congratulate the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) on introducing the Bill. We hope that it will go into Committee, where it can be discussed further, although I fear that the Conservative Whips may have been at work and will have tried to ensure that the Bill does not proceed.

It is extremely important for both parents and local democracy to be provided with information relating to the costs of individual schools. Parents should be able to compare how effectively the resources that are allocated to different schools are used. I should also like it to be made easier both for the governing bodies of schools and for head teachers and their staff to move allocated expenditure from one heading to another if this is in the best interests of the school. It is not always best for money to be allocated under certain headings without the problems of a particular school being taken into account.

That would also highlight the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) that money provided by the local education authority has in many schools to be supplemented by the parents. It is a sad reflection upon our education system that we are moving further and further away from what we claimed was a free education policy. If this information were made available, it would enable us to highlight that argument.

We welcome the Bill. We hope that it will be given a Second Reading and that it will go into Committee.

2.22 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I support the Bill. It will bring to bear upon the education system not only the discipline of financial control; it will also improve the quality and standard of the education that is provided in our schools. We who are accustomed to seeing, in global terms, figures put into local education authority budgets have little understanding of what these figures mean when they are translated to the forum of the individual school where that money is spent on a unit cost basis. If we are unable to understand that, how much less likely is it that parents, teachers and those who work in our schools will be able to understand how that money is spent and whether value for money is being obtained?

There is no financial conflict between the financial priorities that the Bill seeks to establish and the broader education priorities. In order to establish whether value for money is being achieved in our schools, whether there is cost-effectiveness across the board, whether the right education priorities are being achieved in proportion to the social or political priorities which are customary in a number of our education authorities, parents, teachers and particularly governors need to know what costs are involved.

Those who sit on the boards of governors of schools know that the work which needs to be done often relates to relatively small maintenance matters—perhaps to the installation of a sink in a science laboratory. The procedure is that the architects department is called in to have a look at it; then somebody comes to measure; next somebody comes to recheck; after that, somebody

delivers; then somebody comes to fit the sink; lastly, somebody comes to test the installation. The result is that the cost of installing a relatively small unit, which in our own homes we should think was excessive if it amounted to £70, may well, when the overheads are taken into account, cost about £700—10 times that amount. If that cost were understood by those who are in charge of schools, they would recognise that they were not achieving value for money. The Bill provides a vehicle for that kind of assessment to be made. For these reasons the Bill deserves a Second Reading.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) referred to the closure of schools. One of the features of the Inner London education authority is that, although it may close a school, it does not dispose of the building. This presents a problem. We do not know how much it costs to maintain those buildings while they remain empty. If it possibly can do so, ILEA will cobble up a use for those buildings. It will put somebody or something into the building and make use of it rather than dispose of it. It is interesting to speculate upon the cost of maintaining a building.

I am told that it is impossible to keep a building wind and watertight, aired and ventilated and in a reasonable state of repair for less than £1,000 a week, with a caretaker upon the premises. To spend £50,000 per year maintaining an empty building strikes me as quite unwarranted. If the expenditure were assessed on a unit cost basis we should understand far better how to spend our money and to achieve the right balance between education priorities and ancillary priorities such as maintenance.

The Bill would identify the cost of other ancillary services in individual schools. The school meals service is currently under discussion and one wonders whether we are getting value for money. We recognise the social benefit of providing free school meals for children who might otherwise not get a square meal in the day, but in my area one sees children trooping out of school to buy a bag of chips rather than taking the more balanced and nourishing diet provided by the school meals service. The Bill could assist in identifying and dealing with aspects of that problem.

School transport for recreation and other important activities in the wider curriculum that schools should provide is another important ancillary service. At present there is no way to identify the unit cost, but I believe that the cost per child and per school is far higher than it should be. If school governors could identify actual costs in relation to their own schools, they would have a far clearer idea whether they were obtaining value for money.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in addition to the benefit of the governors appreciating the unit costs, parents too would be enabled to take a far greater interest?

Mr. Bowden: My hon. Friend endorses a point at which I hinted earlier and emphasises one that I was about to make. If the price of putting a sink in a science room were identified as £700, the parents, teachers and governors would throw up their hands in horror at the idea of their money being spent so wastefully. The Bill will help people to become aware of the costs involved in those circumstances. For that reason, I hope that it will have a fair wind today and proceed to further discussion.

2.27 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I warmly welcome the Bill and congratulate my hon. Friends on their perspicacity in bringing it forward. Education is rightly one of the Government's greatest priorities. It is our great hope for the future that our people will receive a proper and valuable education so that they can take a real, sensible and positive role and lead the full and satisfying life that is so important to all our young people.

One of the most important aspects of the Bill is that it seeks to extend genuine accountability. That is important not just in the long-term interests of the children but in the interests of the parents and of those running the school. There is the further advantage that administration at a higher level would be helped in assessing from the unit cost breakdown whether real value for money was being achieved.

Some people seem to think that education in this country is entirely free. It is indeed free to the user, but we are paying out huge sums for a system which does not always deliver as satisfactorily as it should.

One of the most important things that can happen to schools in the future is for all parents to realise that they must take a real interest in their children's education—

Mr. Madel *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put, *but* Mr. Deputy Speaker *withheld his assent and declined then to put that Question.*

Mr. Soames: If parents can take a genuine interest in their children's education, it is more than likely that they will be able to encourage their children further up the ladder of ambition. It is extremely sad that in my constituency there is immense interest in the schools, but that some parents do not encourage their children. Those children invariably fall by the wayside—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 15 February.

SMALL BUSINESS BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [18 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 15 February.

CONTROLLED DRUGS (PENALTIES) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 40 (Committal of Bills).

LEASEHOLDERS (CHOICE OF INSURERS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): What day? No day named.

PROHIBITION OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 40 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the provisions of Standing Order No. 79 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.) shall apply to the draft Amendments of the Potato Marketing Scheme 1955, as amended, as if they were a draft statutory instrument; and that the said draft Amendments be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Potato Marketing Board

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Last June, I came before the House with a request for an inquiry into the activities of and proposed amendments to the Potato Marketing Board. That inquiry was held in August and September last year, and the inspector's report was published in December. I am grateful for the opportunity to readdress the Minister's attention, in the light of that report, to a subject of escalating importance to many potato growers in my constituency and throughout the country.

The purpose of the inquiry was to determine whether the Potato Marketing Board and its schemes were effectively aiding English potato farmers. The lengthy hearings conducted by Mr. Brian Capstick QC concluded that the board, especially in the light of its new proposals, would benefit the traditional grower of main crop potatoes —those farmers who lift their crop after 30 June each season. However, the report did not address itself to three vital areas of concern: the position of the first early grower, the quality control of imported potatoes, and the growth in imports of processed potatoes. I shall discuss those three matters.

First, I shall try to explain the cause of the estrangement between the early growers and the board. The original purpose of the potato marketing scheme was to create and protect an economically stable potato market, especially in years of surplus and of drought. Generally speaking, those who subscribed to the scheme abided by the board's decision to grant or curb acreage and so control production. In theory, that notion appears beneficial, but empirically it is not. The process has become the antithesis of success and has destroyed the fair competition of a free market.

Through embracing the scheme, the English potato growers have become the only growers in the European Community to be reined so tightly, and it refutes entirely the policy of the National Farmers Union, which appeared in "The Way Forward" published in September 1984. It states:

> "There will always be scope for a competitive UK industry to improve its place in the market as long as it is allowed to compete on equal terms. British farm policy can only be administered within EEC legislation. Any farming restraints must apply equally throughout the Community."

A free competitive market does not exist for English early potato growers. They are subject to acreage quotas; their Common Market counterparts, the French and the Greeks, are not. While the Potato Marketing Board continues to control and police domestic production, it has absolutely no control over imports. So we learn that for the past four years since the EEC ruling — between the critical harvesting and marketing dates of 1 and 30 June —almost a quarter of the new potatoes that the British household consumes come from abroad. In short, we are giving away my constituents' livelihoods.

My hon. Friend will tell me that the position is about to change. In his most courteous reply to my Adjournment debate, he said that the board was

> "aware of the anxiety of early growers and is drawing up proposals under which additional basic area can be allocated annually to first early growers."—[*Official Report*, 4 June 1984; Vol. 61, c. 137.]

Mr. Brian Capstick, in the report that we are discussing, says:

"If producers intended to lift potatoes in May and June additional basic area would be made available if they could demonstrate a capacity to grow economically additional potatoes for lifting by 24th June".

I do not doubt that my hon. Friend believed, as the inspector believed and as my constituents believed—that is why they did not make more of the matter at the inquiry—that this meant that a freer rein would be given to first early growers, but not so. The writing was on the wall for those who wished to see it, for the terms and conditions under which this gift of additional acreage would be granted had been spelt out—and carefully fudged—by the time the inquiry started, although not, I must make it absolutely plain, by the time my hon. Friend made his statement in this House.

In *Potato News* in July of last year the scheme was published:

"The Board has approved the provision of one year grants of additional basic area to enable those producers who grow first earlies, intended for marketing during the month of May and the first part of June. This will enable them to achieve an optimum share of the potential market in competition with imported new potatoes".

So far, so good — exactly what we want. The requirement for grant will be the ability to

"economically grow for lifting by June 24 the additional area sought in addition to that normally grown".

The Potato Marketing Board will need to

"consider whether the increase can be economically accommodated not only by the individual but by the industry as a whole".

I assume that it means the French, the Greek and the Egyptian industries. But the position gets worse.

A first letter to Mr. Arnold Hitchcock, the chairman of the board, produced a reply referring me to *Potato News*. A second letter on 13 December — prompted by the realisation that my first early growers were not being granted the additional acreage they had sought—came closer to the truth that we now all know. Mr. Hitchcock certainly made the same points, although offering no explanation of what was meant by "economically grown". *Potato News* had said that

"the extension of the area intended for May and June marketing will be made cautiously and the area granted to any one grower may be restricted".

It may indeed; it may be restricted to no additional area at all.

In his letter of 13 December—this was not published in *Potato News*—Mr. Hitchcock says:

"The Board . . . excluded all those clearly unable to grow and lift by 24 June. It . . . further excluded producers who grow both early and main crop varieties and who had lifted less than 80 per cent. of the early varieties by 24th June 1984".

So what is the result? Fewer than half the applicants were granted a quarter of the additional acreage applied for—a grand increase of 6 per cent. of the acreage of early potatoes planted in a normal year. What is the anticipated yield from that extra 6 per cent.? What proportion of the minimum 22 per cent. of our market that we are currently giving to foreign producers will that win back? The Potato Marketing Board does not know. Asked for the answer this morning, a spokesman for the board said:

"The anticipated increase in yield in tonnes per acre has not been formulated".

So upon what basis has the increase in acreage been calculated?

Such increase in allotted acreage as there has been has been matched against a decrease in the time available to lift early potatoes, now 24 June instead of the second Saturday in July. Again, the marketing board said this morning that that meant that there would be a decrease in the first early potato yield, and, therefore, presumably yet more imports from abroad. The deal begins to look like agriculture's answer to the three-card trick—now we see it, now we do not.

Let me refer briefly and specifically to one Thanet grower, Mr. Rex Goodbar. In evidence to the inquiry, counsel for the marketing board said that Mr. Goodbar would qualify for quota reinstatement and one-year grant. That is down in black and white. On 29 January the marketing board wrote in final response to Mr. Goodbar that

"because the basic area committee was not entirely confident that the criteria could be met"

Mr. Goodbar did not qualify. But in reply to the straight question:

"Is your refusal based on evidence proving that I cannot comply with the criteria?"

it said:

"No. You may be able to prove your ability to comply with the criteria which would improve the chances of you having a successful application in the future."

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister made his statement to the House in good faith. He is an honourable man. But I believe that he, the inspector and the early growers have been sadly and profoundly misled by the Potato Marketing Board.

On processed imports the inspector, in his report, says:

"Although I have heard a mass of evidence this is not an area in which I can make any helpful comments in this report beyond saying that the situation calls for continuous vigilance and, if need be, a flexible and resourceful response from the board."

The processed potato is the growth area of the market. It suits the modern housewife, restaurateur and hotelier. Frozen and dehydrated potatoes, suitable for chips and crisps, are infinitely easier to transport than seasonal potatoes and that convenience has obviously attracted our foreign competitors.

Quotas are enforced by the Potato Marketing Board to maintain high prices for English products, but European growers, who are not restricted by such quotas, are profiting by transporting huge quantities of processed products which retail at a lower price, having been transported and transport costs having been paid, than British potatoes.

Giving evidence to the inquiry, Mr. Young, the director of Scott and Newman Limited, insisted that

"the foreign penetration in processed potatoes had not been halted"

and considered that

"the higher levy (pressed upon domestic produce) might be an advantage to European growers by raising UK prices so that they could compete more easily"

—they being the European producers. He concluded:

"It would take management of the very highest skill and good fortune to keep the GB prices within a narrow band which did not attract imports, particularly of processed potatoes."

Clearly, within the present regime, that skill does not exist.

I refer to the figures given in a written parliamentary answer yesterday. The figures show a growth in domestic consumption in the past four-year period of 377,000 tonnes of processed potatoes. Over the entire period imports accounted for more than two thirds of that growth and in the past disastrous year imports not only accounted for the entire market growth but encroached upon our home production by 11,000 tonnes.

[Mr. Roger Gale]

Quite simply, the processors, because of the board's regime, cannot buy their raw material economically here so they have gone abroad. Even the figures for home-processed potatoes do not reveal what percentage of ware potatoes processed here were originally imported from abroad.

We are talking not about dry statistics, but about British farmers, British industry and British jobs. The Potato Marketing Board is driving those jobs abroad. It is simply not good enough for the inspector to say:

"This is not an area in which I can make any helpful comments".

My hon. Friend is charged with the awesome task of promoting and protecting our home industry. I beg him to do just that before it is too late.

I represent today, I hope faithfully, the views of many potato growers and many hon. Friends as well. My hon. Friends the Members for Gedling (Sir P. Holland) and for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) have particular constituency interests in this matter. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), another major first early area, has been as staunch in his defence of his constituents' interests as I hope I have been of mine.

Britain grows the finest potatoes in the world. But even our quality controls are not transferred to imports, and that brings me, in conclusion, to the third aspect of the report of the inquiry, sadly lacking by omission. While our home-grown produce is, rightly and in the consumers' interests, subject to rigid standards, no such standards apply to imported potatoes. Answering that point in June, my hon. Friend said:

"I have undertaken to study the matter and I hope to be able to say something about it shortly."—[*Official Report*, 4 June 1984; Vol. 61, c. 137.]

In a written answer yesterday, he acknowledged, with characteristic honesty and candour, that

"Following a comprehensive examination of the feasibility of extending quality controls to imported potatoes I have concluded that it would prove very difficult to take action . . . the introduction of legislative measures would almost certainly carry with it the threat of Community legal challenge. To avoid challenge, we should have to proceed on the basis of the lowest standard obtaining in other member states of the Community, which would not necessarily help our growers." — [*Official Report*, 7 February 1985; Vol. 72, c. *693*.]

My hon. Friend might have added—and I am sure that he believes—that it would not help the consumer, either.

The Potato Marketing Board was set up to create an economically stable potato market and to protect quality. We have established this afternoon that since the EEC ruling four years ago, the board has been unable to control the market, because it cannot control imports, and cannot control quality. Faced with the need in the early potato market for flexibility and resource, it has responded with rigidity and timidity.

I commend the diligence of Mr. Brian Capstick for the many hours of painstaking and expensive hard work that he put into his report. Working with one hand tied behind his back, he has produced a document that will, when the statutory instruments have fought their way through the House, improve the electoral processes of the Potato Marketing Board. However, the product of his diligence and hard labours has not satisfied those who were most to benefit — the growers, who are continually battling against foreign imports. The only solace is an adamant desire for a stringent effort by the Potato Marketing Board to co-operate and support the growers.

My hon. Friend the Minister will say that the new regulations, when introduced, will make it easier for the growers to call a poll and make their opinion heard. Mr. Goodbar writes this morning—I think that we can take it that he is not a lone voice—that

"Whilst accepting that we may call a poll of producers after 1st July, we are concerned that the board will conduct a massive publicity campaign to all producers giving yet more assurances —which may or may not be honoured—in order to get a vote for its continuance. We are concerned that we have neither the addresses nor the finances to match this. In order to have a fair assessment by growers they should be able to have the full facts and hear both sides of the case."

Even allowing for Mr. Goodbar's personal strength of feeling, his point is well made.

My constituents and many others look to my hon. Friend for urgent help. For the first early growers and the processors, the board has had its chance.

2.47 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) for providing this opportunity to bring up to date the developments in the potato marketing scheme since the Adjournment debate that we had together last June. That was before the public inquiry, which was held last August and September to consider the Potato Marketing Board's proposals to amend the potato marketing scheme.

The debate is particularly timely because shortly we shall be seeking the approval of both Houses—indeed, I believe that it will be next week—to the draft scheme amendments which were laid before the House on 20 December and to two orders giving effect to revised support arrangements for potatoes, which were laid before the House on 23 January.

My hon. Friend concentrated on three issues, none of which is specifically covered by the amendments which we shall discuss in the House next week. They were debated at the inquiry, but they were not the main thrust of the inquiry. I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I say a little about the inquiry and developments since then before I refer to his three points.

My hon. Friend talked about many potato growers throughout the country being concerned about the points that he raised. I do not deny that some potato growers are worried. However, it is important to do this—and I have to do it. We must look at the matter in perspective. My hon. Friend did not say how many growers were much more supportive of the board's proposals. It is worth making the point that the chairman of the inquiry estimated that about three quarters of 1 per cent. of the total number of registered producers objected to the board's proposals. That puts the situation into perspective. Therefore, I must consider the matter as a whole and take into account the views of other growers.

For the sake of completeness, let me set out the background to the public inquiry. I shall do so briefly, because I referred to it in the Adjournment debate in June. Towards the end of 1982 the Government decided to conduct a thoroughgoing review of the support arrangements that we apply to potatoes. There is, of course, no Community regime under the common

agricultural policy for potatoes, and we are therefore free to operate our own national arrangements, subject only to keeping the Commission informed of the measures adopted. Our present system of support is based on powers contained in the Agriculture Acts of 1947 and 1957, which enable Ministers to provide guaranteed prices or assured markets for potatoes. Our arrangements are founded essentially on the annual determination of a guaranteed price and the making of a deficiency payment if the price received by producers falls below the level of that guaranteed price.

The Government act jointly with the Potato Marketing Board over market support arrangements, but I stress, in view of what my hon. Friend has said, that the board is a producer organisation and is independent of the Government. That means that if producers wish to oppose, for example, the amendments put forward or to revoke the scheme, they have the opportunity to do so if they can get sufficient support from other growers. Effectively, the decision is theirs.

I am sure my hon. Friend welcomes the fact that one of the amendments put before the House by the marketing board makes it much easier for producers to object to proposals or to demand a poll to revoke the scheme. That amendment proposes to reduce the number of producers needed to demand such a poll from 1,000 to 400 and to reduce the qualifying area from 8,000 to 4,000 hectares. That is a small proportion of the number of producers.

The objectives of the review to which I have referred were to consider whether our support arrangements were still relevant to the current and future needs of the industry and to re-examine the need to continue to commit public funds for potato market support. That is relevant to what my hon. Friend said, because the review led eventually to the proposals considered by the inquiry. Therefore, the review was a fundamental stage in the arrangements that we propose for the next five years.

The review was conducted against the background of the Potato Marketing Board facing severe financial difficulties resulting from its inability to raise sufficient income from producers to meet its full share of market support costs, and a consequent need for the Government to provide additional funding to help the board meet the cost of its 1982 crop support operations.

From the review, we were looking for ways of ensuring a stable, efficient and competitive potato industry, while securing the financial self-sufficiency of the marketing board and limiting the extent and hitherto open-endedness of the Government's future commitment to market support financing.

I announced the outcome of that review to the House on 29 February last year. We concluded that we had to take into account the fact that the potato market is highly volatile and that yields can vary dramatically from season to season. For example, this season main crop yields are almost 8·5 tonnes per hectare higher than last season. We therefore concluded that a sudden switch to a free market would significantly increase the chances of price instability and could adversely affect levels of production and consumption.

Our second conclusion was that stabilisation of the potato market, within a limited managed market framework, would help to avoid disruption, would retain producer confidence in the crop and would, thus, give consumers some assurance of supplies at reasonable prices.

The Government's aim was to reduce our commitment to the costs of market support by the end of a five-year running-in period for the new arrangements. That was, and is, an important part of our review. We felt that a greater responsibility should be placed on producers for meeting the costs of market support in years of average surplus and that the Government should contribute to such costs only when exceptional surpluses arose. As a first step to achieving that aim, the board agreed to increase its levy on producers to around twice the current level. That will enhance the size of the board's own resources and facilitate the building up of reserves.

As I announced to the House on 29 February last year, the Government agreed to help the board along the path to financial self-sufficiency by making grants to meet any shortfall in producer funding of market support during the five-year running-in period. Moreover, because the board cannot increase its income from producers, through the higher levy, until the second half of this year, we are making similar shortfall grants available to cover this season's support buying obligations.

The Government's share of this season's support costs under the financial agreement with the board cannot be calculated until after the season is over and the average producer price has been determined. In the meantime, the Government will advance such money as is necessary to keep the board solvent. The House will be kept informed of the level of expenditure through the normal financial procedures.

The 1984-85 spring Supplementary Estimates include £5·869 million for this purpose. This commitment was undertaken to give the new package of support measures a fair wind and to enable the Potato Marketing Board to enter 1985-86 without a heavy debt burden which would severely undermine its ability to pay its way in the future.

There are two further elements in the financial package which I refer to briefly and put on the record. My right hon. Friend the Minister informed the House on 24 June 1983 that the Government were making loans of up to £7·4 million available to enable the Potato Marketing Board to meet its 1982 crop support obligations. In the event, only £5·9 million of the facility was drawn upon. If the House approves the package of measures now before it, we shall make appropriate arrangements to have the amount written off again so as not to saddle the board with heavy indebtedness as it enters the new arrangements.

The final element in the package changes the emphasis of market support from the current system of deficiency payments to the provision of an assured market for a much smaller element of the crop. The House will be asked to approve the continuation of the deficiency payment arrangements, which are extremely open-ended, applying as they do to about two thirds of the crop, and impose a potentially very high commitment on the Government. Instead, we shall provide assured markets for less than 600,000 tonnes of potatoes in the United Kingdom and will redraw the cost-sharing formula to bear more heavily on producers in seasons of average surplus.

That is the background, and these proposals were accepted by the Potato Marketing Board and by the farmers' unions, which undertook to commend them to their members. There also arose a consequent need for the board to propose certain amendments to the scheme.

One of the principal objectives of the new arrangements was to place the board on a much sounder financial footing for the future. To achieve this, the board undertook to

[Mr. John MacGregor]

propose an amendment to the scheme which would have the effect of increasing its levy on producers to £75 per hectare in 1985 from its current level of £36 per hectare.

The potato marketing scheme lays down in precise detail the procedures which have to be followed in proposing amendments. I explained these to my hon. Friend during our last Adjourmment debate. Subsequent to that, we decided to hold a public inquiry in view of the objections and representations received following the formal announcement by Ministers that the board had submitted proposals to them. Every objection and representation that we received was passed on to the chairman of the inquiry. In his report he concluded that there were 130 objections, 84 of which were in standard form, and 34 written representations.

I am sure my hon. Friend will agree that it was a very thorough inquiry. Every opportunity was given to every objector to put his case, and they were all thoroughly sifted. I pay tribute to the way in which Mr. Brian Capstick carried out that inquiry.

Following the inquiry, Mr. Capstick came to the conclusion that, with some little modification, the proposals that had been put, with amendments from the board, should be accepted in full. The modifications which he suggested were put formally to the board, which accepted them. It is on that basis that we are putting them before the House.

In the light of the criticism that my hon. Friend makes, I repeat that the most thorough consideration has been given to the whole matter. There was a full opportunity for a poll which, if a sufficient number had demanded it, would have taken place. Every scope has been given to the objectors. It is clear that the vast majority of producers support what the board proposes. That is what the inspector concluded after his lengthy, exhaustive and fair hearing.

I come to the specific matters raised by my hon. Friend. The first concerns early growers. As my hon. Friend will know, this is a matter for the board and not for the Government, but I understand that assisstance is being given in three ways, and I have seen my hon. Friend's correspondence about this matter with the chairman of the board.

The early lifting rebate will be increased from 50 to 75 per cent. of the ordinary contribution paid by growers. Secondly, additional basic area will be allocated to producers who intend to lift their potatoes in May and June to enable them to compete more effectively with imported early potatoes. That is happening this year. Thirdly, arrangements will be introduced for basic area May and June production which will be outside normal quota arrangements. These special arrangements will apply only to established early producers—those who have received early lifting rebate during the previous three years.

As my hon. Friend will understand, I cannot comment on specific cases such as the one that he raised. However, the board is making a genuine attempt to help the early potato growers. This is a start and an experiment for the first year. The point about its insistence on those who have been in early potatoes before is to ensure that we have competitive growers. This is an area which is extremely sensitive to volumes reaching the market. Prices can change very substantially, even in a week. That is the reason for the board's intention to proceed cautiously. On the whole, it seems sensible.

Careful phasing of supplies has been shown in the past to be essential if market disruption is to be avoided. That also is why the board has been having discussions with the importers to ensure that there is not that kind of market disruption.

As my hon. Friend knows, I have encouraged the Potato Marketing Board to co-operate with the processors most closely, otherwise market opportunities may be lost. I take my hon. Friend's point about that, because it is one that concerns me. We should ensure that our own growers are thoroughly competitive and that they meet market requirements such as the processors require.

There is a growth in demand for processed products, in which the United Kingdom industry must compete. Potato producers must take account of the needs of the market to maximise their returns. For their part, the potato processors must work with producers to help them understand their requirements. It is that dual consultation that I have been encouraging. I agree that the Potato Marketing Board has a vital role to play in this area, and I believe that it is responding as my hon. Friend asks it to do. There is now a much greater understanding of the importance of co-operation among all parties, and the processors have told me that relationships are much better. I shall continue to encourage that.

Finally, I promised that I would make a statement about imported potatoes. I told my hon. Friend yesterday about the real problems, especially on the Community side, of going further and that there was a real danger that we would have to proceed on the basis of the lowest common denominator, which would not necessarily help our growers. I can assure my hon. Friend that I have looked at this most carefully, but that for the reason that I gave him yesterday I have not felt able to extend quality and grading controls to imported potatoes.

I believe that the inquiry and the whole process of review has been most thorough. I hope that it will be acceptable to the vast majority of growers.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 28 January 1985

CIVIL SERVICE

Ethnic Surveys

Mr. Bellingham asked the Minister for the Civil Service whether the Government have taken a decision on future ethnic surveys in the Civil Service.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Government have decided to follow the ethnic surveys undertaken in the north-west and county of Avon with surveys of all remaining non-industrial staff in a phased programme during 1985 to 1988. The first stage of the programme will cover all non-industrial staff in the east and west midlands later this year. All new entrants to the Civil Service will also be covered as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made. Separate arrangements are being worked out for industrial staff. Consideration will be given to further monitoring of recruitment schemes in the light of the results of the recruitment surveys undertaken last year in the north-west and county of Avon. The data from these surveys are now being analysed and we expect to publish the report in the spring.

ENVIRONMENT

Dipper Population

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on which rivers and streams the dipper has been found to have declined because of the relatively high acidity level; and by how many it has declined in each case.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department is aware of two surveys examining the relationship between acidity levels and the dipper population, one carried out by the Welsh water authority on 17 tributaries of the Wye, the other by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in conjunction with that authority on 74 sites throughout the Principality.

The findings have not yet been published, but I understand both surveys suggest that higher acidity is associated with a lower dipper population. In only one case, the River Irfon, are historic data available to compare populations over time; a 70 to 80 per cent. decrease in the dipper population has been recorded between the mid-1950s and 1982, during which time the acidity level increased considerably.

Birds of Prey

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current number of registered keepers of birds of prey.

Mr. Waldegrave: The total number of keepers registered is 3,050. The number of those registered as keepers of birds of prey, with live birds is approximately 2,400.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many registered breeders are currently breeding *(a)* the golden eagle, *(b)* the goshawk, *(c)* the merlin and *(d)* the peregrine falcon and *(e)* other raptors; and how many of each bird was bred in 1984.

Mr. Waldegrave: The numbers of registered keepers who bred or attempted to breed birds of prey, and the number of such birds subsequently registered as bred in captivity in 1984 were:

Species	*Breeders*	*Birds*
(a) Golden Eagle	1	1
(b) Goshawk	30	38
(c) Merlin	28	35
(d) Peregrine	41	43
(e) Others	308	888

Multiple Occupation Properties (Fire Regulations)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce legislation to give greater protection to those living in properties in multiple occupation by increasing the stringency of the fire regulations applicable to such properties.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) on 11 December 1984 at column *443*.

Water Authorities

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the implications for the quality of services provided by water authorities of the proposed increase in their rate of return on net assets.

Mr. Macfarlane: The effect cannot be precisely assessed, but the higher rates of return will support higher investment in water services. Although priorities differ from region to region, this is expected to include higher spending on renovation and renewal of sewers and water mains, with consequent benefit to service levels, and additional outlays aimed at improving the quality of rivers, estuaries and coastal waters.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the effect upon the construction industry of the proposed changes in the financial framework of the water authorities.

Mr. Macfarlane: The financial targets that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) on 12 November 1984 at columns 68-69, will allow a significant real increase in capital investment by the water authorities.

The planning investment levels for the authorities in the public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9428) are £852 million (1985-86), £914 million (1986-87) and £964 million (1987-88). This will enable the authorities to maintain and improve services, secure further improvement in the quality of our rivers, estuaries and beaches and make faster progress on the replacement, repair and maintenance of sewers and water mains. As most of this work will be contracted out to the private sector, it will be of direct benefit to the construction industry.

Water Charges

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to introduce a statutory rebate system for water charges to lower paid customers.

Mr. Macfarlane: No. It has been the policy of successive Governments that, if help is needed, it is provided through the social security system. Water services charges are taken into account when supplementary benefit is calculated, and some 3 million households already receive help in this way.

Radioactive Discharges

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the monitoring of radioactive discharges from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority facility at Winfrith Heath, Dorset.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. The Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food carry out regular monitoring and I am satisfied that discharges continue to pose no threat to the public.

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which radioactive contamination emanating from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's research facility at Winfrith Heath has been discovered near Ventnor, Isle of Wight; and what steps he is taking to seek to prevent a recurrence.

Mr. Waldegrave: I understand that the radioactivity referred to resulted from routine liquid discharges from the Atomic Energy Establishment Winfrith and were radiologically insignificant. There is no cause for concern.

Agricultural Holdings

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what revisions he proposes to make to the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1977 in regard to agricultural holdings in predominantly residential areas under class 5 of schedule 1 of that order.

Mr. Macfarlane: The Government's proposals to amend the General Development Order were set out in a paper issued for public consultation on 23 January 1984. Copies were placed in the Library. The paper includes proposals for tighter controls over the development of livestock buildings in the vicinity of residential property. These, and the many other proposals for changes in the GDO, prompted a wide response from many quarters, and we are currently considering these responses and their simplications in detail.

Stolport, Newham

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what has been his response to the representation made to his Department by the British Helicopter Advisory Board in reply to its letter of 14 August 1984 about planning permission for the proposed stolport at the Royal docks in Newham;

(2) what his response has been to the views put forward by Short Brothers of Belfast about the proposed runway length for the stolport at the Royal docks in Newham.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friend has not responded. The representations are being considered together with others made as part of the consultation process.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what opportunities will be provided for experts from interested parties, including the London borough of Greenwich, to comment on the additional evidence put forward by the Department of Transport in its letter of 31 July 1984 on the control of noise from the proposed Stolport at the Royal docks in Newham.

Mr. Macfarlane: All the parties have been given the opportunity to comment on the additional evidence and, in a second round of consultation, on each other's comments.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how the additional evidence put forward by the Department of Transport in its letter of 31 July 1984 on the control of noise from the proposed Stolport at the Royal docks in Newham is likely to affect the section 52 agreement between the Port of London Authority, John Mowlem and Co., the London Docklands Development Corporation and Newham council.

Mr. Macfarlane: As was stated in the Department's letters of 14 August 1984, the additional evidence related to the drafting of a condition recommended by the inspector following the public local inquiry. It would not be appropriate for my right hon. Friend to comment on the section 52 agreement as such, which is a matter for the parties to the agreement.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the noise impact on Thamesmead residents, both now and as Thamesmead is developed, of the De Havilland STOL aircraft Dash 8 using the proposed Stolport.

Mr. Macfarlane: None.

North Pennines

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is now in a position to make a statement concerning the proposed designation of the North Pennines area as an area of outstanding beauty.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend is still considering this matter. A further announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the latest expected date of completion of the Falkland Islands airport including the ancillary Army provision; and how this compares with the original date;

(2) what is the latest estimate of the cost of the Falkland Islands airport and ancillary provision; and how this compares with the original estimate.

Sir George Young: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Publicly Owned Land (Sales)

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member

for South Hams on 21 January, *Official Report*, columns 266-67, concerning the sale of public land on the vacant and derelict land register, what steps have been taken by each local authority to dispose of the land; whether tenders have been dispatched in each case; what are the dates of return; and how he proposes to monitor progress in each case.

Mr. Macfarlane: With the exception of Nottingham city council, which sought and received extension of time, the authorities have advertised the sites as being for sale in the *Estates Gazette* and elsewhere. The sales are all by tender, and tender documents are available for prospective purchasers.

The directions issued by my right hon. Friend specified that the closing date for the receipt of tenders would be no earlier than six weeks and no later than eight weeks after the date on which the advertisements appeared. The dates between which the closing dates should accordingly fall are:

Locations and Dates
23 February—9 March 1985
Barmpton Lane West, Darlington

6 February
Oozewood Road, Royton, Oldham

26 January—9 February
Doxford Park Way, Silksworth, Sunderland

I shall be maintaining a close watch on how the sales proceed.

Water Act 1973

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on what day his report and account was required, under paragraph 37 of schedule 3 to the Water Act 1973, to be sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General for the year 1983-84.

Mr. Gow: The report and account for 1983-84 was required to be sent by 30 November 1984 and was delivered on 27 November 1984.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, on what dates he has given directions to water authorities under his powers in paragraph 35 of schedule 3 to the Water Act 1973 since 1979; and to which authorities.

Mr. Gow: No such directions have been given.

Planning Advice

Mr. Moynihan asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to publish advice on the planning issues raised by non-retail uses in shopping areas.

Mr. Macfarlane: I have today published a development control policy note on service uses in shopping areas which replaces and considerably enlarges upon advice dating from 1969. The note is available from HMSO and is applicable to both England and Wales. I hope that the note will provide a sound basis on which both potential developers and local planning authorities can assess problems posed by proposals for service uses, which in some cases, as for example with amusement centres, can have a significant effect on local amenity.

Brent Labour Group

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the circumstances under which a notebook, the property of the Brent Labour group, reached the office of the Minister for Local Government.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: This would not be appropriate at the present time.

WALES

Children's Books

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the total sales value of children's books published in the Welsh language during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: This information is not held centrally.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest (Designation)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure that where, under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, areas are designated as areas of special scientific interest then there should be provided an opportunity for the owner or occupier of that land, or other interested party, to appeal against that designation should they so desire.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The matter was considered during the passage of the Act, and we concluded that the right balance was struck by requiring the Nature Conservancy Council to take account of any representations of objections made by owners and occupiers of proposed sites of special scientific interest before notifying such sites.

Housing Authorities (Revenue)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish details of the total income of housing revenue accounts of Welsh housing authorities that have come from *(a)* rents, excluding rebates, *(b)* rent rebates, *(c)* interest from capital receipts from the sale of council dwellings, *(d)* Government subsidy, *(e)* non-statutory contributions from the rate fund and *(f)* other sources for 1984-85, and for each of the preceding five years.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Based on returns made by local authorities to the Welsh Office, the information is estimated to be as follows:

	1979-80 £ *million*	*1980-81* £ *million*	*1981-82** £ *million*	*1982-83** £ *million*	*1983-84* £ *million*	*1984-85* £ *million*
(a) Rents, excluding rebates	72·770	91·084	143·444	151·983	90·002	91·588
(b) Rent rebates	24·617	30·831	24·688	41·884	†105·295	†113·239

	1979-80 £ million	1980-81 £ million	1981-82* £ million	1982-83* £ million	1983-84 £ million	1984-85 £ million
(c) Interest from capital receipts from the sale of council dwellings	Not stated	1·601	4·593	8·546	11·034	11·059
(d) Government subsidy	57·257	65·349	34·168	9·657	7·734	8·428
(e) Non-statutory contributions from the rate fund	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
(f) Other sources (including rate fund contributions made to balance the account)	24·506	27·560	29·939	43·067	50·744	47·534
Total income	179·150	216·425	236·832	255·137	264·809	271·848

*For the years 1981-82 and 1982-83 rent rebate payments made by DHSS to tenants in receipt of supplementary benefit have been included in line *(a)* and not in line *(b)*. This is due to the form in which the information was supplied by local authorities.
†Unified housing benefit.

Homes Insulation

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table giving, by quarter since their inception, for Wales *(a)* the number of dwellings insulated under the local authorities energy conservation programme and a breakdown of the body which completed the work, *(b)* the cost of the programme and *(c)* the number of dwellings insulated under the home insulation scheme and a breakdown of tenancies to whom the grants were paid, *(d)* the amounts of the payments, *(e)* the number of 90 per cent. grants paid and their costs and *(f)* the financial allocation for each of the past financial years to each of these schemes and the allocation for the current financial year.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The available information is given in the following tables. Details of the type of body carrying out the work and of the type of tenancy are not collected centrally.

	Local Authority Energy Conservation Programme*		Homes Insulation Scheme†			
	Number of dwellings	Payments made	Number of grants	Amount of grant paid	Number of 90 per cent. grants	Amount paid on 90 per cent. grants‡
		£		£		£
1978-79						
1st quarter	1,759	73,000	—	—	—	—
2nd quarter	5,007	200,000	—	—	—	—
3rd quarter	6,129	195,000	5,815	221,000	—	—
4th quarter	8,134	442,000	7,983	321,000	—	—
1978-79 Total	21,029	910,000	13,798	542,000	—	—
1979-80						
1st quarter	5,108	220,000	4,636	200,000	—	—
2nd quarter	9,307	315,000	2,527	127,000	—	—
3rd quarter	7,340	323,000	5,085	201,000	—	—
4th quarter	5,245	573,000	7,644	345,000	—	—
1979-80 Total	27,000	1,431,000	19,892	873,000	—	—
1980-81						
1st quarter	4,213	139,000	3,385	155,000	—	—
2nd quarter	4,119	159,000	2,543	128,000	108	8,000
3rd quarter	3,089	182,000	5,951	357,000	1,503	115,000
4th quarter	3,653	209,000	6,632	391,000	1,575	£122,000
1980-81 Total	15,074	689,000	18,511	1,031,000	3,186	245,000
1981-82						
1st quarter	—	—	6,192	379,000	1,238	101,000
2nd quarter	—	—	4,656	299,000	1,079	87,000
3rd quarter	—	—	6,751	430,000	1,511	127,000
4th quarter	—	—	7,929	514,000	2,007	172,000
1981-82 Total	—	—	25,528	1,622,000	5,835	487,000
1982-83						
1st quarter	—	—	5,915	403,000	1,620	149,000
2nd quarter	—	—	6,764	488,000	2,186	194,000
3rd quarter	—	—	7,713	587,000	2,205	214,000

	Local Authority Energy Conservation Programme*		Homes Insulation Scheme†			
	Number of dwellings	Payments made	Number of grants	Amount of grant paid	Number of 90 per cent. grants	Amount paid on 90 per cent. grants‡
		£		£		£
4th quarter	—	—	9,720	730,000	2,554	239,000
1982-83 Total	—	—	30,112	2,208,000	8,565	796,000
1983-84						
1st quarter ‖	—	—	6,571	434,000	1,825	149,000
2nd quarter ‖	—	—	6,184	480,000	1,835	171,000
3rd quarter ‖	—	—	7,005	490,000	1,669	152,000
4th quarter ‖	1,704	—	4,996	362,000	3,279	—
1983-84 Total	—	—	24,756	1,766,000	8,608	—
1984-85						
1st quarter ‖	176	—	5,280	445,000	1,343	—
2nd quarter ‖	577	—	3,987	290,000	877	—

* The collection of these data was discontinued in 1981-82 and partly reintroduced in 1984
† Homes insulation scheme was introduced in September 1978
‡ These data have not been collected centrally since the beginning of 1984
‖ Provisional

Homes Insulation Scheme Allocations—Wales 1978-79 to 1984-85

	Public £ million	Private £ million
1978-79	1·295	1·242
1979-80	1·439	1,473
1980-81	No specific Allocation	1·136
1981-82	No specific Allocation	1·500
1982-83	No specific Allocation	2·196
1983-84	No specific Allocation	1·965
1984-85	No specific Allocation	3,772

Welsh Water Authority (Staff)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest figure reported to his Department of the number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees at the Welsh water authority; and what information he has as to how many full posts have been subject to voluntary redundancy agreements over the past five years.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: At the end of December 1984 the Welsh water authority employed 4,698 full-time and 100 part-time staff. The number of full-time employees who have been granted voluntary redundancy over the last five years is 940.

Heath Hospital, Cardiff

Mr. Grist asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the settlement reached on 10 February 1984 between the Welsh Health Technical Services Organisation and S. W. Milburn and Partners and W. S. Atkins and Partners pertaining to structural and material defects in the Heath hospital, Cardiff.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The settlement was reached between the Welsh Health Technical Services Organisation, acting on the advice of counsel, and the other parties. It was a term of the settlement that the agreement should be confidential to the parties, subject only to the right of confidential disclosure to the Welsh Office and the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Abse asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now place in the Library a copy of the report commissioned by the Welsh Health Authority Technical Services Organisation from Ove Arup and Partners on the structure and soundness of the Heath hospital, Cardiff.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have placed a copy of the reply and appendices in the House of Commons Library.

Road Accidents (Statistics)

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many rear seat passengers were killed in road traffic accidents in Wales during 1984;

(2) what was the total number of road deaths in Wales during 1984; and if he will give a breakdown of this figure;

(3) how many motorists who died during 1984 in road traffic accidents in Wales and who were either drivers or front seat passengers would appear not to have been wearing seat belts at the time of the accident.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The information requested is not yet to hand, but it is anticipated that provisional figures will be available in May.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Confidential Papers (Disposal)

Mr. Shersby asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will consider the introduction of a confidential waste disposal

system similar to that operating in the Civil Service for hon. Members who have to dispose of confidential papers they may receive as members of Select Committees.

Mr. Biffen: The Clerk of the Select Committee concerned will always arrange for the shredding of any confidential Committee papers which a Member may wish to dispose of.

TRANSPORT

Minister's Letter (Cost)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the full cost to public funds of the letter dated 30 November sent out by his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to selected Members of Parliament.

Mr. Ridley: About £350.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any information as to the additional costs incurred by British Rail to date arising from the strike in the mining industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand that British Rail expects to have lost some £215 million of freight receipts by the end of January 1985 as a result of the strike in the mining industry and refusal by a small number of its employees to handle coal offered for movement by rail.

Scheduled Air Services

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Transport if there is a current licence for a scheduled air service to operate between Leeds/Bradford airport and Gatwick.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Yes. It is held by Metropolitan Airways.

Fog Detection

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Transport what analysis his Department has made of the Marconi MET-3 electronic fog detection system which has been in use on the M4 for the past nine months.

Mrs. Chalker: The initial trial of the Marconi MET 3 fog detection system on the M4 commenced in November 1983. Following modifications by the company in November 1984 to overcome technical problems, the trial and evaluation has been extended.

Airports

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Transport what material was available to the airport inquiries in 1981-83 in relation to the effects of expenditure on airport development on *(a)* public expenditure patterns, *(b)* the ancillary effects on jobs of large-scale public investments in airport development in various regions and *(c)* the relationship between airports policy and regional investments and development.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The material available to the airports inquiries in 1981-83 is referred to in the inspector's report which was published on 10 December. The appendices in part IX provide an index of inquiry documents.

Mr. Trotter asked the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent developments at United Kingdom regional airports have been approved in the last 10 years; what was the total cost in each case and the cost to central Government; and which proposed developments have not been approved.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

North-West (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's recent visit to the north-west region.

Mr. David Mitchell: I visited the north-west region on 23 January, when I had a useful meeting with representatives of a number of local authorities in the area. We discussed issues relating to the Government's proposals for the bus industry. I also met a number of representatives of the local media.

Sinclair C5

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he had about the development of the electric vehicle now known as the Sinclair C5 prior to bringing forward the legislation providing for electrically-assisted pedal cycles to be treated as pedal cycles and not as motor vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Section 24 of the Transport Act 1981 provided for an electrically assisted pedal cycle, of a class to be prescribed in regulations, not to be treated as a motor vehicle. In 1982 the Department consulted on draft regulations which, amended in the light of consultation, were laid before Parliament on 8 July 1983 as the Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles Regulations 1983.

During that period a number of individuals and firms, including Sinclair Research Ltd., expressed interest in the potential both for bicycles and tricycles. Some, but not Sinclair Research Ltd., provided information on their ideas for development and the regulations were drafted to allow manufacturers freedom of design within strict limits on speed, weight and power. The Sinclair C5 meets these limits as well as other safety requirements principally for brakes and lights. We do not expect it to have an accident record dissimilar from that which applies to pedal cycles generally.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list those organisations which have recently approached him seeking the expansion of Manchester airport;

(2) how many applications have been made for new scheduled services from Manchester airport by *(a)* British airlines and *(b)* foreign airlines; and which of those services would involve new scheduled destinations;

(3) if he will list all those foreign airlines which operate scheduled services out of Manchester airport; and what is the total number of passengers to have travelled with each such airline using Manchester airport in the last year for which figures are available;

(4) asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* all those destinations from

Manchester airport currently served by *(a)* domestic flights and *(b)* international flights; and in the case of each destination how many passengers travelled that route in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Manchester (Outer Ring Road)

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the original date for publication of the orders for the Denton to Middleton section of the Manchester outer ring road; what is the current date for publication of the orders; when the public inquiry was originally due to be held; and when he now expects the public inquiry to open.

Mrs. Chalker: When I wrote to the hon. Gentleman last July, I indicated that draft orders might be published at around the end of 1984 and that the public inquiry might get under way in the autumn of this year. We now plan to publish the orders in a few weeks time and to start the public inquiry next winter.

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the results of his Department's investigation into the possibility of routeing the Manchester outer ring road over the redundant Chadderton power station site.

Mrs. Chalker: Our investigations into the suggested alternative route through the disused Chadderton power station have shown that it would cost about £2 million more than the original route and involve a loss of up to £4 million worth of economic benefits. I have therefore decided that the original route should form the basis of our statutory orders.

I have written to the hon. Gentleman.

Crash Barriers

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the order of priority and timetable of his Department for the installation of crash barriers on the next 20 dual carriageways in England and Wales.

Mrs. Chalker: I will answer this question shortly.

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to install continuous crash barriers on the A38 between Exeter and Plymouth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have no plans for the installation of further lengths of safety fencing here. However, my Department is currently undertaking a review of the criteria relating to the provision of safety fencing and should this indicate that further lengths can be justified, I shall not hesitate to authorise their provision.

Road Accidents (Statistics)

Mr. Lord asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatal and non-fatal road accidents occurred in the county of Suffolk from July to September 1984 compared with the same period in 1983; if he will give national figures for the same period; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The number of injury accidents are shown in the table below. All 1984 data are provisional.

Injury accidents: Suffolk and Great Britain: July-September, 1983 and 1984

	1983	*1984*
Fatal accidents		
Suffolk	11	28
Great Britain	1,259	1,304
Serious and slight accidents		
Suffolk	669	775
Great Britain	62,649	60,032

Although the increase in fatal accidents may appear large, the numbers are relatively small and are liable to short-term fluctuations. It is too early to say whether this increase is part of a continuing upward trend.

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many rear seat passengers were killed in road traffic accidents in England during 1984;

(2) what was the total number of road deaths in England during 1984; and if he will give a breakdown of this figure;

(3) how many motorists who died during 1984 in road traffic accidents in England and who were either drivers or front seat passengers would appear not to have been wearing seat belts at the time of the accident.

Mrs. Chalker: Provisional estimates of road casualties in 1984 will be published in April, and detailed breakdowns of the final figures will be given in "Road Accidents Great Britain" later in the year. Figures for 1983 can be found in tables 37, 38, and 47 of the 1983 edition, a copy of which is in the Library.

Aerial Spraying

Mr. John asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the areas of *(a)* agricultural land and *(b)* woodland sprayed in each year since 1977 by (i) fixed wing aircraft and (ii) helicopters; if he will give for each year the total number of aircraft involved; and if he will estimate for each year the proportion accounted for by pesticide application.

Mr. Michael Spicer [*pursuant to the reply*, 22 January 1985, c. *400*]: Details are available for pesticide use only, and for the total number of aircraft, as follows:

*Hectares of agricultural land sprayed with pesticides by aircraft**

	Fixed wing	*Helicopters*	*Unknown*	*Total*
1978	177,807	150,663	2,857	331,327
1979	201,776	144,637	—	346,413
1980	199,911	133,341	30,815	364,067
1981	160,900	110,592	22,874	294,366
1982	169,865	138,751	51,006	359,622

* Corrected for non returns.

*Hectares of forestry and nursery trees sprayed with pesticides by aircraft**

	Fixed wing	*Helicopters*	*Unknown*	*Total*
1978	124	4,940	—	5,064
1979	3,447	72	—	3,520
1980	1,897	34	3	1,934
1981	64	125	4	193
1982	34	15	—	49

* Corrected for non returns.

Sources: MAFF Pesticide Usage Survey Reports 22, 28, 34 and unpublished figures.

*Total number of aircraft involved in aerial spraying**

	Number
1977	108
1978	124
1979	130
1980	132
1981	106
1982	100
1983	90
1984	94

* Estimated figures.
Source: Civil Aviation Authority.

Chief Inspecting Officer of Railways (Report)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the annual report of the Chief Inspecting Officer of Railways for 1984 to be published formally; and what is the earliest date on which a copy could be made available to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth.

Mr. Ridley: I shall answer this question shortly.

Train Accident (Rugby)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *483*, if he will explain the circumstances in which a British Rail engineer's train was propelled past a signal at danger on to the main line; at what estimated closing speed the two trains collided; what damage was caused to the two trains involved, to the track, to signalling equipment and to overhead lines and how long they were each out of service as a result; what was the nature of the minor injuries sustained and if those affected are eligible for compensation; what is the nature of the action taken by British Rail to prevent a recurrence; whether the driver of the passenger train involved has been commended for his action; what is the nature of the disciplinary action taken against those members of British Rail staff held responsible for the accident and what were their functions at the time of the accident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I shall answer this question shortly.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Tourist Board

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the loans over £10,000 made at a rate of interest lower than normal commercal rates by the Scottish Tourist Board to aid tourist development projects in each of the last five years, specifying also, where appropriate, the ultimate holding company of the recipient of the loan.

Mr. John MacKay: There were none.

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number and value of loans made by the Scottish Tourist Board to aid tourist development projects in each of the last five years where the loan carried a rate of interest lower than normal commercial rates.

Mr. John MacKay: There were none.

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the grants over £10,000 given by the Scottish Tourist Board to aid tourist development projects in each of the last five years, specifying also, where appropriate, the ultimate holding company of the recipient of grant.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number and value of grants given by the Scottish Tourist Board to aid tourist development projects in each of the last five years.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is set out in the table:

Year	*No. of grants approved*	*Value (£)*
1979-80	116	2,765,703
1980-81	126	1,208,830
1981-82	165	2,645,489
1982-83	188	3,284,108
1983-84	250	5,486,147

Dialysis Machines

Mr. James Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of dialysis kidney machines in operation on an area basis in Scotland; and how many will be in operation in 1986 and 1987.

Mr. John MacKay: Information about the number of machines is not collected centrally, since the differing patterns of use of such machines means that there is no direct relationship with the number of treatments given.

Hospital Closures (Lothian Region)

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he intends to announce his decision on the proposed closures of Bruntsfield and Deaconess hospitals in Edinburgh;

(2) whether he has had any communication from the Lothian health board about proposed hospital closures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Lothian health board decided on 10 January to seek the approval of my right hon. Friend for closure of the Bruntsfield and Deaconess hospitals. I understand a formal submission by the board is in course of preparation which I expect to receive shortly.

My right hon. Friend and I shall give careful consideration to the proposals from the health board and the comments and representation made on the suggested closures. It is not possible at present to say when a decision is likely to be announced.

Community Nursing Services

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was spent in each of the last three years on the community nursing services in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mental Illness

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much money was spent in each of the last three years on *(a)* full-time day centres and *(b)* part-time day centres for people suffering from mental illness;

(2) how much money was spent in each of the three most recent years for which figures are available on specialist services for people suffering from mental illness who are living in the community;

(3) how much money was spent in each of the last three years on staffed hostels for people recovering from mental illness by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* health boards;

(4) how much money was spent in each of the last three years on *(a)* support staff for people suffering from mental illness who are in supported accommodation and *(b)* social work support for people suffering from mental illness living in their own homes.

Mr. John MacKay: This information is not available centrally.

Terrorism

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in Scotland in each year for the longest available period of time as a result of terrorist activities; and if he will break down the figures specifying whether the terrorists were (i) from western Europe, (ii) from Northern Ireland, (iii) from the Republic of Ireland, (iv) from other parts of the world and (v) of unknown origin.

Mr. Ancram: I have nothing to add to the information contained in my reply to the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason) on 2 February 1984, at column *301-2*.

West of Scotland Science Park

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement regarding the action of the Scottish Development Agency property division taking over the West of Scotland science park, Maryhill; and what consultation with Glasgow and Strathclyde universities took place beforehand.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Postal Voting

Mr. William Powell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the votes cast by post in June 1983 in each of the constituencies of Scotland were on the grounds of *(a)* removal, *(b)* physical disability and *(c)* all other grounds.

Mr. Ancram: This information is not held centrally, and there is no obligation on the returning officer to record it.

Traffic Accidents

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many rear seat passengers were killed in road traffic accidents in Scotland during 1984;

(2) what was the total number of road deaths in Scotland during 1984; and if he will give a breakdown of the figure;

(3) how many motorists who died during 1984 in road traffic accidents in Scotland and who were either drivers or front seat passengers would appear not to have been wearing seat belts at the time of the accident.

Mr. Ancram: This information is not yet available.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of Manpower Service Commission mode A trainees in inner Merseyside during 1984 were from ethnic minorities.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of mode A places in youth training scheme schemes and what proportion of mode B places available in September 1984 have now been taken up.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Members as soon as possible.

Low-paid Workers

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what evidence he has that a reduction in the wages of low-paid workers relative to median earnings will increase the employment prospects in the relevant sectors of the economy;

(2) what evidence he has that a reduction in the real earnings of low-paid workers will increase the employment prospects in the relevant sectors of the economy.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There is general evidence that suggests that a reduction in the cost of labour improves employment prospects. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newham North East (Mr. Leighton) on 22 October 1984 at column *481*. There is also evidence that suggests that the employment prospects of certain groups which tend to have below average earnings, notably women and young people, would benefit from a reduction in real and/or relative earnings. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 17 December 1984 at column *37* and my hon. Friend's reply to him on 14 January 1985 at column *32*.

Wages Councils

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made of the effect of the abolition of wages councils on wage levels in the industries concerned.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are considering all available evidence and opinion on this matter.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment what number and what proportion of men of working age are full-time employees, part-time employees, self-employed and not employed, respectively; and what are the comparable figures for women.

Mr. Alan Clark: Preliminary estimates from the 1983 labour force survey in Great Britain are given in the following table:

	Men aged 16-64		*Women aged 15-59*	
	Number (000)	*Per cent*	*Number (000)*	*Per cent.*
All employed*	13,240	77	8,880	57
Full-time employees	11,040	64	4,750	30
Part-time employees	240	1	3,280	21

	Men aged 16-64		Women aged 15-59	
	Number (000)	Per cent.	Number (000)	Per cent.
Self-employed	1,660	10	490	3
Not employed	3,880	23	6,740	43
All	17,120	100	15,620	100

* Includes those whose hours of work were not stated and those in employment who did not state whether they were employees or self-employed.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of employers and managers, professional and scientific workers, supervisory staff and skilled manual workers, respectively, were women in the latest year for which figures are available; and what have been the trends in these figures in the past decade.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information for Great Britain is set out in the table:

	Women as proportion of all in group (per cent.)		
	1971*	1981*	1983†
Employers and managers	19	22	22
Professional and scientific workers	6	11	11
Supervisoy staff	‡	37	‖
Skilled manual workers	12	11	12

* Estimates based on census of population.
† Estimates based on labour force survey.
‡ Estimate not available on a comparable basis to the 1981 estimate.
‖ Estimate not available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Shop Hours (Auld Report)

Mr. Martin Stevens asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a statement about the Auld report on shop hours.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to announce the Government's intentions in the near future.

Lambeth (Targeting and Surveillance)

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis the decision was taken to launch police targeting and surveillance operations in Lambeth recently; and whether this involved his Department or the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The decision to launch police targeting and surveillance operations in Lambeth was taken by the Commissioner personally in the light of a marked increase in the number of offences of street robbery in the borough. The operation was fully discussed by the community/police consultative group for Lambeth.

Khat

Mr. Sackville asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he plans to refer the drug khat to the Advisory Committee on Misuse of Drugs with a view to controlling its importation and use.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans at present, but he is keeping the position under review.

Police Officers (Rent Allowances)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why rent allowances are paid to police officers; whether similar payments are made to police officers buying or owning their own homes; and what is the total annual cost of such allowances.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Under the Police Regulations 1979, every police officer must either be provided with free accommodation by the police authority or be paid a rent allowance in lieu. Rent allowance is paid to owner-occupiers, as well as to officers, living in rented accommodation. The purpose of the allowance, which was first introduced in 1920, is to ensure that police officers who provide their own accommodation are in a broadly similar financial position to those who are provided with free accommodation by the police authority. The cost of rent allowances in England and Wales in 1983-84 was about £148 million.

Ms. D. S. Gelleburn

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now reply to the letters sent to one of his Ministers of State on 1 October 1984 and 3 December 1984 by the hon. Member for Gower, regarding Ms. D. S. Gelleburn, of 42 Faraday Road, Clydach, Swansea.

Mr. Waddington: I wrote to the hon. Member on 21 January 1985.

Electoral Registration (Mental Hospital Patients)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to remove the restrictions in section 7 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 on patients of a mental hospital using the hospital address for electoral registration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: No. The provisions which enfranchised voluntary patients resident in mental hospitals have been in force less than two years and it is too soon to consider changing them.

Brent Labour Group

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the progress of police investigations into the circumstances under which the Labour group office at Brent town hall was burgled on 16 November; and if he will make a statement on the substance of the report.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the theft of a handbag and its contents from Brent town hall was reported to Wembley police on 16 November 1984. The handbag and its contents remain missing. On 22 January Wembley police received a letter from Mr. Martin Coleman, leader of the Labour group on Brent borough council, reporting the theft of an exercise book from Brent town hall and

suggesting that it might have been stolen at the same time as the handbag. The exercise book was handed on to the police that same evening. Police investigations into both thefts are continuing.

Society of Civil and Public Servants (Meeting)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why he banned members of the National Union of Mineworkers from attending a meeting of the Society of Civil and Public Servants at his Department on 22 January.

Mr. Brittan: Taking into account my Department's direct responsibility in relation to the law and order aspects of the miners' dispute, I did not consider it right to allow speakers from outside to address a meeting on this subject on Home Office premises. It is open to the union concerned to arrange wider meetings elsewhere.

Foxley Corner, Wiltshire (Incident)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Wiltshire as to the circumstances in which the windows of a parked van were broken by police officers and one of the women passengers was injured on the B3098 road at Foxley corner between Urchfont and Wedhampton on the night of 21 to 22 January; and if he will make a statement on the substance of the report.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable tells me that police inquiries into the incident are continuing and that some of the people involved have recorded complaints under the Police Acts of 1964 and 1976 against the officers concerned. The chief constable is appointing an officer from an outside force to investigate these complaints. Five women were arrested as a result of the incident and have been bailed pending further inquiries. It would be inappropirate for me to comment further at this stage.

Fire Regulations

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the code of practice for fire regulations in multi-occupied residential premises; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to issue the code of practice on fire safety in houses in multiple occupation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Preparation of the code has taken much longer than expected, but it is hoped that a draft which will form the basis for consultation with interested organisations will be available in the next few months. When the final version of the code is published a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to issue to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis guidance under section 106 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 on arrangements for obtaining the views of local people on police matters.

Mr. Brittan: Copies of the guidance that I have issued to the Commissioner have been placed in the Library of the House and sent to every right hon. and hon. Member for a constituency in the Metropolitan police district. I have also issued a circular giving non-statutory guidance to police authorities outside London about their duties under section 106 of the Act. Copies of this document have also been placed in the Library of the House.

General Election Statistics

Mr. William Powell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the votes cast by post in June 1983 in each of the constituencies in England and Wales were on the grounds of *(a)* removal, *(b)* physical disability and *(c)* all other grounds.

Mr. Mellor: I regret that this information is not available. It is not held centrally and there is no obligation for the registration officer to record it.

PRIME MINISTER

Malaysia (Visit)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she is now in a position to announce the date of her visit to Malaysia.

The Prime Minister: No. But I hope soon to be in a position to announce the reinstatement of the visit which had to be postponed last year.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Prime Minister if the limited list proposals apply identically to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: Yes, though the details of implementation may vary slightly because of differing primary legislation.

Museums and Galleries Commission (Chairman)

Mr. Faulds asked the Prime Minister when she expects to fill the post of chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission.

The Prime Minister: Following the death of Lord Howard in November, consultations concerning the appointment of his successor as chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission have taken place and the post will be filled as soon as possible.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Thurnham asked the Prime Minister what are the current criteria by which appointments of permanent secretaries are determined.

The Prime Minister: Permanent Secretary appointments are made by the Minister in charge of the Department concerned, with the approval of the Prime Minister on advice by the head of the Home Civil Service. The criteria for particular appointments will differ according to the nature of the appointments, but will be related to the relevant qualifications and experience of the person concerned.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Mason asked the Prime Minister if she will give the total costs to date of the miners' strike to Her Majesty's Government's Departments and the publicly owned industries.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in answer to a question by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 24 January, at column 501.

Chile

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister (1) if she will list all meetings held between Ministers and members of the Chilean Government and military since April 1982; and what was the purpose of each meeting;

(2) if she will list all public statements made by Ministers since April 1981 on the régime in Chile, and on United Kingdom relations with Chile.

The Prime Minister: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will list all arrangements and treaties agreed with Chile since 1981.

The Prime Minister: No treaties have been signed or agreed since that date. The Government maintain a normal range of diplomatic relations with Chile.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister what steps she has taken since 1981 to bring to the attention of the Chilean authorities British concern regarding human rights in Chile.

The Prime Minister: The Government have repeatedly expressed their concern both in public and directly to members of the Chilean Government at the human rights situation there.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will consider reimposing an embargo on sales of arms to Chile.

The Prime Minister: No. The Government maintain normal relations with Chile, including defence sales, but our policy remains to refuse the supply of items which in our judgment are likely to be used for internal repression.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the United Kingdom voting record at the United Nations since 1979 on all resolutions concerning Chile.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom voted as follows on resolutions criticising the human rights situation in Chile in the UN Commission on Human Rights and the UN General Assembly:

	Commission on Human Rights	*General Assembly*
1979	(United Kingdom not a member)	Yes
1980	Yes	Yes
1981	Abstention	Yes
1982	Yes	Abstention
1983	Yes	Abstention
1984	Yes	Yes

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the policy of arms sales to Chile since March 1982; and what is the future policy.

The Prime Minister: The Government continues to follow the policy established in 1980: that we are willing to supply defence equipment to Chile with the exception of items which, in our judgment, are likely to be used for internal repression.

Argentina (Arms Sales)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister how many people have been arrested since January 1983 and charged with the theft of engine parts and their subsequent sale to Argentina; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I understand that the police have been investigating the possibility of transactions of this kind having taken place and that a number of persons have been arrested and charged with offences which may possibly be connected with such transactions. These investigations are still being actively pursued and it is not possible to say more at this stage.

Diego Ramirez

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister what use the United Kingdom has of the air base at Diego Ramirez; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government are not aware of any air base on Diego Ramirez island.

Adelaide Island

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister when the proposal from the Chilean Antarctic Institute for use of Adelaide Island was made; and what discussions were held before agreeing to its use by Chile.

The Prime Minister: The initial approach was made by the Chilean Antarctic Institute to the British Antarctic Survey in December 1983, and preliminary discussions between them were held in Santiago in January 1984. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office held consultations with the Natural Environmental Research Council — which owned the facilities at Adelaide—and the Britsh Antarctic Survey before agreeing to the proposal in August 1984.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government concerning the transfer of nuclear materials, and in particular enriched uranium, to countries which have not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The Prime Minister: The transfer of nuclear materials, including enriched uranium, is authorised in accordance with the policy set out in 1976 by the then Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan); that is to say:

"When considering the export of nuclear equipment, material, or technology, we shall study each case on its merits. Our first consideration will always be the provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Euratom Treaty, and whether or not the prospective customer has concluded a Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Our detailed requirements will include the application of IAEA safeguards or comparable safeguards which are verified by the IAEA to exported nuclear equipment and material; an

assurance that whatever we export will not be used to manufacture nuclear explosives for any purpose; an assurance that our exports will be adequately protected against the possibility of theft or sabotage; and assurances that if the equipment or material that we export is re-exported, then the new purchaser will be required to give the same assurances of safeguards, non-explosive use and physical protection as were given by the original customer."

Flight Lieutenant Richard Thomas

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister what investigations the Ministry of Defence carried out into the death of Flight Lieutenant Richard Thomas in an aircraft accident in January 1983; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Flight Lieutenant Richard Thomas, who was on loan to the Chilean air force, died while flying a low-level training mission. Since he was flying one of their aircraft, the Chilean authorities investigated the circumstances of the crash. Their findings wer subsequently passed to the Ministry of Defence, which concluded that no further action was required.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if the discussions held by the Falklands Legislative Council on the amendments to the Falkland Islands constitution were held in public; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: All the discussions in the Legislative Council were held in public.

Scientific and Military Co-operation

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards scientific and military co-operation with Governments not elected by democratic means.

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy is to pursue scientific and military co-operation with other countries where it is in our interests to do so. We treat each proposal on its merits.

Uneconomic Farms

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister what is the Government's policy on subsidising uneconomic farms.

The Prime Minister: The Government do not have such a policy.

Personal Taxation

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister what would be *(a)* the loss of revenue if income tax thresholds and national insurance thresholds were raised to £3,250 for a single person and £4,250 for a married couple and additional tax allowances of £780 were given for each child and *(b)* the saving in expenditure if all benefits, including family income supplement, child benefit and all housing benefits and tax allowances were abolished; and what would be the net weekly spending power of a man with two children earning £110 per week with a rent of £25 and rates of £5 per week (i) now and (ii) assuming all these changes had been made simultaneously.

The Prime Minister: I shall reply to my hon. Friend shortly.

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister what constraints she seeks to place on other employments of persons employed by her part-time as public relations consultants *(a)* in the public sector and *(b)* elsewhere.

The Prime Minister: My office does not employ public relations consultants.

Ministerial Cars (Parking Offences)

Dr. Marek asked the Prime Minister how many drivers in charge of ministerial cars committed parking offences in 1984; and in respect of how many of these cases fines or other penalties were imposed.

The Prime Minister: There were 659 cases in 1984, all of which incurred a penalty.

Local Authorities (Government Grants)

Mr. Favell asked the Prime Minister how much has been paid by central Government in grants and subsidies for which local authorities are the ultimate recipients, showing separately *(a)* rate support grants, *(b)* rent and rate rebates and housing benefit, *(c)* housing subsidies and *(d)* any other grants or subsidies divided by category for each year from 1978-79 to 1984-85, giving the figures both in cash terms and expressed at current prices; and if she will provide similar data in respect of each individual metropolitan county council and each of the metropolitan boroughs within their areas.

The Prime Minister [*pursuant to her reply*, 23 January 1985, c. *424*]: Table 1 gives the available information in cash terms for England, Wales, Scotland and Great Britain. The GDP deflator may be used to convert the figures to current prices. The approximate values of the deflator are as follows:

	Values
1978-79	56·2
1979-80	65·7
1980-81	77·9
1981-82	85·7
1982-83	91·4
1983-84	95·5
1984-85	100·0

Because there are different possible interpretations of which grants and subsidies are received ultimately by local authorities and which are passed on, comprehensive information on grants and subsidies has been given.

Central Government Grants and Subsidies to Local Authorities
£ million—Cash

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
England							
(a) Rate support grants*	6,569·7	7,171·1	7,887·4	9,000·9	9,018·8	9,067·1	8,852·8

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
(b) Rent and rate rebates†	384·9	436·0	566·6	644·3	859·1	..	..
(c) Housing subsidies‡	971·5	1,240·2	1,393·3	863·1	420·5	359·0	393·0
(d) Other grants and subsidies‖	1,946·7	2,324·3	2,822·9	3,121·8	3,262·0	3,853·7	..
Wales							
(a) Rate support grants*	511·9	589·9	683·4	744·8	797·3	819·3	803·7
(b) Rent and rate rebates†	21·4	24·4	31·9	33·7	54·5	..	..
(c) Housing subsidies‡	48·8	58·7	65·3	34·6	10·1	8·8	8·4
(d) Other grants and subsidies‖	126·9	141·2	167·3	190·5	184·9	228·2	..
Scotland							
(a) Rate support grants*	1,040·7	1,194·8	1,451·0	1,512·3	1,633·1	1,718·2	1,638·5
(b) Rent and rate rebates†	45·3	52·7	70·2	106·5	141·3	..	..
(c) Housing subsidies‡	142·7	213·4	228·2	161·9	104·6	72·1	62·6
(d) Other grants and subsidies‖	96·6	123·3	155·0	183·6	200·6	231·8	..
Great Britain							
(a) Rate support grants*	8,122·3	8,955·8	10,021·8	11,258·0	11,449·2	11,604·6	11,295·0
(b) Rent and rate rebates and housing benefits†	415·6	513·1	668·7	784·5	1,054·9	3,562·7	3,956·0
(c) Housing subsidies‡	1,163·0	1,512·3	1,686·8	1,059·6	535·2	439·9	464·0
(d) Other grants and subsidies‖	2,170·2	2,588·8	3,145·2	3,495·9	3,647·5	4,313·7	..

Rate support grant—Metropolitan authorities £ million (cash)

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Greater Manchester	—	—	—	100·2	102·4	107·5	102·6
Bolton	42·7	48·5	53·8	50·2	51·9	54·0	54·8
Bury	28·0	30·6	35·3	29·3	28·9	31·3	30·7
Manchester	100·8	109·1	116·0	109·8	93·8	96·2	90·6
Oldham	40·0	45·2	49·6	49·9	49·0	51·6	52·3
Rochdale	39·7	44·7	50·0	46·3	47·4	49·6	49·1
Salford	48·9	53·8	58·1	56·5	53·4	54·6	53·9
Stockport	40·5	42·5	46·6	40·0	38·8	39·4	38·8
Tameside	39·3	43·0	49·9	44·3	44·8	46·2	45·8
Trafford	26·0	26·7	27·8	24·9	23·2	22·3	21·0
Wigan	51·7	57·6	66·3	59·7	61·3	62·2	60·5
Merseyside	—	—	—	70·1	69·6	69·2	62·5
Knowsley	35·1	37·0	40·6	39·4	38·0	38·5	37·7
Liverpool	102·7	112·9	125·8	114·6	111·3	118·0	115·1
St. Helens	29·8	32·5	37·8	33·1	33·1	34·9	34·6
Sefton	47·4	51·6	56·5	46·8	45·7	45·3	44·2
Wirral	55·2	59·5	66·2	55·2	54·5	57·4	56·6
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	65·9	70·3	66·1	62·3
Barnsley	41·4	47·2	56·3	47·7	46·7	48·3	47·8
Doncaster	51·2	56·6	67·4	57·6	56·0	57·3	57·5
Rotherham	45·4	51·6	59·4	53·2	51·6	53·3	53·7
Sheffield	88·1	93·8	110·5	89·9	86·1	82·8	84·3
Tyne and Wear	—	—	—	65·2	73·9	76·5	75·8
Gateshead	38·5	42·4	49·4	42·1	40·5	42·6	42·1
Newcastle under Tyne	47·1	51·1	56·9	46·1	35·6	37·4	35·0
North Tyneside	36·3	40·5	45·8	38·2	36·4	37·1	37·4
South Tyneside	35·0	38·7	43·1	39·5	38·1	39·0	37·9
Sunderland	57·4	63·8	72·3	61·0	61·7	62·6	58·9
West Midlands	—	—	—	73·6	66·6	72·2	65·8
Birmingham	157·6	170·4	178·0	162·5	156·1	176·2	180·3
Coventry	51·0	53·7	59·6	56·0	57·4	58·4	56·7
Dudley	31·3	32·8	35·9	31·2	30·6	33·9	34·7
Sandwell	40·8	42·3	45·2	36·4	42·9	49·1	50·0
Solihull	24·6	25·4	27·5	24·9	25·9	27·3	26·5
Walsall	36·0	38·1	42·3	37·8	35·5	42·4	43·5
Wolverhampton	37·5	39·6	43·3	40·8	42·4	44·6	44·2
West Yorkshire	—	—	—	94·9	94·9	100·1	103·0
Bradford	85·8	96·3	106·4	100·2	102·7	110·3	110·0
Calderdale	35·2	39·3	45·1	42·0	41·7	43·0	43·2
Kirklees	61·8	72·2	83·7	76·2	82·1	86·4	88·0
Leeds	103·7	115·5	126·1	115·4	111·7	116·6	117·3
Wakefield	47·8	53·7	60·9	54·2	52·5	54·5	54·6

Rent and Rate Rebates and Housing Benefit Metropolitan Authorities £ Million (Cash)

	1978/79	1979/80	1980/81	1981/82	1982/83	1983/84	1984/85
Greater Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bolton	2·1	2·5	3·1	3·4	4·0	16·6	16·6
Bury	1·2	1·5	2·0	2·9	3·7	9·6	9·6
Manchester	7·0	7·4	9·9	9·6	22·8	64·6	70·3
Oldham	2·2	2·5	3·0	3·5	4·2	15·6	17·7
Rochdale	1·7	1·9	2·6	2·9	3·9	14·3	15·7
Salford	2·7	3·0	3·9	5·1	6·5	25·3	27·8
Stockport	2·2	2·5	3·3	3·4	4·1	15·1	15·7
Tameside	1·8	1·9	2·8	3·1	4·6	15·2	16·9
Trafford	1·5	1·9	2·4	2·4	3·5	12·1	12·5
Wigan	3·0	3·6	4·5	5·5	7·3	21·7	24·1
Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Knowsley	2·6	3·0	4·1	3·4	4·1	20·7	20·5
Liverpool	7·1	8·0	10·8	10·6	16·4	66·6	74·5
St. Helens	1·7	2·0	2·7	3·1	3·2	12·6	13·4
Sefton	1·9	2·3	3·0	2·6	3·5	18·6	20·5
Wirral	2·9	3·4	4·3	4·3	5·4	25·7	28·9
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Barnsley	2·6	2·9	4·1	5·1	6·4	14·8	19·0
Doncaster	2·5	2·7	3·8	4·9	6·4	18·8	23·8
Rotherham	2·9	3·3	4·5	5·4	6·6	18·8	22·5
Sheffield	5·7	6·7	8·8	9·6	11·5	43·0	52·0
Tyne and Wear	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gateshead	2·8	3·1	4·3	4·4	5·1	20·1	21·0
Newcastle Upon Tyne	4·0	4·8	6·6	7·1	8·6	34·8	38·5
North Tyneside	2·7	3·0	3·9	4·7	5·6	20·5	24·3
South Tyneside	2·1	2·5	2·8	2·9	3·4	15·9	19·1
Sunderland	3·8	4·2	4·9	5·6	7·8	25·4	28·6
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Birmingham	12·1	14·3	18·3	19·2	23·9	107·0	110·9
Coventry	2·8	3·1	4·3	5·3	7·6	26·3	25·2
Dudley	2·7	3·1	3·7	4·5	5·1	21·4	23·7
Sandwell	4·2	4·7	6·6	8·2	10·6	33·7	34·9
Solihull	0·8	1·0	1·4	3·0	3·8	12·0	13·0
Walsall	2·7	3·3	4·8	6·8	8·3	25·5	26·4
Wolverhampton	2·6	3·1	4·6	6·4	7·9	32·2	31·4
West Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford	3·3	3·8	4·7	5·2	17·2	29·0	32·3
Calverdale	1·6	1·8	2·1	2·1	2·7	10·6	11·3
Kirklees	2·6	3·1	4·5	4·6	5·1	16·7	20·1
Leeds	6·7	8·0	9·2	9·3	11·8	48·6	56·0
Wakefield	2·9	3·7	4·5	5·4	6·5	17·9	23·1

Housing Subsidies Metropolitan Authorities £ Million (cash)

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Greater Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bolton	3·3	4·3	5·5	3·0	0·1	—	—
Bury	1·5	1·8	2·3	0·6	—	—	—
Manchester	18·7	23·2	26·7	15·9	7·6	2·1	5·5
Oldham	6·8	9·0	9·7	7·3	3·3	2·1	2·1
Rochdale	3·5	4·6	5·6	3·5	0·9	0·2	0·8
Salford	9·2	11·0	12·7	11·4	7·6	7·4	4·6
Stockport	2·1	2·9	3·4	0·7	—	—	—
Tameside	3·4	4·5	5·1	3·0	0·4	—	—
Trafford	1·9	2·2	2·5	1·2	—	—	—
Wigan	4·9	7·0	8·1	3·9	—	—	—
Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Knowsley	5·4	6·9	6·9	2·1	—	—	—
Liverpool	13·9	16·9	18·9	12·4	4·4	2·6	4·1
St. Helens	2·4	3·2	3·0	1·5	—	—	—
Sefton	1·9	2·4	2·7	0·8	—	—	—
Wirral	3·2	3·5	4·2	1·0	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Barnsley	3·5	4·6	5·3	1·3	—	—	—
Doncaster	3·5	5·3	6·5	3·3	—	—	—
Rotherham	5·4	7·3	8·9	5·8	—	—	—

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Sheffield	11·4	15·1	16·8	6·1	—	—	—
Tyne and Wear	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gateshead	5·8	7·2	8·4	4·6	—	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	10·4	13·3	15·3	9·7	3·2	0·2	1·4
North Tyneside	5·5	7·3	9·3	6·3	2·5	—	—
South Tyneside	3·6	4·8	6·4	2·4	—	—	—
Sunderland	5·0	6·2	7·5	2·8	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Birmingham	32·8	43·3	42·1	28·9	10·6	2·2	0·6
Coventry	4·2	4·6	6·0	3·4	—	—	—
Dudley	4·4	6·2	7·5	2·2	—	—	—
Sandwell	5·7	8·6	9·9	2·4	—	—	—
Solihull	1·0	1·4	1·7	5·1	1·6	—	—
Walsall	4·3	6·9	9·2	3·9	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	6·0	9·3	10·6	4·9	—	—	—
West Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford	4·0	5·5	7·0	3·3	—	—	—
Calderdale	2·6	3·1	3·1	1·5	—	—	—
Kirklees	3·4	4·8	5·9	2·1	—	—	—
Leeds	11·4	16·4	17·4	6·9	—	—	—
Wakefield	6·8	9·2	9·9	5·4	—	—	—

2(d) Other grants and subsidies
Metropolitan authorities

£ million (cash)

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Greater Manchester	48·9	68·5	74·5	86·1	95·0	97·7	—
Bolton	5·5	6·5	13·7	9·9	10·1	13·6	—
Bury	3·4	3·6	4·3	4·4	5·1	6·8	—
Manchester	13·9	16·4	23·7	25·1	32·8	38·4	—
Oldham	4·3	6·4	10·2	9·7	9·1	12·0	—
Rochdale	3·8	5·3	6·4	6·6	7·4	9·6	—
Salford	6·0	6·5	8·6	11·3	13·9	14·2	—
Stockport	5·4	6·6	8·5	9·3	8·3	11·2	—
Tameside	4·2	4·7	6·5	7·6	7·0	8·7	—
Trafford	4·1	5·4	7·2	6·7	6·0	10·1	—
Wigan	4·8	5·4	6·5	7·4	9·0	10·8	—
Merseyside	38·3	52·6	63·4	76·2	83·9	88·0	—
Knowsley	2·3	2·7	3·3	3·4	3·5	6·0	—
Liverpool	5·3	22·9	28·5	31·7	35·8	46·0	—
St. Helens	4·2	3·5	5·6	7·6	7·5	9·3	—
Sefton	6·6	7·7	9·8	16·8	10·6	15·9	—
Wirral	8·6	9·8	12·6	14·9	16·3	21·7	—
South Yorkshire	21·1	30·1	37·5	38·5	44·7	44·0	—
Barnsley	3·4	3·7	4·9	4·8	5·5	7·1	—
Doncaster	4·7	5·7	6·6	7·0	7·5	11·1	—
Rotherham	3·6	3·4	5·0	5·3	5·5	7·2	—
Sheffield	10·3	13·4	15·3	16·8	17·8	24·3	—
Tyne and Wear	77·0	42·7	39·2	69·3	16·2	20·8	—
Gateshead	8·3	6·2	6·4	7·2	7·7	11·2	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	7·9	8·3	9·5	9·7	9·5	15·2	—
North Tyneside	5·2	6·7	8·2	8·4	8·2	10·4	—
South Tyneside	3·1	4·7	4·7	6·2	6·3	7·4	—
Sunderland	5·0	6·4	7·1	7·0	7·7	10·7	—
West Midlands	51·7	56·6	65·4	76·3	94·5	99·2	—
Birmingham	32·0	24·3	40·6	31·5	36·3	53·8	—
Coventry	6·8	9·0	11·7	11·5	12·2	19·0	—
Dudley	3·4	4·2	4·8	6·0	6·1	8·6	—
Sandwell	4·1	4·8	6·0	8·3	8·4	12·1	—
Solihull	0·6	3·3	4·1	4·6	4·1	5·3	—
Walsall	4·7	7·8	9·7	7·6	7·5	10·0	—
Wolverhampton	5·6	6·9	9·5	8·6	11·6	12·9	—

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
West Yorkshire	39·9	47·9	59·4	63·7	75·9	78·7	—
Bradford	9·9	16·2	15·8	19·1	17·8	28·3	—
Calderdale	5·7	6·1	6·7	6·0	6·7	9·3	—
Kirklees	6·2	7·2	8·7	9·3	9·8	14·5	—
Leeds	12·0	14·7	19·0	7·7	28·0	30·8	—
Wakefield	4·9	4·8	6·7	5·9	5·9	7·8	—

Notes to table 1

The table has been prepared by DOE, the Welsh and Scottish Offices and DHSS. Authorities' outturn returns have been used for some of the information. The following notes are general.

* The rate support grant system changed in 1981-82. Figures for earlier years are not on a comparable basis. The figures for 1978-79 to 1980-81 include the needs, resources and domestic elements. Thereafter, they include block grant and domestic rate relief grant. The figures up to 1981-82 are final entitlement. Figures for 1982-83 onwards are latest estimates after holdback.

† Figures for 1978-79 to 1982-83 are rent and rate rebates. The figures for 1983-84 and 1984-85 are for housing benefit and have been provided by DHSS. Separate figures for England, Wales and Scotland are not readily available. The 1984-85 Great Britain figure is provisional.

‡ The figures for 1982-83 to 1984-85 are subject to adjustment on the basis of final audited claims.

‖ The figures cover relevant and non-relevant specific grants, capital grants and transport supplementary grant.

Notes to tables 2(a) to 2(d)

The coverage is the same as for table 1. With regard to table *2(a)*, rate support grant was not paid to metropolitan counties before 1981-82.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Deaf Children (Teachers)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the number of fully trained teachers for deaf children; and how this compares with his estimate of the number of such teachers required to provide deaf children with the education they need.

Mr. Dunn: On 31 March 1983, the latest date for which information is available, the numbers of full-time teachers in service in maintained and non-maintained schools in England and Wales who were recorded as holding recognised qualifications for teaching deaf or partially-hearing children was 1,840. My right hon. Friend estimates that this figure is very close to the number of such teachers required.

Open University

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of students who have enrolled with the Open University each year since it was established in 1969.

Mr. Brooke: The Open University admitted its first undergraduates in 1971. In 1973 its continuing education programme admitted associate students, who take single undergraduate level courses but do not follow a degree course. The university extended its continuing education programme in 1974 by introducing a programme of sport courses and packs, mainly in vocationally relevant subjects. The figures for the number of students enrolled in each year in each category are as follows:

	Undergraduate Students	Associate Students	Short Courses and Packs
1971	19,581	—	—
1972	31,902	—	—
1973	38,424	1,885	—
1974	42,636	1,350	1,584
1975	49,358	4,188	1,768
1976	51,035	4,578	118
1977	55,127	5,576	6,096
1978	58,788	6,923	13,713
1979	60,963	8,778	10,311
1980	61,446	7,889	25,317
1981	60,550	7,078	18,507
1982	64,422	7,150	29,818
1983	66,403	7,367	40,756
1984	66,763	8,675	*43,031

* (Provisional)

Student Grants

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the value of student grants in real terms since 1978-79 using 100 as a base in 1978-79.

Mr. Brooke: The information requested is as follows:

	Ordinary maintenance grant (£)	Percentage value in real terms (September 1978=100)
1978-79	1,100	100
1979-80	1,245	97
1980-81	1,430	96
1981-82	1,535	93
1982-83	1,595	90
1983-84	1,660	89
1984-85	1,775	91

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing for each year since the introduction of student grants *(a)* the value of the grant, *(b)* the real value when compared with the rise in retail prices and *(c)* the real value when compared with the rise in average earnings.

Mr. Brooke: The information requested is as follows, based upon 1962-63 which marked the inception of the present mandatory awards system:

	Ordinary maintenance grant £	Real value in percentage terms (September 1962=100) of the grant deflated by: (a) Retail prices	(b) Average earnings
1962-63	320	100	100
1963-64	320	98	93
1964-65	320	94	86
1965-66	340	95	86
1966-67	340	92	80
1967-68	340	91	78
1968-69	360	91	76
1969-70	360	86	71
1970-71	380	85	66
1971-72	430	88	67
1972-73	445	85	62
1973-74	485	85	59
1974-75	605	90	62
1975-76	740	87	60
1976-77	875	90	62
1977-78	1,010	90	66
1978-79	1,100	91	63
1979-80	1,245	88	62
1980-81	1,430	88	58
1981-82	1,535	84	56
1982-82	1,595	82	53
1983-84	1,660	81	51
1984-85	1,775	83	52

Primary Schools (Toilets)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many primary schools in *(a)* England, *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside, *(c)* West Yorkshire and *(d)* Kirklees still rely in whole or in part on outside toilet provision for their pupils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not collected centrally.

Rajneesh School, Suffolk

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if Her Majesty's inspectors of schools have conducted any investigation of the Rajneesh school at Herringswell, Suffolk; and if he will publish the findings.

Mr. Dunn: The Medina Rajneesh school, Herringswell, is an independent school and is subject to the provisions of part III of the Education Act 1944. It has been visited on several occasions by Her Majesty's inspectors but has not been the subject of a full inspection which would have led to a published report. Her Majesty's inspectors are due to visit the school again shortly.

European Organisation for Nuclear Research

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he anticipates that his advisory board for the research councils will be in a position to advise him further about the United Kingdom participation in the European Organisation for Nuclear Research.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that the chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC) expects to receive the report of the group chaired by Sir John Kendrew, which is reviewing the United Kingdom's participation in high energy particle physics, in April 1985. That report is expected to include recommendations about United Kingdom participation in the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN). The review group will also report to the chairman of the Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC), as required by its terms of reference. The ABRC and the SERC will thereafter submit their advice on the report, including advice about United Kingdom participation in CERN, to my right hon. Friend.

Manchester (School Governors)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is now delaying the approval of new rules of management for Manchester governors of primary and secondary schools; what representations he has had on the matter; what replies he has sent; and if he will make a statement announcing a decision.

Mr. Dunn: Articles of government—formerly called rules of management — for primary schools do not require my right hon. Friend's approval. In September 1982, Manchester local education authority asked whether proposed revision of articles of government for county secondary schools were such as would receive the necessary approval. The view that they were not has been the subject of various exchanges with the authority, with which the matter currently rests. Representations on the authority's proposals have been received from an hon. Member and from a national teachers' organisation.

University Grants Committee (Scotland)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has recently received proposing a separate University Grants Committee for Scotland.

Mr. Brooke: None.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, before publishing his Green Paper on higher education, it is his intention to consult appropriate Scottish bodies on the case for a separate University Grants Committee for Scotland.

Mr. Brooke: No. The Scottish Tertiary Education Advisory Council appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is considering future strategy for higher education in Scotland, including the arrangements for providing institutions with financial support. The Government will consider these matters in the light of the council's report, which is expected later this year.

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to ensure that secondary school pupils and their parents are informed about the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education examination.

Sir Keith Joseph: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have arranged for an explanatory leaflet about the new general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examination to be distributed to all secondary school pupils and their parents in England and Wales. The leaflet is being distributed to employers' organisations and other interested parties as well. Copies have been placed in the Library.

We plan to publish a "general introduction" to the GCSE, designed for teachers and others professionally

concerned with examinations, shortly. We are also considering how best to make fuller information available in due course to employers and others.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

World Bank Special Fund

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution Her Majesty's Government will commit to the World Bank special fund for famine areas of Africa; and what factors are to be taken into account over long-term development aid in that region.

Mr. Raison: Her Majesty's Government will be represented at a meeting of possible donors which the World Bank has convened in Paris on 31 January. While we strongly support the purposes of the special facility, we are reluctant to see the funds available for bilateral aid diminished by a further multilateral commitment. Among the factors we take into account in deciding on long-term aid to areas affected by famine are development needs, the prospects of using aid effectively, and the importance of working closely with the World Bank and other major donors.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984

Mr. Frank Field asked the Attorney-General when the Government intend to implement section 3 of the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984.

The Attorney-General: Section 3 of the Act came into force on 12 October 1984. If the hon. Member intended to refer to part III of the Act, it is intended to bring that part into force in July.

Official Secrets Act 1911

Mr. Dobson asked the Attorney-General if he will provide details of proceedings that have been commenced under sections 1 and 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 since 9 February 1983 set out in the manner of appendix II to the Franks report.

The Attorney-General: Details of proceedings that have been commenced under sections 1 and 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 since 9 February 1983, set out in the manner of appendix II of the Franks report, are as follows:

PROSECUTIONS UNDER SECTION 2

1983

An employee of the Salvage Association engaged by the Department of Trade to assist negotiation of a salvage contract was alleged to have disclosed details of rival tenders to one of those tendering. Both were tried at the Central Criminal Court and acquitted.

A registry clerk at the British embassy in Bonn concealed items of diplomatic mail which had not been processed. On conclusion of his tour of duty he took them to his home in Kent where he abandoned them on moving house two years later. They were found by the subsequent occupier in September 1982 and comprised in excess of 400 documents, of which 141 were classified "confidential" and 51 "restricted". He pleaded guilty to each of two charges and was fined £600 on each charge. He was dealt with summarily.

A serving police officer passed information concerning motor vehicles obtained from the Police national computer. The information was used in connection with criminal offences. He was charged with three offences and tried at Cardiff Crown court. He was convicted on one offence and fined £100.

1984

A clerk employed in the Foreign Office passed copies of two minutes written by her Secretary of State to colleagues to a national newspaper. She pleaded guilty at the Central Criminal Court and was sentenced to six months imprisonment.

A civil servant employed by the Ministry of Defence stands charged with unauthorised disclosure to a Member of Parliament of certain documents in his possession. His trial is currently taking place in the Central Criminal Court.

A civil servant employed by the Home Office stands charged with unauthorised disclosure of a document in his possession. Committal proceedings are pending.

PROSECUTIONS UNDER SECTION 1

1983

There have been two completed cases where an offence under section 1 has been charged since 9 February 1983.

In one case an employee of the security service passed information to a foreign power. He was tried at the Central Criminal Court, convicted, and sentenced to 23 years imprisonment.

A service man stationed in Cyprus was charged under section 1 of the 1911 Act with allegedly communicating a confidential signal to an unauthorised person. He pleaded not guilty, was tried at the Central Criminal Court, and acquitted.

Eight service men stationed in Cyprus are at present charged with offences under section 1 of the Official Secrets Act 1911. The trial is to be held at the Central Criminal Court later this year.

Jury Vetting

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Attorney-General on what statutory basis he authorises the vetting of juries; and what guidance he issues to the special branch in such cases.

The Attorney-General: No statutory authority is required for jury checking. Both the prosecution and the defence in any jury trial have the right to inspect a copy of the panel from which the jury will be chosen so that they may inquire about the members of the panel and decide whether any should be challenged. So far as the prosecution is concerned, I issued guidelines in July 1980 — which were merely a revision and elaboration of guide-lines issued by my predecessor, Mr. Sam Silkin— requiring the Director of Public Prosecutions to seek my personal authority in every case in which such checks are proposed. A copy of those guidelines is in the Library of the House. I issue no guidance direct to the Special Branch, but paragraph 6 of my guidelines indicates the scope of the inquiries which the Director may request the police to make.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Non-Proliferation Treaty

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his proposals to extend and develop the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Luce: We consider the non-proliferation treaty to be fundamental to our policy of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. We take every opportunity to extend its coverage by persuading states that have not yet acceded to do so. At the NPT review conference in Geneva in September, we shall urge the parties to re-affirm their commitment to it. We have no proposals for changes to the treaty itself.

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to obtain an

agreement to prevent any form of nuclear assistance to a country that has withdrawn from the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Luce: We are not aware that any state party is contemplating withdrawal from the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the level of the United Kingdom's representation at the non-proliferation treaty meeting in Geneva; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The United Kingdom delegation to the preparatory committee for the non-proliferation treaty review conference is headed by the leader of the United Kingdom delegation to the Committee on Disarmament.

No final decision has been taken regarding representation at the review conference itself which begins on 2 September. It is probable that the principal United Kingdom statement will be made by a Minister of State, as was the case at the first and second review conferences in 1975 and 1980 respectively.

Iran-Iraq War

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the response of the Government to the Red Cross appeal for intervention to end the Iran-Iraq war.

Mr. Luce: The most recent appeal by the International Committee of the Red Cross on the Iran-Iraq conflict in November 1984 concentrated on securing the help of the international community in persuading Iran to respect the Geneva conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war. In response, the representative of the Presidency in Tehran made in demarché to the Iranian Government on behalf of the Ten, expressing concern at the inability of the ICRC to fulfil its obligations in Iran.

We gave full support to the recent investigation by a United Nations team into the treatment of prisoners of war by Iran and Iraq.

Operation Moses

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government had any knowledge of Operation Moses prior to its public acknowledgement in Israel; whether Her Majesty's Government had any involvement in the operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: We were aware of reports that some Falashas were able to leave Sudan, with Israel as their final destination, but not of the project now known as Operation Moses. There was no United Kingdom involvement. The movement of Falasha Jews to Israel is a matter for the Governments of Israel and Ethiopia, the country of which the Falashas are citizens.

Irish Foreign Minister

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply, No. W153, to the hon. Member for Billericay on 21 January, what substantive reply to the representations of the Irish Foreign Minister of 15 January has now been given by Her Majesty's ambassador to Dublin.

Mr. Renton: As I said to my hon. Friend on 21 January, Her Majesty's ambassador has explained our stated policy on the Security Forces in Northern Ireland. No further substantive comment on the incident on 15 January would be appropriate until the police have completed their inquiries and their report has been considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Foreign Governments (Representations)

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, in their attitude towards representations from foreign Governments concerning events in the United Kingdom, Her Majesty's Government differentiate between the Government of the Irish Republic and other foreign Governments.

Mr. Renton: Our attitude towards such representations depends on their nature and our relations with the Governments concerned. We have close relations with the Government of the Republic of Ireland and are ready to listen to their views.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will be the arrangements for civilian use of the Falkland Islands airport; and how this will affect its use for all military and allied purposes.

Mr. Renton: The existing airport at Port Stanley is used both by the Royal Air Force and by the Falkland Islands Government Air Service. The detailed arrangements for the operation of the new airport under construction at Mount Pleasant are at present under discussion. They will reflect the fact that in addition to its military function, the airport will come to have an increasingly important civilian and developmental role.

ENERGY

BNOC (Oil Prices)

3. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairman of the British National Oil Corporation to discuss the price of oil.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I frequently meet with the chairman of the British National Oil Corporation.

25. **Mr. Skeet** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will instruct the British National Oil Corporation to reduce its official oil price.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: No.

Polkemmet Colliery

4. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will pay an official visit to Polkemmet colliery.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have no plans to do so.

Standing Charges

9. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received from the electricity and gas boards concerning the operation of their arrangements for levying standing charges.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Decisions on prices, including standing charges, are a matter for the electricity and gas boards. Such questions are raised from time to time during regular discussions with the industries.

"Cold Comfort for the Poor"

16. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what study he has made of the report by the Greater London Citizens Advice Bureaux "Cold Comfort for the Poor", a copy of which has been sent to him, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: My right hon. Friend and I have received copies of the report from the director of the Greater London citizens advice bureaux service and our comments have been passed to him.

National Coal Board (Membership)

19. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he is satisfied with the current performance of the members of the National Coal Board.

Mr. Peter Walker: Yes.

Coal (Subsidies)

20. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the level of production subsidy per tonne of coal for each country in the European Economic Community.

Mr. David Hunt: No up-to-date figures are available. The latest published figures take no account of the vastly increased subsidy per tonne which the United Kingdom taxpayer will be making to the coal industry this year as a result of the current dispute.

Coal Industry

21. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the strike in the coal mining industry.

22. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement on the strike in the coal mining industry.

23. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he will next meet the chairman of the National Coal Board to discuss the present state of the coal industry.

27. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he intends to meet the chairman of the National Coal Board to discuss the present coal mining dispute.

29. **Mr. Rost** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current situation in the coal mining industry.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer to the reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell).

26. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he makes of the extent to which the current dispute has reduced the long-term market for coal.

Mr. David Hunt: The extent of the long-term damage will depend on the terms on which the dispute is settled. Clear recognition by all concerned of the economic realities of coal production should permit the National Coal Board to win a substantial market based on assured and competitively priced supplies.

28. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the numbers of mineworkers resuming work since the beginning of 1985.

Mr. David Hunt: So far in 1985, 10,159 former strikers have returned to work throughout the British coalfield.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the coal output lost as a result of the industrial dispute in the industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Published figures show that between the start of the overtime ban on 1 November 1983 and 27 October 1984 an estimated 55,694,000 tonnes of deep-mined output are estimated to have been lost to the National Coal Board as a result of the dispute. However, we still have very high stocks at both the pits and the power stations.

24. **Mr. Orme** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what response he has made to the leaders of the Council of Churches in Wales and the Roman Catholic Church in calling on the Government to set up an independent review body to examine the future of the coal industry.

Mr. Peter Walker: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that I met the leaders of both the British Council of Churches and the Council of Churches for Wales last week. I share the concern expressed by the churches about the damage this pointless dispute is inflicting on the mining industry and its communities. Like them, I also wish for a swift settlement that will offer the industry a viable future.

Privatisation

17. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what are the current estimated savings by his Department for 1984-85 as a result of privatisation schemes.

Mr. Peter Walker: Privatisation is only one element in my Department's successful cost-cutting programme and its contribution cannot be isolated.

Electrical Appliances

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will introduce legislation to require electrical appliances to be labelled at the point of sale with information relating to their average running costs and energy efficiency.

Mr. David Hunt: Members of the Association of Manufacturers of Domestic Electrical Appliances are already including in pre-sales literature basic data on the energy consumption of major appliances. The Energy Efficiency Office has prepared leaflets which enable retailers and prospective purchasers to convert this data into a likely annual running cost. I hope more progress will be made by voluntary arrangements and the pressure of consumers.

Uranium (Namibia)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Energy when the Central Electricity Generating Board's contract with Rio Tinto Zinc for the supply of Namibian uranium is due to terminate; and if any plans exist for renewal of the contract after its expiry date.

Mr. Goodlad: The contract with the Rossing mine has already terminated and no plans have been made to renew it.

Combined Heat and Power Schemes

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Energy which of the proposed lead city schemes for combined heat and power offer the best prospects of an attractive return on investment.

Mr. David Hunt: Estimates of the returns offered were published in Energy Report No. 53.

Sleipner Gas Contract

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Energy what consideration is being given to the use of substitute natural gas produced from coal as an alternative to the Sleipner gas contract; and whether any assessment has been made by Her Majesty's Government of the annual tonnage of coal which would be required for this purpose.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: On current estimates, synthetic natural gas produced from coal would be far more expensive for the gas consumer than either the British or Norwegian gas currently on offer to the British Gas Corporation and is not therefore under consideration as an alternative to Sleipner.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he is now in a position to announce his decision on the British Gas Corporation's request that it be allowed to import natural gas from the Sleipner field; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Natural Gas Reserves

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has revised his forward estimates of the amount of natural gas available from the United Kingdom continental shelf since the Brown Book was last published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Revised estimates of gas reserves on the United Kingdom continental shelf are being prepared and will be published in the next edition of the Brown Book.

Gas Consumption

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has revised his forward estimates of the likely consumption of gas in the United Kingdom since the Brown Book was last published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The latest published estimates are contained in my Department's proof of evidence for the Sizewell B public inquiry.

National Coal Board (Public Relations)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he gathers about expenditure by the National Coal Board on public relations consultants; and which are the firms and individuals employed.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department does not gather such information.

Nationalised Industries (Contracts)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his policy regarding the award of contracts by nationalised industries under his responsibility other than by open public competition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The award of contracts is a commercial decision for the management of the industries.

Alternative Forms of Energy

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Energy what progress was made in 1984 relating to research into alternative forms of energy.

Mr. David Hunt: Progress has resulted in the confirmation of passive solar and waste combustion as economically attractive technologies. We have made encouraging progress with our major projects in geothermal and wind energy and have signed a memorandum of understanding on collaboration with the United States.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Retailers (Discounts)

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's review of relative discounts by suppliers to large and small retailers.

Mr. Fletcher: The Director General of Fair Trading expects to publish later this year the results of his fact-finding exercise to update the information in the report by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on discounts to retailers.

Companies (Liquidation Law)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied with the present state of company liquidation law; when he expects fully to implement the recommendations of the Cork report on insolvency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: No, I am not satisfied. That is why we propose to amend the legislation by the Insolvency Bill which was introduced in another place on 10 December 1984. The Government's response to the report of the review committee on insolvency law and practice—the Cork report — was contained in the White Paper "A Revised Framework for Insolvency Law" published last February, Cmnd. 9175, which met with general approval. A number of modifications to the White Paper proposals made in light of comments received, including wider grounds for relief for directors from automatic

disqualification, were announced on 1 August 1984. The principal of these were described in a memorandum, copies of which were placed in the Library of this House.

Civil Defence

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will consider the formation of a consultative body consisting of representatives of the trade unions, industry and his Department to co-ordinate the role of industry in civil defence.

Mr. Butcher: A study to assess the essential requirements which industry could be called upon to supply for civil defence purposes, and industry's capability to meet them, is being undertaken. Until this study has been completed, it would be premature to consider the formulation of a consultative body on the lines suggested.

Electric Batteries

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will initiate consultations with the manufacturers of electric batteries about the introduction of a code of practice requiring all batteries to carry a date of manufacture and date by which they should be sold.

Mr. Fletcher: I am not aware of any substantial public complaint in this area, nor am I convinced that the date-stamping of batteries would be of significant benefit to consumers.

Books and Journals

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the approximate annual sales value of *(a)* books, *(b)* newspapers and *(c)* periodicals, journals and magazines, in the United Kingdom for the latest available period of 12 months.

Mr. Channon: Estimates of annual sales in the United Kingdom for the 12 months ended September 1984 are as follows:

	£ billion
(a) books	1·8
(b) newspapers	2·5
(c) periodicals, journals and magazines	1·8

China (Trade)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to improve trade with the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Channon: Trade between Britain and the People's Republic of China continues to increase. The Government of the People's Republic of China have told the Government that China is aiming for sustained economic growth with emphasis on the development of energy, transport, communications and the modernisation of industry and agriculture, to which Britain can contribute. There are, therefore, good opportunities for a steady increase in trade, which are enhanced by our very good political relations. My noble Friend the Minister without Portfolio will shortly lead a high level trade mission to China, which I am sure will make a significant contribution to the development of trade between Britain and China.

Pharmaceutical Products (Exports-Imports)

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the cost of pharmaceutical imports, and the value of pharmaceutical exports, during 1983.

Mr. Channon: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Shipbuilding (Privatisation)

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the currently envisaged timetable for the privatisation of the United Kingdom shipbuilding and composite yards and the manner in which it is proposed to dispose of these yards.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend told the House on 25 July 1984 that he had asked British Shipbuilders to dispose of its warship building interests by 31 March 1986 and to make substantial progress to that end by 31 March 1985. Brooke Marine, Yarrow Shipbuilders and Hall Russell have already been placed on the market and British Shipbuilders will issue the sale documents for the other yards as soon as possible.

As my right hon. Friend said in July, the Government would prefer to see the yards sold separately or in small groups, but we also asked British Shipbuilders to set in hand contingency plans for the flotation on the stock exchange of all or some of the companies in case individual sales may not be achieved.

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the current level of capacity utilisation in those United Kingdom shipyards scheduled for privatisation;

(2) what discussions his Department has had with potential purchasers of privatised shipyards about possible Government financial support for maintaining after privatisation capacity utilisation at levels similar to those occurring prior to privatisation.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Second-hand Cars

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the number and value of second-hand cars bought and sold in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Channon: The available information relates only to sales of used motor vehicles and motor cycles in Great Britain and is shown in the table:

	£ million
1978	4,148*
1979	4,847*
1980	5,067*
1981	4,992*
1982	5,691†

* Inclusive of VAT
† Exclusive of VAT

Figures for 1982 were published in an article in "British Business" on 10 August 1984, pages 590 to 594. For 1978 to 1981 they were published in pages 652 to 658 of "British Business" on 15 July 1983.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the number of firms currently involved in the retailing of second-hand cars.

Mr. Channon: No information is available on the number of businesses involved in the retailing of second-hand cars.

United Medical Enterprises

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department has monitored the subsequent disposal of assets of United Medical Enterprises, formerly a subsidiary of the National Enterprise Board; what is his practice in relation to the monitoring of such sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Post Office (Counter Services)

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigations he made, and on what operational evidence he relied, when determining that the counter services of the Post Office should secure a real unit cost reduction of 5 per cent. over the three years 1982 to 1985; and if he will place such evidence in the Library.

Mr. Pattie: My right hon. Friend has made no such determination.

Radio Wavebands (Consultative Document)

Mr. Moynihan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what conclusions he has reached on the future of bands I and III in the light of the response he received to the consultative document, Cmnd. 9241; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie [*pursuant to the reply*, 9 January 1985, c. *442*]: We received a considerable number of constructive and detailed responses. The proposals in the consultative document for competing local trunked systems providing common base station and message handling services in band III received widespread support.

The prevailing view favoured the adoption of a common signalling standard for trunked systems based on MPT 1323 and the preparation of such a standard, in consultation with the manufacturers, is making good progress.

Proposals were also submitted for the establishment of one or more very large new national radiotelephone systems in band III with interconnection to the public switched telephone network (PSTN) and for the immediate adoption in band III of single sideband modulation.

The consultative document suggested that the question of a further national radiotelephone service should not be considered until the two new 900 MHz cellular services had had an opportunity to develop. These services, which started this month, have a large band of spectrum already set aside for them.

Given the need to make the best use of available spectrum and the publicly stated basis on which the cellular competition took place, I have concluded that it would not be right to license any further such national systems for the time being, but the position will be reviewed towards the end of 1986 in the light of growth in the demand for radiotelephone services with PSTN interconnection and experience of their development.

In the meantime, however, I am exploring further, with advice from the Director General of Telecommunications, the possibility of authorising the immediate establishment of one or more large national networks either without interconnection or possibly very limited interconnection. I have also asked the director to advise whether, in the context of the promotion of competition in communications in the United Kingdom, existing public telecommunications operators should be eligible to operate systems in band III.

Subject to further consideration and to the director's advice, applications may be invited in the spring for one or two national networks and, in certain of the main conurbations, for up to five or so smaller local ones, with the possibility of some PSTN interconnection. The first generation of smaller systems and at least the first national system would be licensed to operate in accordance with the agreed common signalling standard. If it were decided to authorise two national systems preference in the case of the second might be given to applicants proposing the use of more advanced technology such as single sideband. Proposals would also be invited for local or national two-way mobile data transmission systems.

Further consideration is being given to a number of other issues raised in response to the consultative document and to the future use of band I.

Outward Mission Scheme

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those countries which are not covered by the outward mission scheme; and what are the reasons for each exception.

Mr. Channon [*pursuant to the reply*, 24 January 1985, c. *507*]: Those countries which are not covered by the outward mission scheme are:

Austria
Belgium
Canada
Denmark
France
Federal Republic of Germany
Italy
Netherlands
Norway
Switzerland
Sweden
United States of America

BOTB's resources are concentrated in those areas where it is believed that they are needed most. The markets in western Europe are nearby, and relatively well known, and the absence of a comparatively small travel grant should not deter serious exporters.

North American countries are also familiar, and there is no language barrier. The normal BOTB group mission approach is not generally appropriate for the very large and diverse north American market. There is, however, a special limited scheme for missions connected with the BOTB's Export USA drive.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesticides

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will give the list of organisations to which were sent, by his Department, copies of the two papers "Pesticides Legislation: Outline of Proposals" and "Pesticides Legislation: Explanatory Notes".

Mrs. Fenner: The documents referred to by my hon. Friend were circulated widely to organisations and individuals concerned in or about the manufacture, distribution and use of pesticides including environmental and consumer interests. I will arrange for a copy of the consultation list to be placed in the Library of the House and for a copy to be sent to my hon. Friend for his information.

Warble Fly

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what tests or experiments have been carried out in the Central Veterinary Laboratory, Weybridge, to ascertain whether cows' milk may be contaminated when organo-phosphorus compounds are applied on a dairy herd as a precaution against warble fly.

Mrs. Fenner: All veterinary medicines have to be licensed under the Medicines Act 1968. Licences are issued only after a thorough evaluation of data submitted by the applicant demonstrating the safety, quality and efficacy of the product. The assessment of safety includes the safety of the consumer of meat, milk or eggs from treated animals and of persons handling or administering the product as well as the safety of the target animal. Where necessary, the product licence specifies a withholding period between administration of the product and the taking of meat, milk or eggs for human consumption. The product licences for warble fly treatments containing organo-phosphorus compounds as the active ingredient specify a withholding period of six hours.

In view of the Medicines Act requirements, I see no need for tests to be carried out at the central veterinary laboratory.

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will list the organo-phosphorus compounds which farmers must use to comply with the regulations against warble fly.

Mrs. Fenner: The Warble Fly (England and Wales) Order 1982 provides that only systemic warble fly treatments licensed under the Medicines Act 1968 may be used for the compulsory treatment of animals.

Six products, all of which contain an organophosphorus compound as the active ingredient, are currently licensed under the Medicines Act as warble fly treatments for dairy cattle. They are:

Tiguvon (active ingredient Fenthion 2 per cent.)
Orbisect Warble Fly Liquid (active ingredient Phosmet (prolate) 13·3 per cent.)
Dermol (active ingredient Phosmet (prolate) 13·3 per cent.)
Warbexol (active ingredient Famphur 12·5 per cent.)
Cooper Warble Fly Liquid (active ingredient Phosmet (prolate) 13·3 per cent.)
Young's Poron 20 (active ingredient Phosmet (prolate) 20 per cent.)

Some of these products are also marketed under alternative names.

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has investigated the use of the Derris compound in other countries for the eradication of warble fly.

Mrs. Fenner: A number of countries, including other member states of the Community, the United States of America and Canada, undertake measures to control warble fly. All utilise systemic treatments similar to the ones used in this country. Derris is incompatible with our control and eradication schemes because it can only be used effectively during a short period in the year when the warble larvae have punctured the hide of an animal.

Sugar

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what subsidies were paid to sugar exporters in each European Economic Community country in each of the past five years.

Mr. MacGregor: European Community exporters receive payment of refunds from the authorities of the member state from which the export takes place. Sugar export refunds paid in each member state of the European Community over the last five years have been as follows:

MECU

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	**1984*
Denmark	6·1	17·6	30·9	21·8	n.a.
Federal Republic of Germany	59·7	76·4	125·4	132·1	n.a.
France	148·8	203·3	336·1	386·2	n.a.
Greece	—	—	—	—	n.a.
Irish Republic	3·2	—	—	5·0	n.a.
Italy	—	13·7	20·7	0·2	n.a.
Netherlands	19·5	25·7	51·8	50·1	n.a.
Belgium and Luxembourg	45·8	66·0	135·8	113·0	n.a.
United Kingdom	3·2	6·4	43·1	49·8	n.a.
Total (EC 10)	286·3	409·1	743·8	758·2	1,140

* Budget appropriation.

Source:
1980-1983: FEOGA Financial Reports.
1984: Official Journal of the European Communities.

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the subsidy cost in pound sterling of European Economic Community sugar exports in each of the past five years; and how much in each year was received from sugar beet levy to offset these costs.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is set out in the table:

*£ million**

	Export refund expenditure	*Production levy† receipts*
1980	173	137
1981	228	70
1982	415	154
1983	445	273
1984‡	671	434

* Converted from ECU at the annual average conversion rates for the FEOGA Guarantee Section.

† Production levies are not intended to offset the cost of exporting a quantity of sugar equal to the amount imported under preferential arrangements.

‡ Budget appropriations.

Source: 1980-83 FEOGA Financial Reports.
1984 Official Journal of the European Communities.

Aspartame

Mr. Dykes asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he proposes to request the Food Additives Contaminants Committee to review the use of aspartame in aqueous solutions.

Mrs. Fenner: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave him on 29 November 1984, at column *590*.

Milk

Mr. Speller asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate how many litres of milk production will be available for redistribution as secondary quota if larger producers, who originally applied for the outgoers scheme, are now allowed to participate.

Mr. Jopling [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1985, c. *27*]: If all producers who wish to join the outgoers scheme were allowed to do so, the total amount of quota becoming available in England and Wales might be of the order of 350 million to 400 million litres—compared with the current objective of 289 million litres—depending upon the actual uptake rate.

Mr. Wigley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that in the event of a milk quota allocated to a farm being transferred to another farm, the information about the transfer will be made known to the public and in particular to the farming unions and to local creameries.

Mr. MacGregor: Under the Community regulations, milk quota may be transferred from one farm to another only if an appropriate amount of land is also transferred. When transfers of this nature take place, all of the parties to the transaction are required to sign a form showing the amount of land and quota transferred. This form is then sent to the Milk Marketing Board so that the register of quotas can be updated. This register will not be complete until the processes to establish producers' final quotas have been finalised. It will then be available for inspection only by people with an interest in the holding concerned.

Butter (Intervention Stores)

Mr. Wigley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the volume of butter from each member state of the EEC which has gone into intervention during the most recent 12-month period for which the information is available.

Mr. MacGregor: In the period December 1983 to November 1984 the following quantities of butter from each member state of the EEC have been entered into intervention:

	Tonnes
Belgium	15,147
Denmark	—
Germany	188,954
Greece	—
France	99,826
Ireland	38,696
Italy	785
Luxembourg	758
Netherlands	89,619
United Kingdom	75,341

Source: EC Commission.

EC Agriculture (Financial Guidelines)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why it is necessary for the Government to press for effective application of the financial guidelines for EEC agriculture; which member states are likely to resist such effective application; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: It is the Government's usual practice to press in the European Community for policies they wish to see implemented. The Council of Ministers unanimously agreed conclusions on budgetary discipline in December and all member states have to work within the framework of agreed Community policies.

Veterinary Investigation Laboratories, Itchen Abbas

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will reconsider his decision to close the veterinary investigation laboratories at Itchen Abbas, Hampshire.

Mr. Jopling: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) on 6 December 1984.

Ministerial Visit (Caribbean)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on discussions between the Parliamentary Secretary the hon. Member for Medway (Mrs. Fenner) and representations of banana-producing countries in the course of her visit;

(2) if, in the course of her discussions on her visit to banana-producing countries in the Caribbean, the Parliamentary Secretary the hon. Member for Medway (Mrs. Fenner) took any steps to establish the difference between the price paid to producers for bananas and the retail price charged in Britain.

Mr. Jopling: The Parliamentary Secretary will be meeting Prime Ministers and Ministers of Agriculture in the Windward Islands and Jamaica to review progress towards meeting agreed objectives on quality. The discussions will not be concerned with the commercial relations between the supplying countries and their distributors in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the individuals who are accompanying the hon. Member for Medway (Mrs. Fenner) on her official visit to banana-producing countries.

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary is accompanied by Mr. Fenner, by the head of the Ministry's tropical food division and her private secretary.

Bananas

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the work of the banana quality monitoring committee.

Mr. Jopling: Joint monitoring committees on banana quality were established with the Windward Islands and

Jamaica in November 1983 to oversee agreed programmes for improvements in the quality of bananas exported to the United Kingdom. The committees meet periodically to review progress and to decide on any additional measures that may be necessary.

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantity of bananas was imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jopling: The information requested is as follows:

Imports of bananas (including plantains)

	Quantity (tonnes)
1980	322,481
1981	328,045
1982	327,876
1983	307,169
1984	*†317,348

(Source: Customs and Excise.)
* Estimate.
† Actual imports to November inclusive 292,239.

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the principal sources of bananas for the British market.

Mr. Jopling: The principal sources are the Windward Islands, Colombia, Surinam, Jamaica, Ecuador and Panama.

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the policy of the Government on the importation and consumption of bananas.

Mr. Jopling: Her Majesty's Government have a long-standing commitment to provide preferential access for the whole of the exportable surplus of bananas from Jamaica and the Windward Islands. This reflects the critical importance, in particular to the Windward Islands, of their banana exports to the United Kingdom, which provide the major element of both their exports earnings and their employment.

Imports from other ACP countries have access duty-free and without restriction. Bananas from other sources are imported under licence to meet the balance of market requirements. The results of a review of the Government's policy in this respect were announced by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Fletcher) in his reply to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) on 15 November 1984 at column *305*.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Board and Lodging Payments

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will ensure that in any changes to board and lodging payments by his Department adequate flexibility is maintained to reflect the variations from area to area and from season to season in the list of board and lodging and that a mechanism is retained to consider appeals by persons familiar with local circumstances.

Mr. Whitney: Our proposals for changes to the present system of board and lodging payments were put to the Social Security Advisory Committee in November last year for consultation. Before finalising our proposals, we shall be considering fully its own views and all the representations made to it, including any which deal with the issues raised by the hon. Member.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many submissions have been made to the Social Security Advisory Committee regarding his recent proposals on board and lodgings allowances; what categories of persons or bodies have made such submissions; and how many submissions have been made by each.

Mr. Whitney: Over 500 submissions have been received by 25 January 1985. These fell within the following main categories:

1. Local authority associations and individual local authorities.
2. Voluntary organisations concerned with the homeless, young people, the elderly, handicapped and disabled people, the mentally-ill, alcohol and drug abusers, and ex-offenders.
3. Individual housing associations, hostels and housing trusts and associations representing them.
4. Housing advice and information centres.
5. Claimants' rights organisations.
6. Women's aid organisations and refuges.
7. Church organisations.
8. Residential and nursing home proprietors.
9. Organisations representing residential and nursing homes.
10. Professional bodies.

In addition, representations were received from a number of individuals. I regret that a detailed breakdown of the number of representations in each category is not readily available.

Residential Accommodation

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department's review of local authority building note No. 2 on "Residential Accommodation for Elderly People (1973)" has yet been completed.

Mr. John Patten: We think it is more helpful to local authorities for guidance to be set out in a more informal and flexible style than that of the building notes, and future guidance will be in the form of pamphlets which set out the variety of options open to authorities in the design of their services. The 1973 building note will not, therefore, be updated; work on a replacement is still at a comparatively early stage.

Infant Mortality

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report*, as soon as it is available to him, the infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births for 1984 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Japan, *(c)* France, *(d)* Finland and *(e)* Sweden.

Mr. John Patten: Yes. Figures for England and France are expected to be available in the spring of 1985. However, data for the last remaining countries may not be received until late 1986.

Ambulances

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he proposes to issue guidelines to health

authorities about the use of stretchers on secondary suspension systems for ambulances to avoid aggravation of injury through vibration on the way to hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is for each health authority, advised by the relevant chief ambulance officer, to determine the equipment appropriate for use by the ambulance service locally.

NHS (Charges)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the charges determined under section 66 of the National Health Service Act 1977 reflect the full costs borne by health authorities in providing the services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 21 January, at column *342*.

Tendering

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will name, for each tendering exercise of which his Department is aware and which was completed since the last named in his answer of 30 November 1984, *Official Report*, columns *623-24*, the health authority and the hospital concerned and the successful tenderer.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are aware of the following additional cases:

Health Authority	*Hospital*	*Contractor or In-House*
Domestic		
Bury	Bealey	ISS
Laundry		
Cheltenham	—	Gloucester HA
Dewsbury	—	Express Cleaners
Gloucester	—	In-House
Newcastle	—	Co-op
Plymouth	—	In-House
Somerset	—	In-House
Catering		
Bury	Florence Nightingale	In-House
Scunthorpe	Various Hospitals	In-House

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest figures for the savings achieved in relation to the eight contracted-out services referred to in his Department's press release 84/50 on health service tendering.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I will let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as we can obtain up-to-date information.

Fluoride

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list the sources of any evidence available to his Department of the upper limit of consumption of fluoride before *(a)* the teeth begin to discolour through mottling and *(b)* harm to health may begin to result;

(2) if he will list the sources of any evidence available to his Department of the degree of mottling of children and young persons' teeth from water fluoridated naturally or artifically to one part per million;

(3) if he will list the sources of any evidence available to his Department of the effect of a high concentration of magnesium and calcium in water containing natural fluoride at levels at or above one part per million.

Mr. John Patten: The question of dental mottling was studied in the United States of America before the introduction of public water fluoridation. It was found that at a concentration of fluoride of about two parts per million an increasing proportion of children had mottled enamel that was apparent and objectionable aesthetically (Dean HT and Elvolve E "Further studies on the minimal threshold of chronic endemic dental fluorosis" — Pub Health Rep 52: 1249-64 10 September 1937).

There have been a number of studies contrasting the prevalence of dental mottling, which may have various causes, in comparable fluoridated and non-fluoridated areas. A review of the evidence is, for example, contained in pages 349-354 of Lord Jauncey's opinion in the Strathclyde fluoridation case.

Lord Jauncey concluded that

"if the drinking water in Strathclyde is fluoridated to one part per million there is likely to be a very small increase in the prevalence of mottling of a type which will only be noticeable at very close quarters and which is very unlikely to create any aesthetic problems for the owners of the teeth".

On the issue of harm to health, there is a substantial body of evidence which shows that levels of consumption associated with fluoride in drinking water considerably above the optimum level of one part per million are not associated with skeletal fluorosis in temperate countries. Published reviews of the evidence include the following:

Fluorides and Human Health (World Health Organisation, Geneva 1970).

Fluoride, Teeth and Health (a Report from the Royal College of Physicians of London, 1976).

Drinking Water and Health (National Academy of Sciences, Washington, 1977).

Victorian Water Supplies (Melbourne, 1980).

We know of no reputable evidence that a high concentration of magnesium and/or calcium makes any difference to the benefit to dental health obtained from drinking water containing natural fluoride at a concentration of around one part per million. Conversely the efficacy of fluoride has been demonstrated in this respect including areas where it has been artifically added to water with low concentrations of either magnesium and/or calcium.

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance he is proposing to issue of *(a)* toothpaste with fluoride, *(b)* fluoride tablets, *(c)* dentists applying topical fluoride and *(d)* users of kidney dialysis machines following the enactment of the Water (Fluoridation) Bill.

Mr. John Patten: No guidance will be needed on any of these issues. Topical fluoride may be safely applied in either fluoridated or non-fluoridated areas. We are currently issuing guidance to the Health Service on the exposure to aluminium and fluoride of patients undergoing haemodialysis. For the position with regard to fluoridated toothpaste and fluoride tablets, I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him of 13 November 1984 at column *217*.

Prescribed Medicines

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the National Health Service

budget was represented by the cost of prescribed medicines in 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1984, respectively.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the prescriptions issued during the latest period of 12 months for which figures are available were of medicines listed in the "Monthly Index of Medical Specialties."

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the average number of prescriptions issued for each registered National Health Service patient during the latest period of 12 months for which figures are available; and what were the comparative figures in the other member countries of the European Community.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The average number of prescriptions dispensed to each patient registered on a doctor's National Health Service list in 1983 was 6·8. We do not have available the comparative figures in other member countries of the European Community.

Surgery Closures

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the criteria that have to be satisfied for a general practice to close a surgery.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A doctor must obtain the approval of the family practitioner committee or, on appeal, the Secretary of State, to the places where he is available for consultation and to any changes in them. Such approval may not unreasonably be withheld but may be given subject to such conditions as seem necessary to enable the doctor to carry out his obligations under his terms of service. In considering a proposed change we would expect a committee to have regard to the views of patients and the general public.

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to publish his circular on family practitioner committees.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the population of England and Wales is covered by comprehensive computerised age/sex registers of family practitioner committees.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Approximately one in five.

Milk and Welfare Foods (Entitlement)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he plans to end entitlement to free milk and free welfare foods to pregnant and nursing mothers.

Mr. Newton: We have no present plans to do so; but the current social security review is of course looking at the provision for maternity needs, and families with children, generally.

Health Authorities (Funding)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) in how many cases there has been a change of use, from standardised mandatory ratios to social deprivation factors, as the criterion in resource allocation working party allocations of health funding to health authorities; in how many cases such authorities gained extra funding; and in how many cases they lost funding;

(2) in how many cases the resource allocation working party criteria for analysing resource levels have been changed from standardised mortality ratios to social deprivation factors; what has been the change in funding allocation in each health authority case so affected; how many health authorities have gained and how many lost as a result; what appeals have been made against such reassessments; and with what results.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our method of calculating regional target allocations when we are making decisions about the allocation of resources to regional health authorities follows the recommendations of the resource allocation working party (RAWP). We have not changed our practice of using standardised mortality ratios.

Regions follow the broad principles set out by RAWP in calculating their district target allocations, but they also take account of local factors. I understand that at least one regional health authority includes information about social deprivation in calculating district target allocations. In making allocations to districts, RHAs have regard to their strategic objectives including progress towards equality of access to health services for patients according to clinical need which is the prime aim of the RAWP philosophy. So the method of calculating the target need not itself have an effect on the allocation to a health authority. We do not collect information centrally about district health authorities' appeals to RHAs against the method of calculating their target allocations and/or the amount of allocations actually made, nor about the outcome of any such appeals.

It would be a mistake to devote too much attention to the intricate technical details of a formula which is used as an important factor, but not the only factor, in allocating resources according to the plans and needs of the service and its patients.

Drugs (Safety)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that sufficient information is available to the public on the safety and side effects of drugs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes, but if my hon. Friend has any specific problems in mind perhaps he would let me know.

Departmental Staff (Assaults)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of assault on his Department's local staff have been reported to him; what is the principal form such attacks take; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The number of incidents reported were as follows:

	Number
1978	212
1979	187
1980	195
1981	192
1982	219
1983	199
1984	198

The principal forms that such incidents took in 1983, the latest year for which full details are currently available, were:

	Per cent.
Technical assault	31
Blow with fist	20
All other types of manual assault	42

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what measures he has taken or what measures he proposes to take to protect his Department's local staff from assault; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: All local office staff in the Department are advised concerning the possible risk of assault in the course of their duties. Staff who visit claimants in their homes receive advice on dealing with potentially violent situations as part of their training.

Where appropriate, protective screens are installed in public areas at the Department's local offices.

Arrangements to alert staff to situations or cases which have been identified as potentially dangerous are under review to see if they can be improved.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the £100 million estimated savings from his original limited drugs list was expected to result from generic substitution.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There is no, and never was any, element of generic substitution in the limited list proposals we announced on 8 November 1984.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the £100 million estimated savings from his original limited drugs list was expected to come from the £120 million presently spent on propriety brands dispensed to a prescription category; and what will come from the £40 million presently spent on the sedative category.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 5 December 1984 to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris) at columns *219-20*.

Mr. George Gardiner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the members of the panel he has appointed to assist the Chief Medical Officer in advising on the drugs that should be included in his proposed limited list for prescription under the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our chief medical officer has invited a number of eminent individuals from relevant branches of the medical and pharmaceutical professions to advise him on the content of the limited list. They are Professor Alasdair Breckenridge, professor of clinical pharmacology; Professor David Morrell, professor of general practice; Dr. John Tomlinson, general practitioner; Dr. Duncan Colin Jones, consultant physician; Professor Eric Stroud, professor of child health; Professor Malcolm Hodkinson, professor of geriatric medicine; Mr. David Coleman, retail pharmacist.

The chief medical officer has invited Professor Malcolm Lader to advise on the psychiatric implications of the list. He may also wish to involve other specialists on particular points.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration has been given to enabling patients, preferring branded drugs which may no longer be available on prescription, from having that part of the cost of the generic substitute allowed against the cost of the branded product.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Doctors will be able to prescribe at National Health Service expense from a limited but adequate range of drugs in those categories covered by our limited list proposals. If a patient elects to have a private prescription instead, that will be a matter of choice not of medical necessity. There is no question of our subsidising this choice.

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations have been made by organisations representing the elderly on the proposals to limit drugs available to National Health Service patients on prescription.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received representations from a wide range of individuals and organisations, including some which cite the needs of the elderly. We are carefully considering all these views.

Human Embryos

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make available in the Library copies of any representations he has recently received concerning the formation of a non-statutory body to monitor experimentation upon human embryos.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes, on the same terms as indicated in the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on 21 January at column *344*.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any intention of endorsing the setting up of a non-statutory body to monitor experimentation upon human embryos.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are following with interest the proposals being made for such a body but the Government have not been involved in them. We are still considering the public and parliamentary reactions to the Warnock inquiry.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has had any discussions with the Medical Research Council concerning the formation of a non-statutory monitoring body for experimentation upon human embryos until such time as legislation is enacted by Parliament on this subject.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Medical Research Council has informed me of its proposals for voluntary arrangements to monitor research using human embryos.

Croydon District Health Authority

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why, for the purposes of determining the eligibility of the Croydon district health authority for additional financial assistance under the resource allocation working party criteria, a shift has been made from the use of standardised mortality ratios as a yardstick to the use of social deprivation factors; what assessment was made before this shift was made of its implications for the level of resources available to the Croydon district health authority vis-a-vis other comparable district health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The allocation of resources to district health authorities is a matter for the regional health authority to determine. I understand that relative social deprivation is only one of a number of factors which the South-West Thames regional heath authority takes into account in its resource allocation policy.

Abortion

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many abortions were performed on residents and non-residents at up to 12 weeks gestation, 13 to 20 weeks gestation, 20 to 23 weeks gestation and 24 weeks and over for each year since 1968; on what grounds these were performed; what ages the women were; and how many were performed in the National Health Service and how many were performed in other approved places, respectively.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of abortions performed in England and Wales to resident girls aged 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 years *(a)* with parental consent and *(b)* without parental consent for each of the years from 1968 to 1984.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect information about parental consent in each case. The available figures are shown in the table.

Numbers of Legal Abortions: Girls aged 11 to 16, 1968-83
England and Wales Residents

	Age					
Years	*11*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*
*1968	3	6	21	150	363	559
1969	2	7	38	279	848	1,445
1970	3	20	85	391	1,233	2,530
1971	3	16	77	529	1,671	3,465
1972	—	7	98	586	2,113	4,318
1973	4	14	108	693	2,270	5,082
1974	1	9	117	718	2,490	5,348
1975	—	12	120	747	2,691	5,411
1976	6	14	122	738	2,545	5,429
1977	1	13	105	804	2,701	5,510
1978	3	20	113	708	2,454	5,675
1979	9	18	116	698	2,693	6,030
1980	5	17	141	770	2,717	6,370
1981	7	13	98	710	2,701	6,190
1982	—	15	138	778	2,921	6,334
1983	—	9	127	893	3,058	6,468

* 27 April to 31 December.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what instructions he has issued to health authorities about changes in the compilation of hospital waiting list figures; from when the changes will be operative; what estimate he has made of the likely percentage differences the changes will make to waiting list totals; and whether he proposes to reissue published waiting list figures adjusted to match the new figures.

Mr. John Patten: Health authorities have not been asked to change the methods by which they compile waiting lists, but to review them to improve their accuracy.

Doctors (Benefit Claims)

Mr. Jim Callaghan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the terms and conditions of service of a general practitioner require him to give information to his Department in connection with claims for benefit designed to allow claimants to maintain their health, such as dietary additions to supplementary benefit; and what fee is chargeable for this service if he has the consent of the patient to do so *(a)* to the patient and *(b)* to his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A doctor is required by his terms of service to issue to his patients or their personal representatives free of charge a medical certificate required to support such a claim.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements are made for dialysing psychiatrically-disturbed patients other than sending them to a kidney unit in a general hospital.

Mr. John Patten: Patients referred for haemodialysis normally spend an initial period in a renal unit in a general hospital and thereafter may continue to be treated in the renal unit or may dialyse either at home or in a satellite unit. The participation of relatives or friends is encouraged. Whether special arrangements are made for psychiatrically disturbed patients is a matter for the health authorities concerned following the clinical advice of the relevant consultants.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what increases in spending on the installation of kidney dialysis he anticipates over the next five years.

Mr. John Patten: It is for health authorities to decide what proportion of the resources available to them is to be allocated to the provision of a particular service. My right hon. Friend has, however, asked health authorities to develop services for patients suffering end stage renal failure as a priority within the acute sector, and all regional health authorities have recently agreed to increase the annual acceptance rate of new renal patients to at least 40 per million population by 1987. The extent of the increase in expenditure on dialysis in the next five years will depend upon the way in which individual health authorities organise their services and on the balance between dialysis and transplantation.

In the first nine months following the launch of our donor card campaign in February 1984, the number of transplants rose 35 per cent. (to 1129) compared with the same period in the previous year.

Ophthalmic Services

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost saving to the National Health Service if the supply, repair and replacement of general ophthalmic service spectacles is restricted to children aged under 16, full-time students aged under 19, people on certain benefits and low income, and people who require complex lenses, as under amended regulations proposed by the Government.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The anticipated full year effect for England of the Government's measures to limit the supply, repair and replacement of glasses in 1985-86 is expected to be £14 million.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the cost saving to the National Health Service if the full assessed charge is payable by patients who require lenses over six dioptres cylindrical power, or over 10 dioptres spherical and over four dioptres cylindrical power, or lenticular;

(2) how many spectacles, on an annual basis, are prescribed in the categories with one or more lens over six dioptres cylindrical power, over 10 dioptres spherical and over four dioptres cylindrical power, or lenticular;

(3) what percentage of the total number of annual prescriptions is represented by the categories defined as complex in amended regulations proposed by the Government;

(4) how many cases involving complex lenses, as defined in the Government's planned amendments to the general ophthalmic service, are dealt with *(a)* by the hospital eye service and *(b)* the general ophthalmic service, on an annual basis.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many prescriptions for glasses have been issued in each of the last three years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In England the number of prescriptions issued following sight tests under the general opthalmic service were as follows:

	number
1983	6,671,836
1982	6,413,522
1981	6,273,033

Supplementary Benefit Appeals

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Chief Adjudication Officer has considered the findings of the supplementary benefits appeal tribunal in the cases of Mr. Roderick Skinner and Ms. Isobel Rafferty in August 1984; and what conclusions he reached.

Mr. Whitney: I understand that the Chief Adjudication Officer has considered the case of Mr. Roderick Skinner but not that of Ms. Isobel Rafferty. In the former case it was decided, in the circumstances of this particular case, not to appeal against the decision to the social security commissioner.

Fuel Bills

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what he estimates will be the average payments for help with fuel bills in exceptionally severe weather for claimants in the areas of England and Wales which have qualified for assistance.

Mr. Whitney: Information is not yet available to estimate the average payment for help with fuel bills in the areas of England and Wales affected by the recent exceptionally severe weather. The method of calculating amounts payable in respect of extra fuel costs arising from exceptionally severe weather is explained in the Chief Adjudication Officer's published guidance — in paragraphs 7426-7459 and appendix 19 of the S Manual, a copy of which is in the Library. Where the period covered by a fuel bill includes a period of exceptionally severe weather, then the temperatures over the whole period of the bill are compared with the mean temperatures for that time of year. If the whole period is colder than average, then claimants eligible for payments receive help with a proportion of their fuel bills depending on how far temperatures over the whole period have fallen below the mean. Average amounts paid will, therefore, depend on temperatures over the coming weeks and on the size of claimants' fuel bills.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the best available estimate of the total amount of public expenditure expected to be saved in the current financial year as a result of the reduction in parents' entitlement to housing benefit when their working children are living at home introduced in April 1984; and whether he will now abolish the reductions.

Mr. Whitney: The estimated saving from the increase in the non-dependant deductions for 18 to 20-year-olds in the housing benefit and supplementary benefit schemes from April 1984 is £11 million in the current financial year. The future of non-dependant deductions will be part of our considerations following the social security reviews.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the best available estimate of the number of young people made homeless as a result of the reduction in parents' entitlement to housing benefit when working children are living at home, introduced in April 1984.

Mr. Whitney: We have no evidence that any working children living in their parents' household have been made homeless as a direct result of the increase in the housing benefit non-dependant deductions in April 1984.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what research was conducted by his Department into the likely effects of the reductions in the entitlement to housing benefit of families whose children are working, introduced in April 1984; before the introduction of the reductions; what research into the

actual effects has since been conducted; what research into the effects is now planned; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: In relation to wage levels, the contributions to housing costs expected from young people in work are not excessive. No research has been conducted by the Department into the likely effects of non-dependent deductions, and there are no immediate plans to commission research in this area.

Benefit Claimants (Criminal Records)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what national or regional guidelines have been issued regarding access to criminal records by officials of his Department concerning social security claimants; on how many occasions in each region of the United Kingdom in each year since 1970 such access has been used; what has been the purpose of seeking access to such records; if access has depended on the discretion of chief police officers; and how many claimants in each region in each year have been denied benefit as a result.

Mr. Newton: No guidelines have been issued to officials regarding access to criminal records of social security claimants since such information has no bearing on benefit entitlement. However, the investigation of serious, organised crime which relates to social security matters and which involves considerable sums of money is pursued in close liaison with the police. For example, in a recent case, an offender was sent to prison for 5½ years for manipulation of stolen order books with a potential value of over £70,000.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Interest Relief

Mr. Craigen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average interest relief on tax given to first-time buyers and the latest average level of central Government support to a council house tenant.

Mr. Moore: Provisional estimates for 1984-85 are shown below. I regret that it is not possible to distinguish mortgage interest relief given to first-time buyers.

	England £	*Scotland* £	*Wales* £	*Northern Ireland* £
Average mortgage interest tax relief per owner occupier	270	270	150	220
Average Central Government subsidy per council tenant	88	61	34	*595
Average payment of Housing Benefit (rent rebate) per council tenant	358	271	466	378
Average Local Authority subsidy per council tenant	95	140	16	*—

* The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is the sole public housing authority in Northern Ireland. The figure is based on the average revenue deficit per NIHE dwelling.

EC Budget

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the final result of discussions between the EEC Council and the European Assembly about the draft 1985 Budget.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The European Parliament voted on 13 December 1984 by 390 votes to 5 to reject the 1985 draft budget. Consequently since 1 January the finances of the Community have been governed by the provisional twelfths regime.

No new draft budget has yet been put forward by the Commission for consideration by the Council and the Parliament.

Investment

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he intends to take following the recommendation of the European Commission in its annual economic report for increased public investment in countries whose construction industry is underutilised.

Mr. Peter Rees: The Government's plans for public investment are set out in Cmnd. 9428.

National Economic Development Council

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the National Economic Development Council on 9 January.

Mr. Peter Rees: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) on 24 January, at column *1120*.

Savings Certificates and Government Stock

Mr. Pawsey asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give instructions, where savings certificates and Government stock are purchased by a husband and wife and the appropriate certificates are in joint names, that all letters be addressed to the joint holders.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Bank of England and the Department for National Savings do not usually know or record the relationship of joint holders. The usual practice for Government stock is to address original correspondence to whichever holder's name appears first. In the very rare cases where national savings originates correspondence on savings certificates the practice is to write to the joint holders. In replying to any letter from holders the practice is to follow the form adopted by the sender—for example a joint reply to a jointly signed letter.

Civil Service (Financial Incentives)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the present financial incentives to good performance in the Civil Service; and why they are considered inadequate.

Mr. Hayhoe: In the case of industrial civil servants, there are a number of productivity schemes which encourage good performance. But for non-industrial civil servants the main form of reward for merit in the Civil

Service has been the prospect of promotion to the next grade. In the vast majority of cases promotion brings a financial reward.

However, as I told the House on 5 December—columns *192* and *193*—the Government believe it right to provide additional incentives to good performance. This becomes more important when numbers are falling and there are reduced opportunities for promotion. The Government are, therefore, introducing an experimental scheme of performance bonuses but, for the reasons which I gave the House on 5 December, performance-related pay cannot be introduced immediately across the whole of the Civil Service.

EC (Own Resources)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what interest rate is charged to the EEC when own resources payments are made in advance of the due date at the request of the EEC Commission.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Interest is not charged on the sums advanced to the European Community in respect of own resources payments. Since the EEC Commission's funds are derived directly from member states' contributions any interest they charged the Commission for making such advances would eventually have to be borne by them.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Churchill asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the changes in public expenditure in each year since 1978-79 to date; and what is his forecast for those years for which figures are available expressed both in constant prices and as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Board of Inland Revenue

Mr. Trotter asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider appointing lay members with commercial experience to the Board of Inland Revenue.

Mr. Moore: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates would be the full-year revenue raised on the following supplies if they were rated at 5 per cent. for value added tax purpose: *(a)* those goods and services listed in the European Commission's reasoned opinion on United Kingdom zero rates, *(b)* newspaper cover prices, *(c)* books, *(d)* fuel and power, *(e)* children's clothes and footwear and *(f)* all supplies at present zero-rated.

Mr. Hayhoe: The estimates of net additional revenue in a full year at 1984-85 prices are:

	£ million
(a) Those goods and services listed in the European Commission's reasoned opinion on United Kingdom zero rates	115
(b) Newspaper cover prices	80
(c) Books	30
(d) Fuel and power	470
(e) Children's clothing and footwear	90
(f) All supplies at present zero-rated (excluding exports and international services)	2,270

Capital Transfer Tax

Mr. Cormack asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the yield from capital transfer tax in 1983-84.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Married Man's Allowance

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many couples claimed the married man's allowance in each of the last five fiscal years for which figures are available.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1985, c. *121*]: Estimates based on the surveys of personal income for the years concerned are shown below. The figures exclude married couples who elected for the separate taxation of wife's earnings.

	Numbers of married couples claiming the married man's tax allowance Million
1978-79	12·9
1979-80	12·7
1980-81	12·7
1981-82	12·1
1982-83	12·4

Personal Tax Allowances

Mr. Yeo asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will recalculate the figures given in his answer to the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on 20 December, *Official Report*, column *321*, about personal tax allowances assuming no increase on top of indexation in the levels at which higher rates of income tax become payable.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 January 1985, c. *504*]: The reply to the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) assumed no increase on top of indexation in the levels of taxable income at which the higher rates of income tax become payable.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Orlit Houses

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive commenced its examination of the options for dealing with its stock of Orlit dwellings at *(a)* Comber and *(b)* Donaghadee.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am advised by the chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that while the future of Orlit dwellings has been under consideration since potential defects in these properties were identified in 1983, it was not possible to consider specific proposals for

dealing with the Orlits at Comber and Donaghadee until December 1984 when the final results of technical assessments carried out by the Housing Executive were confirmed.

Strip Searches

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if any staff members have been reprimanded as a result of conduct during a strip search in prisons in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years;

(2) how many strip searches of women prisoners have taken place in the presence of one or more male prison officers in each of the past six years;

(3) what type of items which may constitute a danger to the prison system are intended to be discovered by strip searching;

(4) if he will make a statement detailing those items which have been found during a strip searching in each of the past five years;

(5) if he will make a statement on the contribution of strip searches to prison security in Northern Ireland;

(6) what study of strip searching he has made since his appointment; and what consideration he is giving to such investigations;

(7) how many strip searches have taken place in each of the Northern Ireland prisons in each of the past 10 years;

(8) how many prisoners have been subjected to strip searching in each of Northern Ireland's prisons in the past 10 years;

(9) what medical or nursing staff are required to be present during a strip search of a prisoner;

(10) at what level of authority individual strip searches are ordered or authorised;

(11) what guidelines are issued to prison staff regarding strip searches; and what sanction there is against a member of staff who breaches those guidelines;

(12) if there has been any evidence, from medical reports on prisoners, of mental, nervous or physical injuries caused by strip searching in Northern Ireland prisons;

(13) if he will order an end to strip searches in Northern Ireland;

(14) what efforts his Department is making regarding the welfare of women prisoners in Northern Ireland; and what further initiatives he proposes in this regard.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Benefits and Allowances

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to how many people living on Creggan estate, Derry, are claiming each of the various benefits and allowances administered by the Department of Health and Social Services.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information requested is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pluralist Society

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is Government policy to encourage the continuance of a pluralist society in those parts of Northern Ireland where it presently exists.

Mr. Hurd: The Government will continue to protect the right of the constituent groups in Northern Ireland to uphold and give expression, within the law, to their distinctive views on religious, cultural and other social questions.

Security

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take the necessary steps to sustain the full fabric of its society for the Protestant community in areas close to the frontier with the Irish Republic where the Irish Republican Army's campaign to murder Protestants has disadvantaged it.

Mr. Hurd: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that necessary extra resources, including teachers, are made available in controlled primary and secondary schools serving communities close to the frontier with the Irish Republic which have been disadvantaged by the Irish Republican Army's murder campaign against Protestants.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Farmers

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has recently considered how farmers, who were living close to the frontier with the Irish Republic and were forced by Irish Republican Army activity to abandon their holdings in the mid-1970s, can now be compensated for loss of earnings in the same way as other businesses were at that time;

(2) if he has any plans to assist farmers, who were displaced by Irish Republican Army activity from their holdings close to the frontier with the Irish Republic, to return to their properties; and whether he believes their safety can now reasonably be assured.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

A-level Curriculum

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what are the criteria used by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland when deciding whether or not to approve arrangements for the provision of an A-level curriculum in schools in Northern Ireland;

(2) if he will list the number of A-level students in *(a)* Inniskillen collegiate school, *(b)* Fivemiletown high school and *(c)* Portora royal school during (i) 1983-84, (ii) 1984-85 and (iii) the projected figures for 1985-86;

(3) if he will list the subjects offered at A-level and the number of students taking each subject in *(a)* Inniskillen collegiate school, *(b)* Fivemiletown high school and *(c)* Portora royal school during (i) 1983-84, (ii) 1984-85 and (iii) the projected figures for 1985-86;

(4) under what circumstances the Department of Education for Northern Ireland has approved the provision of an A-level curriculum in Northern Ireland schools where there are only two, three or four students per

subject; and if he will now agree to extend such approval to any secondary schools which make such a request and will provide adequate extra staff for this purpose.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Scheduled Offences

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the number of cases in which persons were convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland in 1984 on the basis of evidence given by accomplices on behalf of the Crown in which evidence, other than of the accomplice, either forensic, from other non-supergrass witnesses or by an admission of guilt from the accused, was used to obtain the conviction;

(2) how many people were convicted in 1984, either on their own admission of guilt or following a plea of not guilty, on the basis of evidence given by accomplices on behalf of the Crown in cases concerning scheduled offences in Northern Ireland; how many suspects arrested on the basis of such evidence have been released as a result of the retraction of evidence given by accomplices; and how many people are presently awaiting trial as a result of evidence obtained from terrorist accomplices.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Remanded Persons

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the average period of remand without bail in each of the following cases involving accomplice witness's evidence or *(a)* persons convicted, *(b)* persons acquitted and *(c)* persons who were released as a result of such evidence being retracted; and how these figures compare with those for persons charged with scheduled offences on the basis of evidence other than accomplice evidence;

(2) for each year since 1980, what is the number of prisoners refused bail; and what is the average period of remand without bail for persons accused and charged wholly or partially on the basis of accomplice evidence in each of the following categories: *(a)* the top decile of prisoners awaiting trial for the longest period, *(b)* the top quartile of prisoners awaiting trial for the longest period and *(c)* the second quartile of prisoners awaiting trial for the longest period; and what is the average period of remand for all prisoners charged on the basis of such evidence;

(3) how many prisoners in 1984 were remanded in custody prior to trial for periods between *(a)* nought to three months, *(b)* three to six months, *(c)* six to nine months, *(d)* nine to 12 months, *(e)* 12 to 18 months and *(f)* over 18 months for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Housing Executive (Tenancies)

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons with addresses in the Irish Republic have been granted the tenancy of Housing Executive dwellings in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 January 1985, c. *390*]: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. However, I understand from the chairman that the information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information which is available was collected for the year 1983-84 only and relates to external applicants generally — that is, those with addresses anywhere outside Northern Ireland—and is as follows:

Period	*Number of external applicants housed from the waiting list*	*Number of external applicants housed from the transfer list (i.e., those previously living in public authority housing elsewhere)*
Year ending 31 March 1984	129	38

In addition, there were 1,135 external applicants—including transfer applications—on the waiting list at 30 September 1984.

Shooting Incident (Belfast)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received concerning the shooting incident in Belfast on 14 January involving the Ulster Defence Regiment.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 January 1985, c. *520*]: Representations have been made by the Government of the Republic of Ireland and by two local political parties.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will call for an inquiry into the shooting of Paul Gerard Kelly on 14 January in Belfast;

(2) if he will make a statement on the shooting in Belfast by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment on 14 January.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 January 1985, c. *520*]: The incident in the early hours of 15 January, in which Mr. Kelly lost his life, is being investigated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. In due course its papers will be submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who will decide if any one of the Ulster Defence Regiment soldiers involved should be prosecuted. While this process is in hand, it would be wrong for me to comment on the incident, but I have no reason to think that any useful purpose would be served by a separate inquiry.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 29 January 1985

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Ministerial Visit (Caribbean)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated cost to his Department of the visit of the hon. Member for Medway (Mrs. Fenner) and her party to banana-producing countries in the Caribbean.

Mr. Jopling: The cost to my Department of the visit of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and her party to banana-producing countries in the Caribbean is expected to be about £13,500. The precise cost will not be known until the party returns.

Agricultural Expenditure

Mr. Foulkes asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what percentage agricultural expenditure has increased in the European Economic Community for each year since 1970.

Mr. Jopling: Annual percentage changes in EC agricultural expenditure from 1970 to 1984 have been as follows:

	Per cent.
*1970-71	+21
*1971-72	−13
*1972-73	+33
1973-74	−15
1974-75	+46
1975-76	+23
1976-77	+23
1977-78	+26
1978-79	+21
1979-80	+10
1980-81	−2
1981-82	+11
1982-83	+28
	+16
1983-84	(estimate)

* The current system of charging EAGGF guarantee expenditure to particular years was introduced by the financial regulation of 7 November 1972. To achieve comparability the percentage changes for earlier years have been shown as though the current system applied for the whole period.

Source: EC Court of Auditors Reports and Commission's Financial Reports.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

African Countries

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, pursuant to the Answer to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *384*, he will now give whatever statistical information is available to him about the financial help given by the countries listed in that question to African countries in need; and which were the countries assisted.

Mr. Raison: Detailed information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Amateur Radio Licence

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if the amateur radio licence issuing department has been fully computerised;

(2) what representations he has had from the Radio Society of Great Britain in relation to the introduction of a novice amateur radio licence;

(3) when he expects to introduce a novice amateur radio licence.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Pharmaceutical Products (Exports-Imports)

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the cost of pharmaceutical imports, and the value of pharmaceutical exports, during 1983.

Mr. Channon [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c.*46*]: In 1983, United Kingdom imports of medicinal and pharmaceutical products were valued at £470 million (cif) while exports were valued at £1,073 million (fob).

Source: SITC/R2 division 54 (Medicinal and pharmaceutical products) in tables II (imports) and V (exports) of the United Kingdom *Overseas Trade Statistics*.

Artificial Sweetners

Dr. Mark Hughes asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether any of the artificial sweeteners which have been approved in the United Kingdom had been tested by the Industrial Bio Test Laboratories in Chicago, United States of America.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

Studies by the Industrial Bio Test Laboratories were considered in respect of one artificial sweetener now permitted in the United Kingdom, namely hydrogenated glucose syrup. Of the two studies performed by IBT and reported in 1969 which are relevant to the safety evaluation of this sweetener, one has been repeated and confirmed by an independent laboratory while the other has been verified following audit by the Food and Drug Administration in the United States.

PRIME MINISTER

Hyndburn

Q46. **Mr. Hargreaves** asked the Prime Minister when she next intends to pay an official visit to Hyndburn.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

East Anglia

Q71. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit east Anglia in 1985.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Channel Tunnel

Q85. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister when the joint Anglo-French working group on guidance for prospective promoters of a Channel tunnel project is expected to complete its work; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: At my meeting with the French President on 30 November 1984 we agreed that the joint working group should pursue its work with real urgency and submit its report within three months. I have nothing to add to the joint statement we made on that occasion, in which we welcomed and endorsed the terms of the communiqué issued on 15 November 1984 by the Transport Ministers of the two countries.

Caernarfon

Q92. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister what plans she has to visit Caernarfon.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 29 January.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Ministerial Cars (Drivers' Instructions)

Dr. Marek asked the Prime Minister if she will give details of the instructions given to drivers of ministerial cars that are not related to security.

The Prime Minister: As these instructions are fairly extensive, I am arranging for a copy to be sent to the hon. Member direct.

Personal Taxation

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister what would be *(a)* the loss of revenue if income tax thresholds and national insurance thresholds were raised to £3,250 for a single person and £4,250 for a married couple and additional tax allowances of £780 were given for each child and *(b)* the saving in expenditure if all benefits, including family income supplement, child benefit and all housing benefits and tax allowances were abolished; and what would be the net weekly spending power of a man with two children earning £110 per week with a rent of £25 and rates of £5 per week: (i) now and (ii) assuming all these changes have been made simultaneously.

The Prime Minister [*pursuant to her reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *26*]: *(a)* The cost of increasing the single person's income tax allowance to £3,250, the married man's allowance to £4,250 and of introducing child tax allowances of £780 per child would be about £10 billion in a full year at 1984-85 levels of income. The reduction in national insurance contributions if the lower earnings limit was raised to £3,250 per year for single people and to £4,250 per year for married couples, in relation to their joint earnings, would be about £1·25 billion in 1984-85. This estimate assumes no change in the contracted-out rebate in respect of people remaining liable to contributions.

(b) If all benefits including those paid to people not in work were abolished, the annual saving in expenditure in 1984-85 would be £38 billion. If, in addition to the changes in *(a)*, tax relief for mortgage interest relief was withdrawn, there would be an increase in revenue of about £3 billion in a full year.

On the stated assumptions, a married man with two children would currently have a net weekly spending power of £78·49 (based on the general assumptions in the November 1984 DHSS tax and benefit model tables). After the changes specified in *(a)* and *(b)* above, his net weekly spending power would become £62·95.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Firearms and Shotguns

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received urging tighter control for the issue of shotgun certificates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We have received representations from various sources, including hon. Members, local authority associations, local authorities and police authorities, and members of the public. In 1984 these numbered approximately 50. The majority suggested that the controls which at present apply to pistols and rifles should be applied to shotguns. On that issue, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend, the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 22 November 1984 at column *246*.

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total cost of administering the firearm and shotgun licensing system, annually, at the latest available date and five years ago.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Annual figures of costs and income are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Surveys to provide such information were conducted in sample police forces in 1979 and 1981 from which it was estimated that in 1979-80 the total costs were £5,000,000 and the income £3,700,000; and in 1981-82 £5,398,707 and £4,376,631 respectively.

Off-course Betting Shops

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the most likely effect on attendance at race tracks and consequently on the level of betting and payment of on-course betting tax that will arise from the provision of better facilities at off-course betting shops.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We intend to issue a consultation document soon about the facilities permitted within betting shops. Before reaching any decisions we shall take account of views expressed about the effect of better facilities on attendances at racecourses as well as a number of other considerations.

Metropolitan Police (Out-of-Court Settlements)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the amounts paid in out-of-court settlements of claims arising from the wrongful acts of Metropolitan police officers in 1983, the amounts paid under awards made by courts in similar cases in 1983, the number of cases initiated in 1983 and the number concluded in 1983.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The total amount paid in 1983 by Metropolitan police in settlement of claims arising from allegations of misconduct by police officers (whether or not formal proceedings were instituted) was £57,455. The total amount paid by the force under awards made by the courts in similar cases during 1983 was £5,855. The number of such civil actions initiated against the force during 1983 was 135, and the number disposed of was 83.

Prevention of Terrorism

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were detained in west Yorkshire under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1982, 1983 and 1984; and how many of these were subsequently convicted of criminal offences.

Mr. Brittan: One person, who was not subsequently charged, was detained in west Yorkshire under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1982. No such detentions were recorded in 1983 or 1984.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons have been arrested on Merseyside under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act to the latest available date; how many were subsequently *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many persons have been detained in England and Wales under the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act to the most recent available date; and how many were *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted.

Mr. Brittan [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1985, c. *14*]: The available information for England and for Merseyside on persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts and subsequently charged relates only to the period from 1 January 1979. From that date up to 30 September 1984, of 328 subsequently charged in England and Wales 248 had been found guilty and of 24 subsequently charged on Merseyside 21 had been found guilty.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, after the revision of the Metropolitan police organisation, described in the police press release of 20 November 1984, it is the intention that each of the borough-based consultative groups will have, as their main police links, several chief superintendents of equal authority and status representing each of the divisions within the borough, instead of the single district commander as at present; and how it is envisaged they will tackle problems of police/community relationships that cross division boundaries.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The precise arrangements for consultation with the community following the reorganisation of the force have not yet been decided. Discussions will be held with borough and district councils, community/police consultative groups and representatives of the local community to ensure that the arrangements established in each area are well adapted to its needs and have the support of the local community.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, after the revision of the Metropolitan police organisation, it is the intention to appoint community liaison officers within the police for each division, instead of one for the whole borough as at present; and whether he considers that the officer with the rank of superintendent, responsible for deputy assistant commissioner services within each area, will have adequate time to devote to community relations, as well as to his other responsibilities including administration, press and publicity.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that it is his intention to appoint a community liaison officer for each division. Instead of one for each district. No final decision will be made about the rank or range of duties to be performed by the officer responsible for "DAC services" at area headquarters until local discussions have taken place with those involved.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the structure of the branch of the Metropolitan police with functions similar to that of A7 after the revision of the Metropolitan police organisation, described in the police press release on 20 November 1984; what its terms of reference will be; what authority it will have within the divisions on community and race relations issues; and whether it will be the place of reference within the Metropolitan police to which consultative groups and London-wide organisations with an interest in these matters can make representations about the overall policy of the force.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that he has no detailed plans at present to change the structure and role of A7 branch. Existing functions of the branch will remain an integral part of his organisation; any changes which become necessary as a consequence of force reorganisation will be implemented only after full discussion with interested parties.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

O and A-level Examinations

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the Secondary Examination Council has any duty to report to him variations over time in the standard of O and A-level examinations.

Mr. Dunn: The council is obliged to report to my right hon. Friend on the discharge of all its functions.

Secondary Schools (Discipline)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has about methods for enforcing discipline in maintained secondary schools other

than corporal punishment; and what steps he takes to disseminate information about effective methods to teachers throughout the country.

Mr. Dunn: A considerable amount of information about this topic reaches my right hon. Friend through HM Inspectorate which, in the course of its work observes, discusses and disseminates information about a range of disciplinary issues. These issues are sometimes raised in school inspection reports, which are now published.

Open University

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the value of the Government grant to the Open University for each year since 1971 in real terms, using 100 as a base in 1971.

Mr. Brooke: The following table gives the recurrent grant for each financial year; the recurrent grant revalued to 1983-84 cost terms*; and also expressed as an index using 100 as a base for the financial year 1971-72.

* Cost terms figures result from adjusting the cash outturn figures for past years to a base of average 1983-84 prices using the deflator for gross domestic product at market prices.

Financial Year	*Recurrent Grant*	*Recurrent Grant at 1983-84 Cost Terms*	*Recurrent Grant Expressed as an Index*
	£ million	*£ million*	
1971-72	6·63	27·78	100·0
1972-73	7·90	30·72	110·6
1973-74	9·78	35·45	127·6
1974-75	13·86	42·09	151·5
1975-76	16·38	39·60	142·5
1976-77	23·57	50·32	181·1
1977-78	24·15	45·29	163·0
1978-79	29·96	50·88	183·1
1979-80	36·71	53·33	191·9
1980-81	47·13	57·72	207·7
1981-82	51·27	57·09	205·5
1982-83	*54·21	56·60	203·7
1983-84	*55·72	55·72	200·5
1984-85	*58·37 (estimate)	55·72	200·5

* These sums exclude the loans of £1 million in 1982-83, £0·7 million in 1983-84 and £0·8 million in 1984-85 which were made available to enable the university to develop its professional, industrial and commercial updating activities.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the real cost of Open University tuition fees and summer school fees for each year since 1971, using 100 as a base for 1971.

Mr. Brooke: The following table gives the undergraduate tuition fees and summer school fees revalued to 1983-84 cost terms*; and expressed as an index using 100 as a base for 1971.

* Cost terms figures result from adjusting the cash outturn figures for past years to a base of average 1983-84 prices using the deflator for gross domestic product at market prices.

Academic Year	*Fee*	*Fee at 1983-84 Cost Terms*	*Fee Expressed as an Index*
	£	*£*	
	Undergraduate Tuition Fees		
1971	20	83·9	100·0
1972	20	77·8	92·6
1973	25	90·6	107·8
1974	25	75·9	90·3
1975	25	60·4	71·9
1976	40	85·4	101·6
1977	45	84·4	100·4
1978	52	88·3	105·1
1979	55	79·9	95·1
1980	67	82·1	97·7
1981	98	109·1	129·8
1982	120	125·3	149·1
1983	127·0	127	151·1
1984	133	126·9	151·0
	Summer School Fees		
1971	25·00	104·8	100·0
1972	25·00	97·2	92·3
1973	30·00	108·7	103·3
1974	34·00	103·3	98·1
1975	38·50	93·1	88·4
1976	49·00	104·6	99·4
1977	49·00	91·9	87·3
1978	50·00	84·9	80·7
1979	52·00	75·5	71·7
1980	62·00	75·9	72·1
1981	75·00	83·5	79·3
1982	77·00	80·4	76·4
1983	80·00	80·4	76
1984	88·00	84·0	79·8

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has received concerning the pupil-teacher ratio in maintained primary and secondary schools in Yorkshire and Humberside, west Yorkshire and Kirklees, respectively, since January 1984.

Mr. Dunn: I have no information for later than January 1984 when the pupil-teacher ratios were as follows:

	Pupil-teacher ratio within maintained primary schools	*Pupil-teacher ratio within maintained secondary schools*
Yorkshire and Humberside* region	21·4	16·5
West Yorkshire metropolitan authority	21·8	17·0
Kirklees local education authority	22·5	17·1

* This includes Humberside LEA, North Yorkshire LEA, South Yorkshire metropolitan county and West Yorkshire metropolitan county.

Physically Impaired Pupils (Teachers)

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce a decision on the proposals of the Advisory Committee on Supply and Education of Teachers for withdrawing the mandatory requirement for a specialist qualification for teachers of the blind, deaf and partially hearing.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales are still considering the report of the committee on teacher training for special education which contains this proposal.

School Meals

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science by how much public expenditure would be reduced if parents accepted the full cost of school meals.

Mr. Dunn: Local education authorities have budgeted to spend £415 million on school meals in 1984-85. Public expenditure would fall by that amount if parents accepted the full cost of school meals.

Plant Breeding Institute (Aphids Research)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the stopping of research on resistance to aphids at the Plant Breeding Institute; and what response he has given.

Mr. Brooke: I received two letters early last year from an hon. Member about the Agricultural and Food Research Council's decision to stop research on resistance to aphids at the Plant Breeding Institute in Cambridge. In reply, I explained that it is for the AFRC to decide and continually to review, its scientific priorities within the resources available to it; and that against that background I understood that the work on aphid resistance at the PBI had been reviewed by the institute's director and his senior staff and judged to be a relatively low priority, a view which was shared by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which commissioned the work.

Computing Sciences Centre, Milton Keynes

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimate of salaries at the proposed computing sciences centre at Milton Keynes compared with equivalent posts in universities.

Mr. Brooke: The proposed institute of information technology to which the hon. Member refers is to be a private venture sponsored by a number of industrial concerns. The renumeration of its academic staff will be a matter for decision by those responsible for managing the institute.

Hammersmith Hospital (Imaging Techniques)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from Sir James Gowans about saving the project at Hammersmith hospital in London on refining imaging techniques using nuclear magnetic resonance scanners.

Mr. Brooke: None.

European Organisation for Nuclear Research

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to receive the report of Sir John Kendrew's committee on the future of the European Organisation for Nuclear Research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) on 28 January 1985 at columns *35-36*.

Research Councils (Restructuring)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current cost estimate for restructuring the Agricultural and Food Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council.

Mr. Brooke: The current estimates of the additional costs of restructuring the Agricultural and Food Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council in the four years 1984-85 to 1987-88 are as follows:

	Agricultural and Food Research Council £ million	*Natural Environment Research Council* £ million
1984-85	3·3	0·25
1985-86	6·0	3·1
1986-87	6·7	5·15
1987-88	3·6	1·75

As my right hon. Friend announced on 10 January, the grants-in-aid for 1985-86 to the Agricultural and Food Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council will be £50·3 million and £67·3 million respectively. These grants-in-aid include sums of £4·8 million and £1·25 million, respectively, which the Advisory Board for Research Councils intends for use in assisting these councils with their restructuring plans. The possibility of providing further special support for this purpose in 1986-87 and 1987-88 will be reviewed later this year.

Scientific Projects

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what projects of high scientific promise his Department is supporting.

Mr. Brooke: The Department does not directly support any research in the natural sciences. The most recent information about particular research projects and programmes supported by the Research Councils, which receive grants-in-aid from the Department through the science budget, can be found in its 1983-84 annual reports, copies of which are in the Library. The councils' peer review systems aim to ensure that only work of the highest scientific promise receives support.

Handicapped Pupils

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current level of and trends in the provision of education for children between 16 and 19 years who have been assessed as having special educational needs.

Sir Keith Joseph: The number of pupils in the age range 16 to 19 in special schools rose from 5,586 in 1980 to 8,767 in 1984. This reflects a welcome trend in the extension of provision for this group of pupils. Although there are no equivalent figures available for students with special educational needs in full-time further education I am aware that colleges are increasingly providing for such students, particularly for those with moderate learning difficulties.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance has most recently been issued

by his Department regarding the duty of local education authorities to provide education for handicapped pupils in the 16 to 19 years age range.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have made clear on a number of occasions my view that local education authorities have a duty to provide full-time education for young people aged 16 to 19 who seek it, including those with special educational needs.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list his powers regarding the education of young people between 16 and 19 years who have been assessed as having special educational needs.

Sir Keith Joseph: My powers are as follows:—

(1) to determine appeals under section 5*(6)* of the Education Act 1981 against a decision by a local education authority not to issue a statement of special educational needs in respect of such a young person who is a registered pupil at a school;

(2) to determine appeals under section 8*(6)* of the Education Act 1981 against the special educational provision to be made under a statement of special educational needs;

(3) to investigate and determine complaints under sections 68 and 99 of the Education Act 1944 that a local education authority has acted, or is proposing to act, unreasonably, or has failed in a statutory duty.

TRANSPORT

Public Service Vehicles

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the Public Service Vehicles (Carrying Capacity) Regulations 1983 so as to require that on public service vehicles no children over five years of age will be permitted to sit three to a seat whose normal capacity is two persons.

Mrs. Chalker: No. A seat designed for two adults can safely be used by three children, and this has always been permitted under PSV (Carrying Capacity) Regulations.

Tyneside Metro

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from private investors seeking a share of the ownership of the Tyneside Metro.

Mrs. Chalker: There have been no such proposals.

Fog Detection

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Transport if it is proposed to introduce the Marconi MET-3 fog detection system on motorway black spots at an early date.

Mrs. Chalker: Marconi fog detection systems will be installed on a number of selected sites on the M25 motorway. Further installation will depend on the results of the trials on the M4 motorway and the benefits of other sensing devices.

Stolport (Newham)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport what aircraft would be capable of using the proposed Stolport at the Royal docks, Newham, if the runway length was 1,200 metres which would not be capable of using it if the runway length was 762 metres.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The considerations which determine whether an aircraft can safely operate on a runway of given length are complex and I shall write to the hon. Member.

Helicopters

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the use of helicopters at airports.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Provided that helicopter operators satisfy the Civil Aviation Authority that their proposed operations are safe, that where applicable the authority has granted an air transport licence, and that they do not cause undue noise disturbance to people on the ground, the Government regard the provision of helicopter services as a matter for operators' commercial judgment.

Bolton (Road Safety)

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many accident investigation and prevention road safety measures have been carried out in the Bolton area during the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: This information is available only from Greater Manchester county council or Bolton county borough council. I much regret that neither council is passing this information to the Department at present, so that I cannot pass it to my hon. Friend. The Department does not keep records of local road safety activities.

Merseyside (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the recent visit to Merseyside of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I visited Merseyside on 25 January to see Liverpool airport and hold discussions with the airport committee chairman and airport director. I also visited Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive and had discussions with the directors of the executive.

M25 Motorway

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what parts of the section of the M25 from the A13 to the M20 are placed in cuttings.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is as follows:

(1) 200 metres of the interchange with the new A13 (Junction 30).

(2) 100 metres of the interchange with the old A13 (Junction 31).

(3) 2·8km of the 4·7km length of M25 between Swanley and Dartford.

The Minch (Nuclear Waste Cargoes)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the frequency of cargoes of nuclear waste through the Minch; what material the ships carry; and what are the ports of departure and arrival of these cargoes.

Mr. Ridley: Movements of plutonium nitrate take place between Dounreay and Sellafield using the ports of

Scrabster and Workington. These are in full compliance with national regulations based on the recommendations of the International Maritime Organisation, which do not depend for their effectiveness on the choice of a particular route. Accordingly, my Department does not collect detailed information of the kind requested.

British Airways

Mr. Andrew MacKay asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to increase the cash limit on Class VI, Vote 6, as a result of the slippage of the sale of shares in British Airways plc.

Mr. Ridley: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class VI, Vote 6 will be increased by £1,259,000 from £250,000 to £1,509,000, to meet costs arising from preliminary work on the sale. The increase will be charged to the reserve. We had expected to offset these costs against the proceeds of the sale of British Airways this year, but the recent slippage in the privatisation timetable has made this impossible.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those organisations which have recently approached him seeking the expansion of Manchester airport.

Mr. Michael Spicer [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *12*]: I cannot release the names of such organisations without their specific agreement. But, since July 1983, my department has received 124 letters from individuals and organisations in the North-West region advocating increased use of Manchester airport.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications have been made for new scheduled services from Manchester airport by *(a)* British airlines and *(b)* foreign airlines; and which of those services would involve new scheduled destinations.

Mr. Michael Spicer [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *12*]: The Civil Aviation Authority has the following licence applications outstanding for scheduled services from Manchester:

Points or points to be served	*Applicant*
(i) *Domestic routes*	
Blackpool	Spacegrand
Birmingham/Bournemouth/Cardiff/ Newcastle	Metropolitan Airways
City of London STOLPORT	Brymon Airways
Jersey	Guernsey Airlines
(ii) *International routes*	
Alicante	Orion Airways
Athens	British Airways
	Britannia Airways
	Orion Airways
Amsterdam	Dan-Air Services
Cork	Air Ecosse
	British Airways
Dublin	Dan-Air Services
Dusseldorf	Dan-Air Services
Faro	Britannia Airways
	Orion Airways
Hamburg	Air Ecosse
	Metropolitan Airways
Kano	British Caledonian Airways
Las Palmas	Orion Airways
Lisbon	British Airways
Madrid	British Airways
Malaga	British Airways
	Britannia Airways
	Air Europe
	Orion Airways
Montpelier	Dan-Air Services
Oporto	British Airways
Oslo	Dan-Air Services
	Metropolitan Airways
Stockholm	Dan-Air Services
	Metropolitan Airways
Tenerife	Orion Airways

Amsterdam, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Cardiff, Cork, Dublin, Dusseldorf, Jersey, Madrid and Newcastle are already served from Manchester.

Although one foreign airline has expressed an interest in operating a long haul service, there are no outstanding applications as such to my Department from foreign airlines seeking a permit to operate into Manchester.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all those foreign airlines which operate scheduled services out of Manchester airport; and what is the total number of passengers to have travelled with each such airline using Manchester airport in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Spicer [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *12-13*]: The following foreign airlines operate scheduled services out of Manchester:

Quantas	Iberia
Aer Lingus	TAP
Air France	Yugoslav Airlines
Sabena	Cyprus Airways
KLM	Air Malta
Lufthansa	Swiss Air
SAS	

The number of passengers carried on the airlines' Manchester services in 1983 was 472,327, but I am unable to give the number of passengers travelling with each of these airlines from Manchester since that information is commercially confidential.

Detailed figures for 1984 are not yet available, but the total number of passengers using Manchester in 1984 was almost 6 million.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* all those destinations from Manchester airport currently served by *(a)* domestic flights and *(b)* international flights; and in the case of each destination how many passengers travelled that route in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Spicer [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *13*]: The following destinations were served in 1984 by international scheduled services from Manchester airport:

Amsterdam	Dusseldorf
Athens	Faro
Bangkok	Frankfurt
Barcelona	Larnaca
Brussels	Lisbon
Copenhagen	Madrid
Cork	Malaga
Dublin	Melbourne
Dubrovnik	Milan

Nice	Rome
Paphos	Shannon
Paris	Sydney
Pula	Zurich

The following destinations were served in 1984 by domestic scheduled services:

Aberdeen	Dundee
Belfast (Aldergrove)	Edinburgh
Belfast (Harbour)	Gatwick
Birmingham	Glasgow
Bournemouth	Heathrow
Cardiff	Isle of Man
Channel Islands	Newcastle

In addition, approximately 160 foreign destinations, mainly in Europe, were served in 1984 by charter and air taxi flights.

I have not given details of the passengers carried on each route since some of this information is commercially confidential.

Chief Inspecting Officer of Railways (Report)

Mr. Pawsey: asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the annual report of the Chief Inspecting Officer of Railways for 1984 to be published formally; and what is the earliest date on which a copy could be made available to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *15*]: I expect the chief inspecting Officer's annual report to be published before the end of September. I cannot give a precise date for its publication, but I shall ensure that a copy of the report is made available to my hon. Friend as soon as it is published.

Train Accident (Rugby)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth of 24 January, if he will explain the circumstances in which a British Rail engineer's train was propelled past a signal at danger on to the main line; at what estimated closing speed the two trains collided; what damage was caused to the two trains involved, to the track, to signalling equipment and to overhead lines and how long they were each out of service as a result; what was the nature of the minor injuries sustained and if those affected are eligible for compensation; what is the nature of the action taken by British Rail to prevent a reccurrence; whether the driver of the passenger train involved has been commended for his action; what is the nature of the disciplinary action taken against those members of British Rail Staff held responsible for the accident and what were their functions at the time of the accident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *15*]: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

EMPLOYMENT

Falkland Islands

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Employment how much expenditure he estimates will be incurred during 1984-85 by his Department on activities related to the Falkland Islands, including recruitment costs at local offices.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Minimal expenditure has been incurred by certain jobcentres in connection with recruitment for vacancies in the Falkland Islands. Precise figures are not available. There is no other known expenditure by this Department on activities related to the Falkland Islands.

Southampton Skillcentre

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning the future of the annexe to the Southampton skillcentre; if he will now reconsider his decision to close down the annexe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The skillcentre training agency's proposals to the Manpower Services Commission for the future development of the skillcentre network were announced by my right hon. Friend on 29 November 1984, at column 1108. Since then, my right hon. Friend and I have received two letters about the proposed closure of the annexe to Southampton skillcentre. I know that the commission chairman has also received a number of letters on the subject and that meetings have been held between his officials and Southampton city council, Hampshire county council and the Hampshire development association.

The commission endorsed the agency's proposals when it met on 24 January.

We are considering the commission's advice.

Community Programme

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are presently employed under the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: On 14 December, the latest date for which figures are available, 130,027 people were in jobs funded under the community programme.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if, pursuant to his reply of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *558-59*, he will provide, for each of the given percentages of former participants who were in work at the time of the follow-up survey, that proportion who had participated as full-time workers on the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 10 January, at column 537.

Schoolchildren (Careers Guidance)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied with the current level of careers advice given to schoolchildren in the Yorkshire and Humberside region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The provision of careers advice in schools is the responsibility of local education authorities. If the hon. Member knows of any particular problems in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and I would be pleased to hear from him.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people currently receiving unemployment benefit have never been in employment.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information on claimants who have been unemployed since leaving full-time education is available in the Library.

Notifiable Installations

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has anything to add to the answer of 17 January to the hon. Member for Gower regarding notifiable installations constituting a major hazard in respect of such installations in the county of South Glamorgan.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: By the end of December 1984 the number of installations notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Notification of Installations Handling Hazardous Substances Regulations 1982 in the county of South Glamorgan was 12. I am sorry that this information was missed out of my reply to the hon. Member's earlier question on 17 January 1985, at column 214.

Self-Employed Persons (Green Paper)

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he will publish the Green Paper on the self-employed.

Mr. Alan Clark: I know of no such Green Paper.

Young Persons

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish, for each borough in the London region of the Manpower Services Commission, and for *(a)* 16-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds and *(c)* 18-year-olds the latest careers service estimates of the number and proportion expected to leave school and further education college, and the number and proportion expected to find work outside the youth training scheme by 31 December.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is as follows and is subject to the comments I made in reply to similar questions on 21 January 1985, at columns 286-96.

Forecast of destination of 1984-85 school leavers by December 1985*

Boroughs within each training division area	*16 year olds*				*17 year olds*				*18 year olds*			
	Leaving school† entering labour market		*Employed outside YTS*		*Leaving school† entering labour market*		*Employed outside YTS*		*Leaving school† entering labour market*		*Employed outside YTS*	
	000's	*per cent.*	*000's*	*per cent.*	*000's*	*per cent.*	*000's*	*per cent.*	*000's*	*per cent.*	*000's*	*per cent.*
Barking	1·5	71	0·9	42	0·2	42	0·2	36	0·1	56	0·1	50
Hackney	1·1	54	0·4	18	0·3	43	0·1	17	0·1	45	0·1	36
Havering	2·4	62	1·4	36	0·3	27	0·1	18	0·3	46	0·3	41
Islington	0·9	54	0·3	18	0·3	44	0·3	30	0·1	41	0·1	25
Newham	1·8	58	0·8	25	0·4	40	0·1	15	0·2	47	0·1	24
Redbridge	1·3	46	0·5	18	0·4	31	0·2	15	0·2	29	0·1	18
Tower Hamlets	1·4	66	0·5	23	0·4	58	0·1	21	0·2	63	..	15
Waltham Forest	1·3	46	0·6	19	0·5	39	0·3	21	0·2	52	0·2	40
London—North East	11·8	57	5·3	26	2·7	39	1·4	20	1·4	45	1·0	30
Bexley	1·5	46	0·7	20	0·4	33	0·3	24	..	3	..	3
Bromley	1·4	39	0·4	10	0·5	31	0·3	19	0·3	34	0·3	29
Croydon	2·5	57	1·1	26	0·3	25	0·2	18	0·1	16	0·1	9
Greenwich	1·9	58	0·8	25	0·6	48	0·2	15	0·4	69	0·1	20
Lambeth	1·1	53	0·5	21	0·3	43	0·1	15	0·2	46	0·1	34
Lewisham	1·5	47	0·3	8	0·6	48	0·2	21	0·4	59	0·2	30
Southwark	1·8	62	0·8	26	0·2	25	0·1	13	0·3	69	0·1	30
London—South East	11·7	52	4·4	19	2·9	36	1·5	18	1·7	39	0·9	21
Ealing	1·6	52	1·0	32	0·5	30	0·4	27	0·2	32	0·2	27
Hammersmith/Kensington	1·0	42	0·4	17	0·4	38	0·2	18	0·3	51	0·2	28
Hillingdon	1·7	55	0·9	30	0·4	36	0·3	31	0·2	32	0·2	31
Hounslow	1·0	37	0·4	14	0·2	21	0·1	11	0·3	39	0·2	34
Kingston	0·6	41	0·4	28	0·2	32	0·2	28	0·2	39	0·1	32
Merton	0·9	43	0·6	31	0·1	10	0·1	7	0·1	11	..	8
Richmond	0·6	43	0·4	28	0·3	39	0·2	29	0·1	43	0·1	37
Sutton	1·1	47	0·6	25	0·2	27	0·1	14	0·1	19	0·1	18
Wandsworth	1·7	51	0·7	20	0·9	72	0·5	39	0·4	71	0·2	33
London—South West	10·0	47	5·3	25	3·2	35	2·1	23	1·8	37	1·3	27
Barnet												
Brent	1·0	36	0·5	16	0·6	41	0·3	17	0·2	44	0·1	22
Camden/Westminster	0·9	29	0·3	9	0·3	19	0·2	9	0·1	10	0·1	7
Enfield	1·8	47	1·0	26	0·5	31	0·3	21	0·3	33	0·2	27
Haringey	1·1	47	0·4	16	0·4	41	0·1	14	0·1	29	..	10

Boroughs within each training division area	16 year olds				17 year olds				18 year olds			
	Leaving school† entering labour market		Employed outside YTS		Leaving school† entering labour market		Employed outside YTS		Leaving school† entering labour market		Employed outside YTS	
	000's	per cent.	000's	per cent.	000's	per cent.	000's	per cent.	000's	per cent.	000's	per cent.
Harrow	0·9	40	0·7	30	0·3	28	0·2	22	0·2	25	0·2	22
London—North‡	6·7	38	3·4	20	2·7	30	1·5	18	1·2	25	1·0	19

.. less than 50.
* The figures relates only to school leavers from *maintained* schools.
† Excludes those who enter Further/Higher Education.
‡ Includes estimates for Barnet LEA.
‖ No return received for Barnet. Percentages are based on totals eligible to leave school. Ages are as at 31 August 1985.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish for each Manpower Services Commission region and area the number of *(a)* 16-year-olds and *(b)* 17-year-olds expected to enter the youth training scheme in 1985-86 on the basis of the eligibility rules announced on 12 November 1984.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I regret the information is not yet available in the form requested. I shall write to the hon. Member when I can give him further information.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of Manpower Services Commission mode A trainees in inner Merseyside during 1984 were from ethnic minorities.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *18*]: Information on the ethnic origin of youth training scheme participants is collected through managing agents and sponsors and this shows that some 2·3 per cent. of entrants to mode A schemes in the Manpower Services Commission inner Merseyside area in 1984 were from ethnic minorities.

Job-Splitting Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the annual cost of the job-splitting scheme as a crude figure and as a percentage of job creation schemes; if he will give the number of entrants to date according to sex and marital status, subdivided according to age, and further subdivided according to the preceding length of unemployment; and if he will make a statement about the relative success and the possibilities of extending the scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1983-84, expenditure on the job splitting scheme was £323,000, slightly over one tenth of 1 per cent. of total expenditure in that year on the employment and training measure. 1,023 applications have been approved to date, creating 2,046 part-time jobs. Women were engaged initially in three quarters of the jobs created and young people under 25 were engaged in just under a half. Further information on marital status and length of unemployment could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Take-up under this experimental scheme has been disappointing. However, as my right hon. Friend announced on November 12 1984, at column 444, changes are to be made to the scheme designed to improve its attractiveness to employers and thus the help it can give to the unemployed.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make available from the January 1984 survey of those having joined the enterprise allowance scheme, and in respect of only those who were still trading after 18 months, the percentage of those entrants who had been unemployed for more than 12 months prior to joining the scheme by age, sex and marital status.

Mr. Alan Clark: The January 1984 survey of enterprise allowance scheme participants relates to data collected from a representative sample of those receiving the allowance in the pilot areas in the middle of June 1983. The survey does not provide any information on scheme participants who were still trading after 18 months.

Information from the separate follow-up survey of entrants to the pilot schemes six months after they had left is not at present available broken down in the way requested by the hon. Member. I shall write to him in due course when it has been possible to determine how much information on the basis he has requested can, at reasonable cost, be derived from the survey results.

Equal Opportunities Commission (Code of Practice)

Mr. Charles Wardle asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether, in the light of the recommendation of the Select Committee on Employment that he should approve the Equal Opportunities Commission's draft code of practice, he now intends to do so.

Mr. Tom King: I have today laid the draft code before Parliament for its approval under the negative resolution procedure. I welcomed the Select Committee's report and I consider the draft code to be a sensible and practical document which should be of help to employers in promoting equal opportunities and in avoiding claims of sex discrimination.

Skillcentre Training Agency

Mr. Moynihan asked the Secretary of State for Employment what report he has received of the Manpower Services Commission's discussion on 24 January of the proposals in the commission paper MSC/84/66 for the future development of the skillcentre training agency.

Mr. Tom King: The chairman of the Manpower Services Commission wrote to me on 24 January with a full report of the commission's discussion, which concluded with the commission endorsing the skillcentre training agency's proposals in the paper MSC/84/66. A copy of the chairman's letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Unemployment Benefit (Seasonal Workers)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons in each of the past five years have appealed against having unemployment benefit refused to them on the basis that they are deemed to be seasonal workers.

Mr. Whitney: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested cannot be obtained quickly because of the effects of the Newcastle computer strike, now ended, which will take some time to resolve. I will, therefore, reply to the hon. Member when the information is available.

SCOTLAND

Homes Insulation Scheme

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table giving, by quarter since their inception, for Scotland *(a)* the number of dwellings insulated under the local authorities energy conservation programme and a breakdown of the body which completed the work, *(b)* the cost of the programme and *(c)* the number of dwellings insulated under the home insulation scheme and a breakdown of tenancies to whom the grants were paid, *(d)* the amounts of the payments, *(e)* the number of 90 per cent. grants paid and their costs and *(f)* the financial allocation for each of the past financial years to each of these schemes and the allocation for the current financial year.

Mr. Ancram: The following tables give the information available on the local authority energy conservation programme and the homes insulation scheme. A breakdown of tenures in respect of grants paid under the homes insulation scheme for Scotland is not available centrally.

Table 1
Local authority: energy conservation programme

Number of dwellings

	Work completed by: *Direct labour*	*Contractor*	*Temporary employment programmes**	*All*	*Cost*
					£000
1978					
2nd quarter	—	—	330	330	21·9
3rd quarter	449	645	748	1,842	114·4
4th quarter	1,626	4,309	3,072	9,007	542·5
1979					
1st quarter	2,267	24,624	5,102	31,993	1,475·0
2nd quarter	862	10,758	5,225	16,845	680·1
3rd quarter	812	7,042	6,928	14,782	576·5
4th quarter	2,837	9,899	7,407	20,143	1,094·7
1980					
1st quarter	2,291	25,422	5,593	33,306	1,973·4
2nd quarter	74	9,084	3,875	13,033	750·9
3rd quarter	—	6,987	3,619	10,606	632·5
4th quarter	664	9,801	5,410	15,875	1,015·9
1981					
1st quarter	1,089	17,567	4,365	23,021	1,375·6
2nd quarter	—	8,512	3,932	12,444	639·6
3rd quarter	—	4,049	3,965	8,014	269·0
4th quarter	653	6,321	4,005	10,979	467·8
1982					
1st quarter	837	19,224	2,306	22,367	1,113·2
2nd quarter	1,283	4,889	2,054	8,226	336·4
3rd quarter	—	2,945	1,980	4,925	126·2
4th quarter	74	4,015	2,120	6,209	364·8
1983					
1st quarter	249	17,926	699	18,874	1,309·9
2nd quarter	—	4,559	1,900	6,459	303·1
3rd quarter	—	8,557	1,145	9,702	436·5
4th quarter	13	7,002	1,472	8,487	515·3
1984					
1st quarter	72	8,790	4,026	12,888	1,045·6
2nd quarter	—	2,603	1,680	4,283	176·2
3rd quarter	20	2,302	1,316	3,638	120·7
4th quarter†	—	—	—	—	—

* "Special temporary employment programme" from 1 April 1978 to 1 April 1981, "Community enterprise programme" from 1 April 1981 to 5 October 1982 when merged with the "Community programme".
† 1984 quarter four information not yet available.

Table 2
*Homes Insulation Scheme**

	Grants paid (standard)	*Cost £000*	*Grants paid (special needs)*	*Cost £000*
1978				
4th quarter	3,887	157·1	—	—
1979				
1st quarter	6,136	261·9	—	—
2nd quarter	3,058	133·8	—	—
3rd quarter	2,049	93·8	—	—
4th quarter	4,007	181·5	—	—
1980				
1st quarter	4,779	215·5	—	—
2nd quarter	2,296	106·1	—	—
3rd quarter	1,391	69·9	38	3·2
4th quarter	3,864	212·9	617	48·9
1981				
1st quarter	5,064	282·6	949	77·8
2nd quarter	2,639	129·8	449	37·8
3rd quarter	1,737	104·2	601	50·5
4th quarter	4,565	199·9	825	72·3
1982				
1st quarter	3,719	217·1	1,963	172·8
2nd quarter	2,458	158·1	1,192	108·0
3rd quarter	2,083	136·6	1,031	95·9
4th quarter	1,934	123·8	1,028	96·2
1983				
1st quarter	3,924	253·2	1,436	134·8
2nd quarter	2,431	160·3	1,383	129·9
3rd quarter	2,095	140·6	1,095	103·6
4th quarter	3,296	220·7	1,584	149·0
1984				
1st quarter	3,487	214·5	1,389	131·0
2nd quarter	2,592	171·5	1,147	107·9
3rd quarter†	1,620	107·6	803	75·1
4th quarter†	2,481	164·3	1,121	100·1

* Special needs category, eligible for 90 per cent. grant, introduced from August 1980.
† Figures based on incomplete returns.

Table 3

	Local authority: energy conservation programme: allocations £ million	*Homes insulation scheme: allocations £ million*
1978-79	4·825	1·675
1979-80	5·481	2·5
1980-81	*	3·282
1981-82	—	2·436
1982-83	—	2·325
1983-84	—	2·330
1984-85	—	†2·879

* Allocations after 1979-80 contained within housing revenue account allocations.
† Provisional figure.

Psychiatrists

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the ratio of consultant psychiatrists to the population in each of the Scottish health board areas.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested is as follows:

	Ratio per 100,000 population
Scotland	4·6
Argyll and Clyde	4·0
Ayrshire and Arran	1·9
Borders	3·0
Dumfries and Galloway	6·2
Fife	4·4

	Ratio per 100,000 population
Forth Valley	5·1
Grampian	3·8
Greater Glasgow	6·2
Highland	5·1
Lanarkshire	2·5
Lothian	5·6
Orkney	—
Shetland	—
Tayside	6·2
Western Isles	—

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many doctors entered postgraduate training in psychiatry in Scotland in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many newly qualified psychiatrists are required each year to maintain existing staffing levels.

Mr. John MacKay: The information available relates to doctors entering higher medical training in the psychiatric specialties in Scotland at the grade of senior registrar. Details are set out in the following table. It is estimated that an average of seven new consultant psychiatrists would be required annually to maintain existing staffing levels.

*Year**	*First Year Senior Registrars*
1982	11
1983	15
1984	16·5

* as at 30 September.

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the recommended ratio of consultant psychiatrists to the population in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: There is no nationally accepted ratio of consultant psychiatrists to population. Requests for additional consultant posts in this specialty can normally be approved in view of the recommendations contained in the report, "Scottish Health Authorities' Priorities for the Eighties".

Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nurses completed community psychiatric nurse training in Scotland in each of the last three years.

Mr. John MacKay: Details for the most recent years for which complete statistical information is available are as follows:

	Number
1981	10
1982	18
1983	26

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nurses were seconded by Scottish health boards for community psychiatric nurse training outside Scotland in each of the last three years.

Mr. John MacKay: The most recent years for which complete statistical information is available are 1981, 1982 and 1983. During these years Scottish health boards did not second any nurses for community psychiatric training outside Scotland. Information received from the Forth Valley health board relating to 1984 indicates that one nurse was seconded to England for community psychiatric nurse training.

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many qualified community psychiatric nurses were employed by each health board in Scotland in each of the last three years.

Mr. John MacKay: The most recent years for which complete statistical information is available are 1981, 1982 and 1983. The following table gives the numbers of qualified nurses employed as community psychiatric nurses in each health board for each year.

	1981	*1982*	*1983*
Greater Glasgow	30	39	43
Lothian	30	30	30
Tayside	13	16	18
Grampian	12	12	14
Dumfries and Galloway	4	4	4
Highland	6	8	8
Fife	7	10	10
Ayrshire and Arran	7	7	10
Lanarkshire	7	8	8
Forth Valley	4	5	7
Argyll and Clyde	12	15	16
Borders	8	8	8
Western Isles	3	3	4
Orkney	—	1	1
Shetland	—	—	—
	143	166	181

Hexafluorosilicic Acid and Disodium Hexafluorosilicate

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether hexafluorosilicic acid and disodium hexafluorosilicate have ever been submitted to the Committee for the Safety of Medicines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: These substances have never been considered appropriate for submitting to the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Hallside Village (Property Survey)

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial support his Department proposes to give to Glasgow district council for a property survey being carried out in Hallside village, Cambuslang, in connection with the bringing of the houses and environs up to a tolerable level of habitation.

Mr. George Younger: None; local authorities have a duty to undertake, or arrange, such surveys from time to time under section 13(3) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1974.

Scottish Development Agency

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* past, present and future Scottish Development Agency-funded environmental improvement projects in each of the Scottish constituencies.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *372*]: Information on SDA-funded environmental projects in each Scottish constituency is contained in the following table:

Completed environmental projects since 1975

Constituency	*Number*	*Value (£)*
Aberdeen North	2	4,146
Aberdeen South	9	290,971
Angus East	25	676,932
Argyll and Bute	24	987,246
Ayr	21	1,379,660
Banff and Buchan	1	238,509
Caithness and Sutherland	28	1,067,623
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	24	1,312,228
Clackmannan	26	2,313,223
Clydebank and Milngavie	39	3,384,456
Clydesdale	20	646,588
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	14	738,299
Cunninghame North	93	7,221,153
Cunninghame South	31	3,635,789
Dumbarton	22	1,430,435
Dumfries	5	125,707
Dundee East	21	836,666
Dundee West	105	3,564,255
Dunfermline East	38	3,538,510
Dunfermline West	25	1,033,142
East Kilbride	8	332,133
East Lothian	29	939,142
Eastwood	5	361,829
Edinburgh Central	6	219,588
Edinburgh East	4	54,642
Edinburgh Leith	69	2,824,177
Edinburgh Pentlands	9	453,995
Edinburgh South	1	183,514
Edinburgh West	9	161,007
Falkirk East	13	520,475
Falkirk West	27	1,661,221
Fife Central	20	3,367,012
Fife North East	14	750,433
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	23	1,619,438
Glasgow Cathcart	1	3,531
Glasgow Central	31	9,851,415
Glasgow Garscadden	7	278,665
Glasgow Govan	10	1,402,966
Glasgow Hillhead	24	2,486,260
Glasgow Maryhill	23	2,115,310
Glasgow Pollok	4	386,931
Glasgow Provan	18	1,986,193
Glasgow Rutherglen	10	1,652,006
Glasgow Shettleston	5	335,502
Glasgow Springburn	22	5,401,411
Gordon	8	358,986
Greenock and Port Glasgow	27	1,737,960
Hamilton	43	5,829,332
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	34	5,547,267
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	22	1,274,737
Kincardine an Deeside	11	347,174
Kirkcaldy	24	1,443,684
Linlithgow	53	5,507,760
Livingston	16	992,143
Midlothian	28	2,199,722
Monklands East	92	10,482,369
Monklands West	13	640,973
Moray	17	1,063,014
Motherwell North	53	3,816,705
Motherwell South	59	3,600,726
Orkney and Shetland	9	1,149,623
Paisley North	15	1,604,435
Paisley South	4	629,301
Perth and Kinross	5	286,649
Renfrew West an Inverclyde	19	1,493,278
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	23	2,622,289
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	20	1,260,970
Stirling	15	889,247
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	32	2,715,837
Tayside North	4	134,721
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	21	2,078,157
Western Isles	9	368,309
Unallocated*	284	22,240,715
Total	1,929	156,000,414

*Unallocated projects cover more than one constituency and cannot be realistically divided. Of the total unallocated projects some 202 were completed in the Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal (GEAR) Programme at a value of £12,680,848.

ENERGY

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any information as to the additional costs, including transport costs, incurred *(a)* by the National Coal Board and *(b)* by the Central Electricity Generating Board, to date arising from the strike in the mining industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The eventual cost of the dispute cannot be estimated until it is over.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much extra oil has been used for electricity generation in the first 10 months of the current industrial dispute as compared with the same period one year earlier; and what has been the extra cost.

Mr. Goodlad: Figures for fuel used in the generation of electricity appear in *Energy Trends*, which is published monthly. The final cost of the coal dispute cannot be determined until it is over.

Plutonium Isotopes (Transport)

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish in the *Official Report* a typical inventory of the different plutonium isotopes carried in a package of plutonium nitrate between Dounreay and Sellafield.

Mr. Goodlad: The isotopic composition of the plutonium nitrate liquor in any package will vary with its radiation history. The following breakdown is roughly typical:

	per cent.
Plutonium 239	70
Plutonium 240	25
Plutonium 241	4
Other isotopes	1

Pit Closures

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he is satisfied with the accounting practices of the National Coal Board in respect of pit closures.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department monitors the accounts of the National Coal Board in relation to the cost of redundancy payments incurred as a consequence of pit closures.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes.

Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the value of work undertaken by the Atomic Energy Authority *(a)* for the nuclear industry and *(b)* for non-nuclear customers under the Science and Technology Act 1965 for each year since 1980.

Mr. Goodlad: The following table, derived from the authority's report and accounts for the years in question, shows the income received for nuclear and non-nuclear work. It excludes income arising as a by-product of or as a contribution to the authority's Vote-funded programmes; for example, sales of electricity.

£ million

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Nuclear work	46·8	52·7	52·9	57·4
Non-nuclear work	21·7	25·2	25·1	27·3

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current status of the research facilities of the Atomic Energy Authority at Winfrith Heath, Dorset, in relation to the steam generating heavy water reactor; what are the uses to which these facilities are now put; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The Winfrith SGHW reactor continues to operate very reliably as an electricity generating station and as a valuable test facility, with a load factor of over 73 per cent. in 1983-84. Continued operation of the reactor enables the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority to gain valuable information and experience on water cooled reactors.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he takes to satisfy himself that the current statutory financial framework at the Atomic Energy Authority is consistent with its overall objectives and its duty to earn an appropriate rate of return on funds invested.

Mr. Goodlad: The authority's statutory financial framework is contained in the provisions of the Atomic Energy Authority Act 1954, as amended: it does not include a duty to earn a rate of return on funds invested. However, the letter from my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) of 13 May 1983 to the then chairman of the authority setting out objectives included a requirement to make a profit on repayment work, both nuclear and non-nuclear, in accordance with terms discussed with the Department. A copy of the letter was published in the *Official Report* on 28 June 1983, at columns 45-46.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gulf (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Nelson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the visit of the Minister of State the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce) to the Gulf earlier in the current month with particular reference to the progress made in bilateral commission talks with the sultanate of Oman and the issues discussed.

Mr. Luce: I visited Bahrain and Oman from 9 to 17 January. In Bahrain I held discussions on bilateral and regional matters with His Highness the Amir, and with leading Bahraini Ministers. I also attended an informal conference of British ambassadors serving in the Gulf region.

In Oman I called on His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and met a number of other senior Omani personalities. I also led the British delegation to the third meeting of the United Kingdom-Oman joint commission. My discussions provided the opportunity for useful exchanges of view on international defence questions, the regional situation, Arab-Israel, Lebanon, and East-West relations. I was also able to discuss in some detail our co-operation in several areas of practical importance, including education, health and civil administration.

Our bilateral relations with Oman, which are of long standing, are excellent. We will work to maintain and improve the relationship, and welcome the recent formation of an Anglo-Omani parliamentary group as a contribution to even closer understanding and friendship between our two countries.

Cyprus

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent United Nations talks between the leaders of the communities in Cyprus.

Mr. Renton: We are disappointed that the outcome to the high-level meeting between the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus was not more positive. We have consistently supported the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General to seek a settlement of the Cyprus problem and we welcome his statement that the gap between the two sides hasnever been so narrow and for the need to persevere. We have impressed upon the parties concerned the need to seize the opportunity the Secretary-General has created.

We hope it will be possible to arrange a further joint high-level meeting as the Secretary-General envisages and remain ready to support his initiative in whatever way we can.

European Assembly

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what views have been expressed by Her Majesty's Government in the European Council of Ministers about the additional cost to United Kingdom taxpayers of the continuous rotation of the European Assembly between different venues; and what steps he intends to take to insist upon an early resolution of this matter.

Mr. Rifkind: This question has been periodically examined by the Council of Ministers, but it remains unresolved. We have drawn the attention of our partners to the additional cost and the reduced efficiency entailed by the lack of a single seat for the European Parliament. Under the treaties, a decision on the seat of the institutions will be taken by common accord of the Governments of member states, though we would think it right for the European Parliament itself to be consulted before a decision was taken.

European Community Budget

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out and explain

the formula referred to by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) on 23 January, *Official Report*, column *978*, by which agriculture will progressively represent an increasingly small share of European Economic Community budget.

Mr. Rifkind: The conclusions of the Council on the measures necessary to guarantee the effective implementation of budgetary discipline, which were adopted on 4 December 1984, provide that the net expenditure relating to agricultural markets will increase by less than the rate of growth of the own resources base which depends mainly on inflation, growth in consumption and the evolution of agricultural levies and customs duties. This means that agricultural expenditure will decline progressively as a proportion of the Community budget.

ENVIRONMENT

Falkland Islands
(Vic Hallam Construction Company)

51. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the work done for his Department by the Vic Hallam Construction Company in the Falkland Islands.

Sir. George Young: I have nothing to add to my answer of 11 December 1984, at column 440.

Control of Pollution Act 1974

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what he estimates will be the cost to the water authorities of implementing the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

Mr. Macfarlane: It is for water authorities to estimate and meet their own costs in connection with the implementation of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. My Department has no figures. However, it was estimated in 1981 that some 100 extra staff could be needed to administer the Act when it is fully implemented. Since that estimate was made the numbers employed by the water authorities have reduced by more than 9,000.

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made on the implementation of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gow: A commencement order and associated regulations will come into force on 31 January, to make part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 the statutory basis for water pollution control in Great Britain. The Act will then provide a comprehensive framework for protecting the water environment. All waters around our coasts, and all inland waters will come within the pollution control system, as well as such underground waters as may be specified.

Although certain provisions of that part of the Act remain to be brought into force, we will have completed phase 2 of the implementation programme announced by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Shaw) on 15 February 1982.

Specific provisions now coming into effect include those which give water authorities in England and Wales, and in Scotland the river purification boards, wide powers to deal with accidental pollution and to prevent pollution from agricultural sources. Codes of good agricultural practice published by my right hon. Friends the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales, on 22 January provide farmers with guidance on the measures to be taken to avoid polluting the water environment. Other regulations soon to be laid before the House will require authorities from 31 July to keep public registers giving details of the conditions attached to consents for discharges to relevant waters and of samples of these discharges.

I have also agreed with the Water Authorities Association a memorandum of practice on the consenting and monitoring of water authorities' own discharges, and I am placing copies in the Libraries of the House.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of non-standard dwellings in need of renovation in each housing authority in England and indicate the percentage this represents of total housing stock in each case;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of dwellings fit but lacking basic amenities in each housing authority area in England and indicate the percentage this represents of total housing stock in each case;

(3) if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of unfit dwellings in each housing authority area in England and indicate the percentage this represents of total housing stock in each case.

Sir George Young: Local authorities' 1984 housing investment programme returns included, for 1 April, their estimates of defective dwellings in their areas. Numbers reported are not necessarily comparable, as authorities' criteria may differ and in total they are not consistent with estimates from English House Condition Survey of 1981. The figures reported are as follows:

Defective Housing, by Local Authority, England
1 April 1984

Local Authority	*Unfit (number)*	*Percentage of total stock*	*Fit but lacking basic amenities (number)*	*Percentage of total stock*	*Non-substandard in need of renovation (number)*	*Percentage of total stock*
North (excluding Cumbria)						
Hartlepool	1,166	3·37	1,553	4·49	7,413	21·41
Langbaurgh	*	*	*	*	*	*
Middlesbrough	142	0·26	1,095	2·01	4,079	7·50
Stockton-on-Tees	671	1·02	1,539	2·35	7,264	11·08
Chester-le-Street	*	*	*	*	*	*

Local Authority	Unfit (number)	Percentage of total stock	Fit but lacking basic amenities (number)	Percentage of total stock	Non-substandard in need of renovation (number)	Percentage of total stock
Darlington	236	0·62	3,131	8·20	3,106	8·13
Derwentside	335	0·95	977	2·77	5,513	15·62
Durham	1,179	3·64	1,688	5·22	6,807	21·04
Easington	61	0·16	957	2·43	11,750	29·90
Sedgefield	5	0·01	582	1·63	11,441	32·11
Teesdale	93	0·93	*	*	*	*
Wear Valley	446	1·70	246	0·94	1,029	3·92
Alnwick	160	1·29	835	6·75	1,167	9·43
Berwick-upon-Tweed	191	1·57	180	1·48	725	5·98
Blyth Valley	754	2·51	1,096	3·65	5,070	16·90
Castle Morpeth	25	0·13	572	3·08	704	3·79
Tynedale	354	1·57	667	2·96	*	*
Wansbeck	*	*	*	*	*	*
Gateshead	1,873	2·18	1,501	1·75	13,088	15·23
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,062	1·78	193	0·17	29,927	25·90
North Tyneside	201	0·25	1,468	1·80	33,429	40·89
South Tyneside	408	0·64	965	1·52	5,467	8·59
Sunderland	368	0·32	3,049	2·62	24,584	21·09
Yorkshire and Humberside						
Beverley	106	0·26	712	1·72	2,421	5·86
Boothferry	70	0·30	480	2·03	1,400	5·92
Cleethorpes	268	1·03	2,220	8·49	1,400	5.36
Glanford	148	0·57	562	2·17	688	2·65
Great Grimsby	2,216	6·43	752	2·18	3,744	10·86
Holderness	181	0·97	105	0·56	257	1·37
Kingston upon Hull	6,340	6·10	4,705	4·52	22,580	21·71
East Yorkshire	*	*	*	*	*	*
Scunthorpe	254	1·02	1,222	4·93	7,226	29·14
Craven	118	0·60	254	1·30	542	2·77
Hambleton	97	0·33	1,005	3·44	*	*
Harrogate	*	*	*	*	*	*
Richmondshire	328	1·90	455	2·63	1,602	9·27
Ryedale	211	0·63	1,009	3·03	1,184	3·56
Scarborough	1,146	2·54	1,868	4·14	5,776	12·81
Selby	236	0·79	1,530	5·14	2,027	6·81
York	336	0·82	1,003	2·45	2,566	6·28
Barnsley	6,523	7·76	2,664	3·17	14,569	17·34
Doncaster	725	0·66	7,347	6·70	7,399	6·74
Rotherham	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sheffield	12,233	5·67	4,318	2·00	70,805	32·84
Bradford	1,845	1·07	1,960	1·13	7,847	4·53
Calderdale	320	0·41	1,300	1·67	8,989	11·57
Kirklees	7,300	4·89	*	*	*	*
Leeds	*	*	2,796	0·99	87,900	31·05
Wakefield	161	0·14	3,213	2·73	32,546	27·67
Amber Valley	163	0·37	1,388	3·15	3,000	6·8
Bolsover	2,328	8·31	324	1·16	1,050	3·75
Chesterfield	1,230	3·16	1,570	4·04	6,457	16·60
Derby	3,347	3·93	3,820	4·49	17,509	20·56
Erewash	1,637	4·02	1,536	3·77	7,123	17·49
High Peak	607	1·94	1,856	5·92	1,452	4·63
North East Derbyshire	149	0·41	472	1·29	6,745	18·37
South Derbyshire	691	2·68	1,395	5·41	3,300	12·81
West Derbyshire	112	0·42	941	3·52	798	2·98
Blaby	340	1·18	200	0·70	420	1·46
Charnwood	119	0·22	1977	3·71	841	1·58
Harborough	694	2·96	631	2·69	1,554	6·62
Hinckley and Bosworth	1,004	2·92	1,158	3·36	*	*
Leicester	*	*	*	*	*	*
Melton	316	1·87	192	1·14	953	5·63
North-West Leicestershire	324	1·06	1,570	5·14	4,323	14·16
Oadby and Wigston	109	0·57	130	0·67	209	1·08
Rutland	68	0·59	232	2·01	1,055	9·13
Boston	710	3·31	235	1·10	1,355	6·32
East Lindsey	665	1·45	1,426	3·11	13,888	30·31
Lincoln	860	2·76	1,530	4·91	2,650	8·50
North Kesteven	*	*	*	*	*	*
South Holland	460	1·82	2,737	10·81	1,763	6·96
South Kesteven	538	1·35	1,441	3·62	4,644	11·67
West Lindsey	989	3·34	896	3·02	1,413	4·77
Corby	18	0·09	105	0·54	180	0·92
Daventry	581	2·55	613	2·70	2,945	12·95
East Northamptonshire	341	1·37	1,378	5·55	2,350	9·47

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Kettering	0	0·00	4,477	15·73	1,122	3·94
Northampton	1,414	2·23	2,384	3·75	3,238	5·10
South Northamptonshire	53	0·21	102	0·41	724	2·88
Wellingborough	238	0·94	899	3·56	721	2·85
Ashfield	27	0·07	2,293	5·58	5,533	13·47
Bassetlaw	658	1·67	1,634	4·14	3,813	9·67
Broxtowe	175	0·43	585	1·44	3,565	8·80
Gedlind	1,630	3·93	607	1·46	4,934	11·89
Mansfield	221	0·57	110	0·28	2,288	5·87
Newark	324	0·80	1,767	4·37	1,191	2·95
Nottingham	565	0·51	2,360	2·12	24,713	22·25
Rushcliffe	79	0·22	1,549	4·31	3,392	9·43
Eastern						
North Bedfordshire	281	0·57	860	1·74	5,000	10·10
Luton	113	0·19	3,159	5·18	1,650	2·70
Mid Bedfordshire	*	*	*	*	*	*
South Bedfordshire	35	0·09	525	1·35	698	1·79
Aylesbury Vale	964	1·94	791	1·59	779	1·57
South Bucks	75	0·31	192	0·80	708	2·97
Chiltern	40	0·12	766	2·27	1,715	5·09
Milton Keynes	70	0·13	1,550	2·90	1,250	2·34
Wycombe	700	1·23	1,200	2·11	1,153	2·02
Cambridge	*	*	*	*	2,260	5·75
East Cambridgeshire	369	1·71	553	2·56	1,777	8·22
Fenland	710	2·60	484	1·77	2,927	10·72
Huntingdon	600	1·25	750	1·57	3,806	7·96
Peterborough	1,861	3·45	435	0·81	1,851	3·43
South Cambridgeshire	473	1·11	1,797	4·21	3,057	7·16
Basildon	240	0·42	130	0·23	712	1·24
Braintree	675	1·57	1,129	2·62	3,852	8·95
Brentwood	73	0·27	384	1·41	119	0·44
Castle Point	15	0·05	190	0·59	43	0·13
Chelmsford	1,398	2·66	2,329	4·44	3,608	6·87
Colchester	1,785	3·39	818	1·55	3,808	7·23
Epping Forest	1,966	4·29	1,633	3·56	3,645	7·95
Harlow	2	0·01	14	0·05	813	2·82
Maldon	45	0·23	1,246	6·50	771	4·03
Rochford	41	0·15	533	1·93	210	0·76
Southend-on-Sea	14	0·02	1,256	1·89	1,772	2·67
Tendring	400	0·72	1,422	2·57	4,599	8·31
Thurrock	305	0·67	2,627	5·75	6,322	13·83
Uttlesford	*	*	*	*	*	*
Broxbourne	51	0·17	454	1·54	1,237	4·9
Dacorum	934	1·87	101	0·20	1,341	2·68
East Hertfordshire	1,812	4·37	435	1·05	4,164	10·04
Hertsmere	100	0·30	828	2·49	1,164	3·50
North Hertfordshire	100	0·24	770	1·84	1,530	3·67
St. Albans	21	0·05	784	1·71	1,638	3·58
Stevenage	5	0·02	306	1·12	1,219	4·48
Three Rivers	80	0·28	171	0·60	2,058	7·21
Watford	3	0·01	649	2·27	3,728	13·06
Welwyn Hatfield	12	0·03	120	0·34	550	1·55
Breckland	916	2·31	3,176	8·02	8,405	21·24
Broadland	350	0·90	700	1·80	4,700	12·09
Great Yarmouth	268	0·78	2,495	7·22	8,750	25·32
North Norfolk	1,538	3·92	1,579	4·02	160	0·41
Norwich	220	0·42	5,266	10·13	9,035	17·38
South Norfolk	303	0·79	1,466	3·82	7,037	18·34
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	1,060	2·06	3,253	6·33	3,937	7·66
Babergh	620	2·09	851	2·87	1,931	6·51
Forest Heath	242	1·21	836	4·18	940	4·70
Ipswich	237	0·49	4,671	9·74	10,477	21·84
Mid Suffolk	1,516	5·40	934	3·33	8,761	31·20
St. Edmundsbury	449	1·33	1,482	4·41	4,381	13·02
Suffolk Coastal	387	0·93	1,110	2·66	8,394	20·09
Waveney	466	1·09	1,964	4·60	1,900	4·45
Greater London						
City of London	0	0·00	0	0·00	0	0·00
Barking and Dagenham	1,341	2·29	10,337	17·62	3,223	5·49
Barnet	*	*	*	*	*	*
Bexley	1,803	2·21	774	0·95	4,936	6·04
Brent	7,500	8·06	1,345	1·45	17,860	19·20

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Bromley	3,580	3·03	2,560	2·16	7,060	5·97
Camden	9,950	12·11	2,250	2·74	10,562	12·86
Croydon	817	0·67	5,159	4·21	7,969	6·51
Ealing	8,250	7·90	4,500	4·31	18,125	17·36
Enfield	4,473	4·45	*	*	*	*
Greenwich	4,507	5·23	3,874	4·50	15,098	17·52
Hackney	13,540	17·75	4,190	5·49	12,290	16·11
Hammersmith and Fulham	9,976	14·60	4,917	7·20	9,134	13·37
Haringey	11,262	13·56	4,128	4·97	12,486	15·04
Harrow	*	*	*	*	*	*
Havering	1,969	2·20	1,142	1·28	16,462	18·40
Hillingdon	*	*	*	*	*	*
Hounslow	4,045	5·11	5,298	6·69	20,548	25·94
Islington	10,805	14·77	2,409	3·29	10,430	14·26
Kensington and Chelsea	8,623	11·68	4,803	6·51	11,245	15·24
Kingston upon Thames	270	0·49	846	1·54	4,395	8·00
Lambeth	15,340	14·42	4,550	4·28	15,595	14·66
Lewisham	6,809	7·05	*	*	11,873	12·29
Merton	2,756	4·09	1,586	2·35	7,260	10·77
Newham	13,394	16·34	8,767	10·69	9,191	11·21
Redbridge	2,479	2·83	2,498	2·85	7,893	9·01
Richmond upon Thames	*	*	*	*	*	*
Southwark	11000	11·76	4,960	5·30	14,640	15·65
Sutton	2,624	3·96	3,109	4·69	7,608	11·48
Tower Hamlets	7,364	11·90	4,041	6·53	2,682	4·34
Waltham Forest	9,349	10·87	4,106	4·77	10,671	12·41
Wandsworth	12,931	11·98	5,661	5·25	12,136	11·25
Westminster	2,835	2·80	8,865	8·76	11,158	11·02
South Eastern						
Bracknell	72	0·22	154	0·48	1,215	3·77
Newbury	*	*	*	*	*	*
Reading	1,890	3·82	1,138	2·30	5,390	10·89
Slough	29	0·08	458	1·31	223	0·64
Windsor and Maidenhead	142	0·27	1,392	2·69	855	1·65
Wokingham	210	0·48	540	1·24	2,130	4·90
Brighton	4,979	7·89	2,467	3·91	8,323	13·18
Eastbourne	51	0·15	2,354	6·76	5,546	15·92
Hastings	1,300	3·94	1,000	3·03	2,500	7·58
Hove	801	2·00	2,374	5·94	5,928	14·83
Lewes	45	0·13	212	0·62	2,675	7·82
Rother	400	1·09	719	1·96	600	1·63
Wealden	626	1·28	1,114	2·28	4,591	9·39
Basingstoke and Deane	312	0·63	372	0·75	5,622	11·32
East Hampshire	620	1·74	1,048	2·94	3,001	8·42
Eastleigh	16	0·04	2,186	5·98	4,315	11·80
Fareham	55	0·16	265	0·79	650	1·95
Gosport	240	0·80	930	3·10	1,645	5·48
Hart	73	0·27	265	0·97	756	2·77
Havant	46	0·10	180	0·41	1,140	2·57
New Forest	816	1·31	609	0·98	5,594	9·00
Portsmouth	2,220	3·10	4,770	6·65	*	*
Rushmoor	110	0·40	368	1·33	2,387	8·65
Southampton	1,400	1·76	4,500	5·66	14,000	17·61
Test Valley	197	0·57	228	0·66	*	*
Winchester	1,595	4·49	679	1·91	1,142	3·21
Medina	125	0·43	1,572	5·38	4,715	16·14
South Wight	52	0·24	225	1·04	1,500	6·91
Ashford	582	1·70	1,711	4·99	2,621	7·64
Canterbury	376	0·78	1,619	3·38	3,279	6·84
Dartford	*	*	*	*	*	*
Dover	903	2·27	1,124	2·82	3,654	9·18
Gillingham	40	0·11	1,470	4·16	60	0·17
Gravesham	243	0·68	989	2·79	2,462	6·93
Maidstone	2,525	5·13	1,554	3·16	2,600	5·28
Rochester upon Medway	1,500	2·77	2,500	4·61	2,510	4·63
Sevenoaks	106	0·26	1,868	4·59	1,997	4·91
Shepway	176	0·47	1,208	3·21	6,931	18·44
Swale	*	*	*	*	*	*
Thanet	*	*	0	0·00	0	0·00
Tonbridge and Malling	97	0·26	1,901	5·18	2,306	6·28
Tunbridge Wells	200	0·52	1,593	4·17	589	1·54
Cherwell	360	0·89	750	1·85	3,813	9·48
Oxford	1,553	4·17	788	2·11	8,368	22·45

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South Oxfordshire	441	0·89	886	1·79	2,044	4·13
Vale of White Horse	1,066	2·81	816	2·15	1,314	3·46
West Oxfordshire	683	2·16	241	0·76	2,430	7·70
Elmbridge	165	0·36	396	0·87	1,747	3·84
Epsom and Ewell	*	*	644	2·52	237	0·93
Guildford	386	0·81	1,312	2·75	1,373	2·88
Mole Valley	235	0·79	250	0·84	*	*
Reigate and Banstead	259	0·59	1,170	2·66	1,352	3·07
Runnymede	197	0·72	1,627	5·91	1,365	4·96
Spelthorne	55	0·15	300	0·83	10,273	28·53
Surrey Heath	25	0·09	494	1·78	385	1·39
Tandridge	136	0·48	201	0·71	1,100	3·89
Waverley	42	0·10	1,676	3·89	848	1·97
Woking	*	*	*	*	*	*
Adur	92	0·37	*	*	*	*
Arun	30	0·05	600	1·08	700	1·26
Chichester	77	0·19	834	2·00	9	0·02
Crawley	11	0·03	244	0·77	0	0·00
Horsham	168	0·41	551	1·36	904	2·23
Mid Sussex	*	*	*	*	*	*
Worthing	1,802	4·33	750	1·80	4,585	11·82
South-West						
Bath	833	2·40	899	2·59	3,299	9·51
Bristol	10,800	6·85	3,200	2·03	22,870	14·50
Kingswood	276	0·85	701	2·16	*	*
Northavon	377	0·87	1,892	4·38	2,964	6·86
Wansdyke	75	0·26	550	1·90	4,182	14·44
Woodspring	*	*	*	*	*	*
Caradon	2,174	7·32	2,274	7·66	2,096	7·06
Carrick	516	1·62	2,400	7·52	2,035	6·38
Kerrier	388	1·16	2,495	7·47	1,543	4·62
North Cornwall	512	1·76	816	2·81	7,152	24·60
Penwith	1,228	5·02	1,728	7·07	2,840	11·62
Restormel	565	1·72	958	2·92	2,409	7·34
Isles of Scilly	0	0·00	0	0·00	0	0·00
East Devon	1,396	2·95	120	0·25	4,250	8·99
Exeter	197	0·54	1,140	3·12	2,230	6·11
North Devon	960	3·16	3,207	10·56	3,207	10·56
Plymouth	3,125	3·42	1,941	2·13	21,253	23·29
South Hams	150	0·48	250	0·81	976	3·15
Teignbridge	2	0·00	2,172	5·34	3,016	7·41
Mid Devon	421	1·80	863	3·69	691	2·95
Torbay	582	1·17	228	0·46	9,937	19·94
Torridge	368	1·83	1,235	6·15	2,003	9·97
West Devon	148	0·85	367	2·10	1,588	9·10
Bournemouth	45	0·07	4,804	7·65	7,697	12·26
Christchurch	5	0·03	25	0·14	2,070	11·42
North Dorset	102	0·52	600	3·08	480	2·46
Poole	67	0·13	724	1·41	2,425	4·72
Purbeck	*	*	*	*	*	*
West Dorset	383	1·16	1,003	3·03	706	2·13
Weymouth and Portland	38	0·17	807	3·64	1,233	5·56
Wimborne	367	1·26	90	0·31	1,190	4·08
Cheltenham	580	1·63	1,000	2·81	3,881	10·90
Cotswold	*	*	*	*	1,968	*6·86
Forest of Dean	655	2·32	3,331	11·80	2,970	10·52
Gloucester	497	1·46	568	1·67	5,535	16·33
Stroud	1,000	2·46	400	0·98	3,496	8·61
Tewkesbury	100	0·31	495	1·55	4,297	13·43
Mendip	154	0·44	1,140	3·29	3,910	11·27
Sedgemoor	*	*	*	*	*	*
Taunton Deane	193	0·54	1,170	3·30	*	*
West Somerset	*	*	*	*	*	*
Yeovil	168	0·31	2,845	5·30	1,429	2·66
Kennet	106	0·42	2,155	8·44	4,635	18·16
North Wiltshire	968	2·43	300	0·75	2,348	5·90
Salisbury	120	0·30	575	1·45	1,017	2·57
Thamesdown	2,454	4·01	2,373	3·87	21,555	35·18
West Wiltshire	551	1·41	952	2·44	6,028	15·45
West Midlands						
Bromsgrove	34	0·11	185	0·58	2,370	7·44
Hereford	354	1·86	301	1·58	2,038	10·73

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Leominster	1,753	11·48	360	2·36	503	3·29
Malvern Hills	3,741	10·21	911	2·49	7,311	19·95
Redditch	122	0·45	611	2·27	988	3·67
South Herefordshire	883	4·79	1,487	8·07	1,203	6·53
Worcester	439	1·51	340	1·17	6,817	23·49
Wychavon	227	0·62	1,996	5·49	4,961	13·65
Wyre Forest	503	1·41	2,407	6·77	7,040	19·80
Bridgnorth	404	2·14	345	1·82	1,870	9·88
North Shropshire	638	3·32	443	2·31	954	4·97
Oswestry	604	4·86	561	4·51	2,450	19·71
Shrewsbury and Atcham	462	1·33	556	1·60	8,555	24·56
South Shropshire	568	3·75	556	3·67	674	4·45
The Wrekin	967	2·07	627	1·34	2,532	5·42
Cannock Chase	76	0·25	411	1·33	1,443	4·67
East Staffordshire	449	1·23	3,377	9·22	3,041	8·31
Lichfield	850	2·61	25	0·09	2,310	7·09
Newcastle-under-Lyme	450	0·97	1,800	3·87	6,629	14·26
Stafford	*	*	*	*	*	*
South Staffordshire	482	1·30	346	0·94	736	1·99
Staffordshire Moorlands	*	*	*	*	*	*
Stoke-on-Trent	4,049	4·06	11,205	11·24	42,001	42·14
Tamworth	37	0·15	250	1·03	2,396	9·88
North Warwickshire	110	0·50	339	1·53	172	0·77
Nuneaton and Bedworth	527	1·25	608	1·44	8,026	18·98
Rugby	3,597	11·07	299	0·92	6,341	19·51
Stratford-on-Avon	1,042	2·61	886	2·22	2,091	5·24
Warwick	363	0·82	231	0·52	4,469	10·11
Birmingham	48,570	12·60	13,600	3·53	87,210	22·62
Coventry	918	0·77	5,879	4·90	14,091	11·75
Dudley	5,282	4·54	4,473	3·84	5,966	5·12
Sandwell	11,300	9·53	5,909	4·98	13,172	11·11
Solihull	50	0·07	200	0·27	1,703	2·31
Walsall	6,786	6·95	2,223	2·28	12,105	12·39
Wolverhampton	*	*	*	*	*	*
North West Including Cumbria						
Chester	1,365	3·01	1,311	2·89	2,325	5·13
Congleton	328	1·06	523	1·68	535	1·72
Crewe and Nantwich	356	0·91	1,922	4·90	6,751	17·23
Ellesmere Port and Neston	31	0·10	533	1·77	1,538	5·11
Halton	15	0·03	671	1·51	4,560	10·26
Macclesfield	1,003	1·73	2,177	3·75	5,168	8·91
Vale Royal	369	0·87	1,495	3·51	4,261	9·99
Warrington	2,988	4·48	2,388	3·58	8,562	12·85
Allerdale	3,476	9·10	717	1·88	7,871	20·61
Barrow-in-Furness	95	0·33	829	2·88	6,908	23·97
Carlisle	1,034	2·64	2,470	6·31	5,535	14·14
Copeland	137	0·50	954	3·49	4,686	17·13
Eden	326	1·82	626	3·49	1,806	10·07
South Lakeland	117	0·29	781	1·92	1,484	3·65
Blackburn	5,012	9·54	3,822	7·28	8,488	16·16
Blackpool	320	0·52	529	0·85	2,694	4·35
Burnley	1,360	3·71	1,102	3·01	7,183	19·60
Chorley	1,426	4·02	3,040	8·57	5,025	14·17
Fylde	45	0·16	544	1·88	488	1·68
Hyndburn	2,947	9·24	1,425	4·47	7,270	22·79
Lancaster	407	0·83	966	1·97	9,020	18·39
Pendle	829	2·32	2,300	6·42	9,200	25·70
Preston	277	0·57	2,712	5·60	7,485	15·46
Ribble Valley	39	0·20	854	4·46	793	4·14
Rossendale	1,694	6·53	2,287	8·82	3,784	14·59
South Ribble	11	0·03	429	1·17	8,677	23·69
West Lancashire	*	*	*	*	2,961	7·52
Wyre	401	1·00	400	1·00	829	2·07
Bolton	10,888	10·58	1,858	1·81	27,111	26·34
Bury	106	0·16	3,184	4·70	4,333	6·40
Manchester	6,068	3·32	7,681	4·20	58,281	31·90
Oldham	4,955	5·71	4,036	4·65	17,432	20·08
Rochdale	5,496	6·83	1,201	1·49	13,850	17·22
Salford	1,068	1·11	2,201	2·29	8,312	8·67
Stockport	*	*	*	*	*	*
Tameside	5,735	6·73	2,196	2·58	14,782	17·34
Trafford	2,162	2·56	8,767	10·37	11,276	13·34
Wigan	1,983	1·68	4,002	3·39	19,600	16·60

Local Authority	Unfit (number)	Percentage of total stock	Fit but lacking basic amenities (number)	Percentage of total stock	Non-substandard in need of renovation (number)	Percentage of total stock
Knowsley	1,139	1·97	134	0·23	6,117	10·59
Liverpool	3,423	1·76	5,835	3·00	39,331	20·20
St Helens	4,205	6·01	10,354	14·81	*	*
Sefton	2,681	2·37	3,899	3·44	6,951	6·13
Wirral	5,583	4·17	3,240	2·42	27,948	20·85

* not available.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of sheltered dwellings in each housing authority area in England and indicate the percentage this represents of total housing stock in each case.

Sir George Young: Local authorities' estimates of the numbers of sheltered dwellings in their areas at 1 April 1984, as reported in their housing investment programme returns, are as follows:

Sheltered Dwellings, by Local Authority, England 1 April 1984

Local Authority	Local Authority (number)	Housing Association (number)	Other Public Sector (number)	Private Sector (number)	Total Reported (number)	Total Reported (per cent. of total stock)
North (excluding Cumbria)						
Hartlepool	414	182	0	0	596	1·72
Langbaurgh	3,604	254	0	0	3,858	6·81
Middlesbrough	738	245	0	*	983	1·81
Stockton-on-Tees	2,519	174	0	0	2,693	4·11
Chester-le-Street	999	0	*	*	999	4·94
Darlington	707	241	0	0	948	2·48
Derwentside	707	102	0	0	809	2·29
Durham	2,076	102	0	36	2,214	6·84
Easington	3,057	247	0	0	3,304	8·41
Sedgefield	3,509	301	0	0	3,810	10·69
Teesdale	30	43	0	12	85	0·85
Wear Valley	1,692	316	0	0	2,008	7·64
Alnwick	95	153	0	0	248	2·00
Berwick-upon-Tweed	81	82	0	0	163	1·34
Blyth Valley	88	466	0	0	554	1·85
Castle Morpeth	65	102	0	0	167	0·90
Tynedale	436	110	0	*	546	2·42
Wansbeck	1,922	173	0	0	2,095	8·36
Gateshead	2,460	375	*	*	2,835	3·30
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,550	693	0	26	2,269	1·96
North Tyneside	1,526	454	0	*	1,980	2·42
South Tyneside	1,337	272	0	0	1,609	2·53
Sunderland	1,957	634	92	*	2,683	2·30
Yorkshire and Humberside						
Beverley	222	58	0	0	280	0·68
Boothferry	463	0	0	0	463	1·96
Cleethorpes	606	161	0	0	767	2·93
Glanford	374	30	*	*	404	1·56
Great Grimsby	304	106	0	0	410	1·19
Holderness	381	56	0	12	449	2·40
Kingston upon Hull	537	526	0	76	1,139	1·10
East Yorkshire	526	108	*	*	634	*
Scunthorpe	98	95	0	0	193	0·78
Craven	454	86	0	0	540	2·76
Hambleton	912	0	0	0	912	3·12
Harrogate	660	164	*	*	824	1·51
Richmondshire	361	0	0	0	361	2·09
Ryedale	300	127	0	*	427	1·28
Scarborough	1,464	167	0	191	1,822	4·04
Selby	1,127	37	0	0	1,164	3.91
York	258	264	0	35	557	1·36
Barnsley	6,214	108	0	0	6,322	7·52
Doncaster	6,847	100	0	0	6,947	6·33
Rotherham	2,837	295	*	*	3,132	3·29
Sheffield	1,343	400	30	35	1,826	0·85
Bradford	3,034	1,016	0	0	4,050	2·34
Calderdale	1,298	250	0	0	1,548	1·99
Kirklees	850	175	0	*	1,025	0·69

Local Authority	Local Authority (number)	Housing Association (number)	Other Public Sector (number)	Private Sector (number)	Total Reported (number)	Total Reported (per cent. of total stock)
Leeds	3,948	1,000	0	0	4,948	1·75
Wakefield	1,961	267	0	0	2,228	1·89
East Midlands						
Amber Valley	712	78	0	0	790	1·79
Bolsover	792	39	0	0	831	2·97
Chesterfield	871	186	0	60	1,117	2·87
Derby	1,508	447	0	121	2,076	2·44
Erewash	834	35	0	0	869	2·13
High Peak	365	115	0	0	480	1·53
North-East Derbyshire	2,385	68	0	0	2,453	6·68
South Derbyshire	699	0	0	0	699	2·71
West Derbyshire	550	27	0	0	577	2·16
Blaby	882	86	0	0	968	3·36
Charnwood	1,293	200	0	0	1,493	2·80
Harborough	411	0	0	0	411	1·75
Hinckley and Bosworth	496	58	0	*	554	1·61
Leicester	443	192	0	0	635	0·59
Melton	195	49	0	0	244	1·44
North West Leicestershire	409	34	0	4	447	1·46
Oadby and Wigston	105	122	*	*	227	1·18
Rutland	384	27	0	24	435	3·77
Boston	424	81	0	0	505	2·36
East Lindsey	634	58	0	0	692	1·51
Lincoln	239	79	0	0	318	1·02
North Kesteven	374	73	*	*	447	1·45
South Holland	976	0	0	6	982	3·88
South Kesteven	871	148	0	0	1,019	2·56
West Lindsey	226	25	0	0	251	0·85
Corby	461	0	0	0	461	2·36
Daventry	120	0	0	0	120	0·53
East Northamptonshire	449	29	0	0	478	1·93
Kettering	305	108	0	0	413	1·45
Northampton	2,110	171	224	0	2,505	3·94
South Northamptonshire	388	60	0	0	448	1·78
Wellingborough	321	161	0	0	482	1·91
Ashfield	1,201	107	0	0	1,308	3·18
Bassetlaw	3,008	168	0	*	3,176	8·05
Broxtowe	786	83	0	0	869	2·14
Gedling	820	217	35	0	1,072	2·58
Mansfield	2,493	90	0	106	2,689	6·90
Newark	424	124	0	0	548	1·36
Nottingham	2,733	804	0	0	3,537	3·18
Rushcliffe	666	87	25	0	778	2·16
Eastern						
North Bedfordshire	359	267	0	41	667	1·35
Luton	1,060	147	0	0	1,207	1·98
Mid Bedfordshire	595	0	0	0	595	1·60
South Bedfordshire	647	182	0	0	829	2·13
Aylesbury Vale	539	118	*	*	657	1·32
South Bucks	524	63	0	176	763	3·20
Chiltern	429	119	0	0	548	1·62
Milton Keynes	285	282	412	53	1,032	1·93
Wycombe	1,532	68	180	*	1,780	3·12
Cambridge	632	231	0	0	863	2·20
East Cambridgeshire	582	0	0	14	596	2·76
Fenland	381	145	0	93	619	2·27
Huntingdon	450	172	0	0	622	1·30
Peterborough	502	445	154	0	1,101	2·04
South Cambridgeshire	849	51	0	97	997	2·33
Basildon	833	435	582	33	1,883	3·29
Braintree	487	132	*	120	739	1·72
Brentwood	379	96	0	60	535	1·97
Castle Point	254	68	0	0	322	0·99
Chelmsford	683	195	0	0	878	1·67
Colchester	555	185	*	*	740	1·41
Epping Forest	394	187	0	*	581	1·27
Harlow	559	116	0	0	675	2·35
Maldon	431	75	0	0	506	2·64
Rochford	358	205	*	*	563	2·04
Southend-on-Sea	1,460	250	0	0	1,710	2·58
Tendring	269	424	0	*	693	1·25
Thurrock	981	28	0	*	1,009	2·21

Local Authority	Local Authority (number)	Housing Association (number)	Other Public Sector (number)	Private Sector (number)	Total Reported (number)	Total Reported (per cent. of total stock)
Uttlesford	415	116	0	45	576	2·46
Broxbourne	334	117	0	0	451	1·53
Dacorum	1,267	288	0	0	1,555	3·11
East Hertfordshire	525	59	0	0	584	1·41
Hertsmere	285	0	0	*	285	0·86
North Hertfordshire	550	131	0	44	725	1·74
St. Albans	469	63	0	0	532	1·16
Stevenage	685	209	0	0	994	3·29
Three Rivers	232	123	26	0	381	1·34
Watford	490	96	4	63	653	2·29
Welwyn Hatfield	1,127	304	0	30	1,461	4·12
Breckland	466	174	0	99	739	1·87
Broadland	331	0	*	40	371	0·95
Great Yarmouth	689	50	0	0	739	2·14
North Norfolk	304	45	0	0	349	0·89
Norwich	647	405	0	31	1,083	2·08
South Norfolk	334	67	0	0	401	1·04
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	422	328	0	0	750	1·46
Babergh	267	0	0	0	267	0·90
Forest Heath	232	0	*	*	232	1·16
Ipswich	227	539	0	0	766	1·60
Mid Suffolk	323	106	0	0	429	1·53
St. Edmundsbury	374	61	0	0	435	1·29
Suffolk Coastal	469	160	0	0	629	1·51
Waveney	511	228	0	0	739	1·73
Greater London						
City of London	0	0	0	0	0	0·00
Barking and Dagenham	496	0	0	0	496	0·85
Barnet	695	294	10	*	999	0·86
Bexley	719	510	0	0	1,229	1·50
Brent	618	57	0	0	675	0·73
Bromley	481	965	*	*	1,446	1·22
Camden	1,296	865	0	*	2,161	2·63
Croydon	1,060	453	0	0	1,513	1·24
Ealing	971	77	0	0	1,048	1·00
Enfield	960	411	0	*	1,371	1·37
Greenwich	860	175	0	117	1,152	1·34
Hackney	915	315	0	0	1,230	1·61
Hammersmith and Fulham	929	132	0	0	1,061	1·55
Haringey	986	321	0	0	1,307	1·57
Harrow	490	578	0	0	1,068	1·41
Havering	952	524	0	0	1,476	1·65
Hillingdon	636	175	0	0	811	0·92
Hounslow	995	100	0	46	1,141	1·44
Islington	579	74	31	0	684	0·94
Kensington and Chelsea	225	416	0	122	763	1·03
Kingston upon Thames	1,226	253	0	0	1,479	2·69
Lambeth	953	444	0	0	1,397	1·31
Lewisham	581	142	0	153	876	0·91
Merton	233	455	0	0	688	1·02
Newham	231	300	0	0	531	0·65
Redbridge	1,072	200	0	0	1,272	1·45
Richmond upon Thames	520	155	0	*	675	0·95
Southwark	727	308	0	93	1,128	1·21
Sutton	701	618	0	0	1,319	1·99
Tower Hamlets	402	45	0	0	447	0·72
Waltham Forest	494	300	0	201	995	1·16
Wandsworth	565	216	0	30	811	0·75
Westminster	466	803	0	*	1,269	1·25
South Eastern						
Bracknell	324	272	0	0	596	1·85
Newbury	643	244	*	100	987	2·15
Reading	285	349	0	30	664	1·34
Slough	850	43	0	0	893	2·55
Windsor and Maidenhead	754	253	*	*	1,007	1·95
Wokingham	244	331	26	18	619	1·42
Brighton	327	234	0	55	616	0·98
Eastbourne	474	539	0	136	1,149	3·30
Hastings	194	28	0	0	222	0·67
Hove	139	78	0	116	333	0·83
Lewes	406	249	0	0	655	1·92
Rother	374	167	0	133	674	1·84

Local Authority	Local Authority (number)	Housing Association (number)	Other Public Sector (number)	Private Sector (number)	Total Reported (number)	Total Reported (per cent. of total stock)
Wealden	470	188	0	44	702	1·44
Basingstoke and Deane	503	343	0	0	846	1·70
East Hampshire	500	89	0	0	589	1·65
Eastleigh	464	358	0	16	838	2·29
Fareham	451	105	0	25	581	1·74
Gosport	294	410	0	0	704	2·35
Hart	202	151	0	19	372	1·36
Havant	661	30	355	38	1,084	2·45
New Forest	433	381	0	276	1,090	1·75
Portsmouth	1,154	696	0	78	1,928	2·69
Rushmoor	332	243	0	*	575	2·08
Southampton	1,726	769	0	51	2,546	3·20
Test Valley	507	125	0	65	697	2·01
Winchester	811	261	87	36	1,195	3·36
Medina	206	122	0	0	328	1·12
South Wight	110	30	0	0	140	0·64
Ashford	356	30	0	80	466	1·36
Canterbury	544	228	1	194	967	2·02
Dartford	379	28	0	0	487	1·42
Dover	279	215	25	750	1,269	3·19
Gillingham	291	84	*	*	375	1·06
Gravesham	497	49	0	86	632	1·78
Maidstone	433	95	0	*	528	1·07
Rochester upon Medway	645	235	0	230	1,110	2·05
Sevenoaks	458	224	0	0	682	1·68
Shepway	384	197	2	0	583	1·55
Swale	702	124	*	*	826	1·86
Thanet	393	125	0	*	518	1·01
Tonbridge and Malling	276	80	0	0	356	0·97
Tunbridge Wells	430	384	0	0	814	2·13
Cherwell	735	328	0	0	1,063	2·62
Oxford	144	439	0	33	616	1·65
South Oxfordshire	734	184	0	0	918	1·85
Vale of White Horse	578	126	0	56	760	2·00
West Oxfordshire	248	62	0	2	312	0·99
Elmbridge	660	595	0	0	1,255	2·76
Epsom and Ewell	102	145	*	*	247	0·97
Guildford	322	93	0	0	415	0·87
Mole Valley	495	179	0	78	752	2·54
Reigate and Banstead	334	270	0	0	604	1·37
Runnymede	182	109	0	*	291	1·06
Spelthorne	323	0	0	0	323	0·90
Surrey Heath	172	114	0	11	297	1·07
Tandridge	780	124	0	0	904	3·19
Waverley	688	283	0	104	1,075	2·50
Woking	498	341	0	116	955	2·94
Adur	214	176	0	*	390	1·59
Arun	604	203	63	210	1,080	1·95
Chichester	370	162	0	*	532	1·28
Crawley	393	147	0	0	540	1·71
Horsham	848	269	0	58	1,175	2·90
Mid Sussex	433	363	0	16	812	1·92
Worthing	248	213	0	126	587	1·41
South West						
Bath	356	203	0	0	559	1·61
Bristol	1,702	1,205	0	0	2,907	1·84
Kingswood	427	155	0	*	582	1·79
Northavon	573	34	0	0	607	1·40
Wansdyke	888	75	0	*	963	3·33
Woodspring	777	222	0	41	1,040	1·61
Caradon	1,162	0	0	0	1,162	3·91
Carrick	298	32	0	0	330	1·03
Kerrier	442	42	*	*	484	1·45
North Cornwall	394	130	0	0	524	1·80
Penwith	630	0	0	27	657	2·69
Restorwell	653	18	0	0	671	2·04
Isles of Scilly	8	0	0	0	8	0·79
East Devon	923	78	2	*	1,003	2·12
Exeterr shd8	378	78	0	118	574	1·57
North Devon	466	88	0	8	562	1·85
Plymouth	401	412	0	*	813	0·89
South Hams	355	17	0	0	372	1·20
Teignbridge	440	19	0	51	510	1·25

Local Authority	Local Authority (number)	Housing Association (number)	Other Public Sector (number)	Private Sector (number)	Total Reported (number)	Total Reported (per cent. of total stock)
Mid Devon	516	178	0	0	694	2·97
Torbay	443	229	0	*	672	1·35
Torridge	264	31	0	0	295	1·47
West Devon	147	21	0	21	189	1·08
Bournemouth	586	568	0	188	1,342	2·14
Christchurch	181	164	0	79	424	2·34
North Dorset	484	202	0	21	707	3.63
Poole	958	269	0	178	1,405	2·74
Purbeck	170	1	*	*	171	0·99
West Dorset	1,103	206	*	39	1,348	4·07
Weymouth and Portland	340	158	0	3	501	2·26
Wimborne	395	141	0	0	536	1·84
Cheltenham	438	113	0	0	551	1·55
Cotswold	562	208	0	100	870	3·03
Forest of Dean	388	88	0	0	476	1·69
Gloucester	72	155	0	0	227	0·67
Stroud	649	99	*	*	748	1·84
Tewkesbury	332	102	0	*	434	1·36
Mendip	750	230	0	94	1,074	3·10
Sedgemoor	563	62	0	*	625	1·73
Taunton Deane	951	237	0	0	1,188	3·35
West Somerset	402	69	0	0	471	3·49
Yeovil	1,536	16	0	0	1,552	2·89
Kennet	494	91	0	100	685	2·68
North Wiltshire	678	106	0	59	843	2·12
Salisbury	458	186	0	7	651	1·64
Thamesdown	631	704	0	0	1,335	2·18
West Wiltshire	791	171	0	55	1,017	2·61
West Midlands						
Bromsgrove	387	77	0	28	492	1·55
Hereford	202	223	0	17	442	2·33
Leominster	147	0	0	0	147	0·96
Malvern Hills	758	62	0	0	820	2·24
Redditch	482	132	118	0	732	2·72
South Herefordshire	176	0	0	0	176	0·95
Worcester	259	69	0	133	461	1·59
Wychavon	525	216	0	0	741	2·04
Wyre Forest	1,777	80	0	0	1,857	5·22
Bridgnorth	164	18	0	0	182	0·96
North Shropshire	177	87	233	68	565	2·94
Oswestry	130	47	0	0	177	1·42
Shrewsbury and Atcham	467	171	0	0	638	1·83
South Shropshire	224	0	0	0	224	1·48
The Wrekin	826	207	234	0	1,267	2·71
Cannock Chase	129	28	0	0	157	0·51
East Staffordshire	238	194	0	0	432	1·18
Lichfield	312	60	*	*	372	1·14
Newcastle-under-Lyme	626	69	0	0	695	1·49
Stafford	881	154	0	0	1,035	2·35
South Staffordshire	254	30	0	*	284	0·77
Staffordshire Moorlands	191	82	*	*	273	0·77
Stoke-on-Trent	261	175	0	0	436	0·44
Tamworth	278	59	0	0	337	1·39
North Warwickshire	545	38	0	0	583	2·62
Nuneaton and Bedworth	927	169	0	0	1,096	2·59
Rugby	934	74	0	0	1,008	3·10
Stratford-on-Avon	370	46	0	0	416	1·04
Warwick	336	352	0	*	688	1·56
Birmingham	3,168	1,360	0	116	4,644	1·20
Coventry	634	379	0	45	1,058	0·88
Dudley	1,191	359	0	0	1,550	1·33
Sandwell	1,183	77	0	0	1,260	1·06
Solihull	1,143	112	0	0	1,255	1·70
Walsall	1,901	138	0	0	2,039	2·09
Wolverhampton	2,131	118	*	0	2,249	2·34
North West inc. Cumbria						
Chester	547	96	0	0	643	1·42
Congleton	527	20	0	0	547	1·76
Crewe and Nantwich	1,082	44	0	0	1,126	2·87
Ellesmere Port and Neston	1,116	42	0	*	1,158	3·85
Halton	671	244	21	0	936	2·11

Local Authority	Local Authority (number)	Housing Association (number)	Other Public Sector (number)	Private Sector (number)	Total Reported (number)	Total Reported (per cent. of total stock)
Macclesfield	1,217	246	12	12	1,487	2·56
Vale Royal	1,026	72	0	0	1,098	2·57
Warrington	365	132	154	0	651	0·98
Allerdale	190	166	0	0	356	0·93
Barrow-in-Furness	165	78	0	0	243	0·84
Carlisle	146	158	0	0	304	0·78
Copeland	146	129	8	5	288	1·05
Eden	108	133	129	101	471	2·63
South Lakeland	422	129	0	0	551	1·36
Blackburn	820	406	0	0	1,226	2·33
Blackpool	637	0	0	0	637	1·03
Burnley	899	239	0	0	1,138	3·11
Chorley	351	102	0	0	453	1·28
Fylde	280	119	*	*	399	1·38
Hyndburn	591	96	0	0	687	2·15
Lancaster	244	407	0	12	633	1·35
Pendle	970	133	0	0	1,103	3·08
Preston	670	502	0	0	1,172	2·42
Ribble Valley	334	64	0	0	398	2·08
Rossendale	576	240	0	0	816	3·15
South Ribble	969	162	0	33	1,164	3·18
West Lancashire	834	141	198	*	1,173	2·98
Wyre	339	0	0	0	339	0·85
Bolton	3,002	419	0	0	3,421	3·32
Bury	561	428	0	0	989	1·46
Manchester	463	1,392	0	0	1,855	1·02
Oldham	2,443	420	0	0	2,863	3·30
Rochdale	617	317	52	0	986	1·23
Salford	2,584	327	6	*	2,917	3·04
Stockport	532	757	*	0	1,289	1·14
Tameside	1,304	348	58	*	1,710	2·01
Trafford	1,605	430	131	0	2,166	2·56
Wigan	1,024	290	0	0	1,314	1·11
Knowsley	428	216	0	48	692	1·20
Liverpool	1,399	1,141	0	0	2,540	1·30
St Helens	662	292	*	*	954	1·36
Sefton	919	764	*	*	1,683	1·49
Wirral	1,093	1,112	0	142	2,347	1·75

* not available.

Pesticides

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which pesticides either his Department or the water authorities have plans to monitor apart from organochlorine insecticides.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction has recently approved proposals for exploratory surveys of rivers for a range of pesticides; in particular, organo-tin compounds, organophosphorous compounds, the triazines and the permethrins.

We have advised water undertakers that they should analyse water supplies for pesticides such as organophosphorous insecticides, phenoxyacetic acid and triazine herbicides, where these substances are likely to occur in their waters.

Water Authorities

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will produce a table showing the return of assets for each of the water authorities in England in the years 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84; and what are the estimated figures for 1984-85.

Mr. Macfarlane: The form of accounts used prior to 1981-82 does not enable a rate of return comparable with later years to be calculated; and it is too early to estimate the outturn for 1984-85. The other figures requested are shown in the following table:

*Financial Target and Achievement**

(both expressed as a percentage of net assets, at current cost)

Name of Water Authority	1981-82 Target	1981-82 Achievement	1982-83 Target	1982-83 Achievement	1983-84 Target	1983-84 Achievement	1984-85 Target†
Anglian	1·38	2·58	2·06	3·29	2·06	2·96	1·36
Northumbrian	2·52	1·63	1·87	2·10	1·87	2·43	1·25
North West	0·80	1·30	1·26	1·92	1·26	1·84	0·95
Severn Trent	1·02	1·28	1·17	1·66	1·25	1·62	1·25

Name of Water Authority	1981-82 Target	1981-82 Achievement	1982-83 Target	1982-83 Achievement	1983-84 Target	1983-84 Achievement	1984-85 Target†
Southern	1·09	1·70	1·18	1·76	1·25	1·56	0·91
South West	2·17	1·98	1·47	1·95	1·47	1·87	1·26
Thames	1·24	1·45	1·09	1·37	1·25	1·19	0·50
Wessex	1·65	2·35	1·50	2·08	1·50	1·67	0·61
Yorkshire	0·85	1·10	1·14	1·52	1·25	1·65	1·00

* The achievement figure includes both current cost operating profit for the year and any balance brought forward, as defined in the relevant Return of Assets Order.

† A reassessment of asset values, described in note 1 to the current cost supplementary statements in the authorities' account for 1983-84, resulted in generally higher asset values. These higher values were taken into account in setting financial targets for 1984-85. The targets set for 1984-85 average about 1 per cent.; on an equivalent basis the targets for 1983-84 would have averaged 0·94 per cent.

Commercial and Industrial Buildings (Use)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the general development orders 1977 to 1981 in the light of continuing technological advancement in respect of the use of commercial and industrial buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: I am not currently persuaded that amendments to the Town and Country Planning General Development Order, or indeed to the Use Classes Order would be of help in this field. I have examined the idea of creating a special class for high-technology uses in the Use Classes Order. In doing so, I have concluded that much of the alleged difficulty in this area comes from unfamiliarity with this new type of development, and that the introduction of a new class would create considerable problems of definition and rigidity. My Department has issued advice on planning and high-technology in circular 16/84 and has also liaised with the National Development Control Forum on the issue of a guidance booklet on the subject. We have also consulted a wige range of interests on a proposed amendment to the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, which would give greater flexibility for changes between alternative permitted uses. Such a change should benefit users who, in planning terms, incorporate disparate elements such as office, storage and research and development.

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to seek to amend the Town and Country Planning Acts to give greater flexibility of use to owners of commercial and industrial buildings engaged in the field of high technology industries.

Mr. Macfarlane: As soon as the parliamentary timetable permits, I would hope to introduce a provision on the lines of that set out in my Department's consultation letter of 30 July 1984.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the length of time taken by the Property Services Agency to settle contractors' accounts in respect of measured term contracts for contracts *(a)* to £500,000, *(b)* from £500,000 to £1 million, *(c)* from £1 million to £2 million and *(d)* over £2 million, respectively.

Sir. George Young: Each order under a measured term contract is the subject of a separate final account. On average, it takes four months from the date of completion of the work to settlement of the final account. During this period the work has to be jointly measured, priced and agreed between the contractor and the agency's quantity surveyor, and the account prepared, checked and submitted for payment. The average time taken to clear final accounts applies to all MTCs irrespective of the total value of the contract. For orders of more than £1,000 in value, the contractor will have been paid most of the money due during the progress of the work.

London Docklands, Development Corporation

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the change in the number of people employed in undertakings that use the river or dock facilities within the London Docklands Development Corporation area since July 1981;

(2) how many jobs created in the London Docklands Development Corporation area since July 1981 are held by residents of the London boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Southwark;

(3) how many new jobs created in the London Docklands Development Corporation area since July 1981 have been taken by people who were previously registered unemployed in Southwark, Newham or Tower Hamlets;

(4) what information he has as to how many of the new jobs created in the London Docklands Development Corporation area since July 1981 referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, South on 28 November, *Official Report*, column *515*, are transfers from other locations.

Sir George Young: This information is not collected.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of people in each of the nine major standard industrial classification categories (1980) among the new jobs created within the London Docklands Development Corporation area since July 1981.

Sir George Young: This information is not broken down by standard industrial classification categories for the LDDC area. The 3,619 new jobs created in the LDDC area since July 1981 (excluding Inner Urban Areas Act related employment) can, however, be broken down into the following categories:

	Number
Office	1,090
Industry	96
Distribution	1,393
Mixed	1,040
	3,619

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give a breakdown by (i) the nine

main Standard Industrial Classification Orders (1980) and (ii) the major employer of the 1,629 jobs in the rest of Tower Hamlets, referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 28 November, *Official Report*, column *515*; and how many of these relate to jobs in St. Katherine's dock.

Sir George Young: This information is not broken down by standard industrial classification categories. The 1,629 jobs in Tower Hamlets within the LDDC area, but excluding those in the enterprise zone, can, however, be broken down as follows:

	Number
Office	710
Distribution	850
Inner Urban Areas Act funded	*69
	1,629

* This category cannot be broken down further.

The major employer within the above total is the ASDA superstore, which has created 350 jobs. Seven hundred and ten of the new jobs are attributable to development at St. Katherine's dock.

Isle of Dogs Enterprise Zone

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost of creating each new job in the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone, excluding jobs in construction, in the London Docklands Development Corporation's own offices and in Cannon workshops in terms of rates forgone plus the cost of infrastructure works.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) on 20 December 1984, at column 267.

Local Authority Charges

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, with reference to the Under-Secretary of State's letter of 11 December 1984 to the local authority associations *(a)* how this relates to the review of local authority charges undertaken by his predecessor in 1979-80, *(b)* what was the outcome of this review and what proposals the Government made and *(c)* under which legislation such proposals have been given effect.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall answer this question shortly.

Domestic Rates

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the 1984-85 domestic rate poundage in *(a)* Kensington and Chelsea and *(b)* Bournemouth.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information is as follows:

	Domestic rate poundage 1984-85
Kensington and Chelsea	137·5p
Bournemouth	149·5p

Greater London Development Plan

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the 33 London borough councils have expressed concern to him about the resources they would have to devote to determining objections to the Greater London council's proposed alterations to the Greater London development plan.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friend has received 134 objections and representations to the proposed amendments to the GLDP. Of these, 31 were the initial responses of London boroughs and of the City of London. Boroughs generally were expecting to have to give further consideration to their responses, and in view of anxiety expressed informally to my Department, I am satisfied that further consideration would have caused a drain on authorities' resources during a period of preparation for taking on new responsibilities from April 1986, with little certainty of the process of adopting the amendments being completed before abolition of the GLC.

Local Authorities (Expenditure Limits)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to each authority that decided not to apply for redetermination of its expenditure limit about its reasons for deciding not to seek a redetermination.

Mr. Waldegrave: A number of designated authorities alleged that by applying for a redetermination they laid themselves open either to a reduced expenditure level, or to the imposition of onerous requirements in respect of their detailed spending decisions. We made it clear on a number of occasions that neither course was likely. I can only assume from the absence of applications that the authorities are content with the expenditure levels set.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which factors he took into account in deciding which of the concerns expressed in reply to the consultation paper, "Streamlining the Cities: Housing", to meet when announcing changes to his original proposals to abolish the Greater London council housing role.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend took into account all the representations which had been made to us.

Civil Airports (Noise Control)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the civil airports in England for which local authorities do not have some responsibility for the control of aircraft noise.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have been asked to reply. I am writing to the hon. Member.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Wild Animals

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to amend the law on the keeping of wild animals in Northern Ireland in order to make it consistent with the law in Great Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: No.

Departmental Publications

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums have been expended by his Department in each of the last two years on documents and publications issued free of charge to *(a)* doctors, *(b)* pharmacists and *(c)* other persons or bodies; and what were the sums expended in (i) 1970, (ii) 1975 and (iii) 1980 in cash and in constant prices taking 1970 as the base.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Executive

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applicants there were at the latest available date in Northern Ireland for Housing Executive accommodation in each council area; how many empty Housing Executive dwellings and units of accommodation there were in each area on the same date; how many of such dwellings or units of accommodation in each such area had been vacant for more than three months; and how many of the applicants have applied for accommodation in more than one council area.

Mr. Chris Patten: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I understand from the chairman that the information is not readily available; I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Equal Opportunities (Questionnaire)

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is compulsory for civil servants in Northern Ireland to fill in the recently circulated equal opportunities questionnaire; and if the questionnaire has been sent to civil servants from Great Britain who work in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: Completion of the questionnaire is voluntary; if has been issued only to non-industrial members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Civil Service

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland of the total numbers of Civil Service personnel presently serving in Northern Ireland, how many are members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and how many are members of the United Kingdom Civil Service;

Dr. Boyson: Of those civil servants in Northern Ireland for whom my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible, 31,251 (including 5,919 in industrial grades) are members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and 62 are members of the Home Civil Service. A number of Home Civil Servants serve in other Departments in Northern Ireland.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he takes any steps to determine the political affiliations of civil servants in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: No.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in the *Official Report* those items of Civil Service conditions or requirements which, if applied equally, would constitute discrimination.

Dr. Boyson: I am not aware of any such matters, but if the hon. Gentleman has any particular point in mind I shall be glad to consider it.

Nurses

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many nurses at the latest available date are in training in Northern Ireland; of these how many are in *(a)* each year of the training course and *(b)* each year of the training course in each training hospital; in each case how many are training for each recognised nursing qualification; and how many in each case are from (i) Northern Ireland, (ii) the Irish Republic and (iii) elsewhere.

Mr. Chris Patten: At 23 January 1985 there were 708 nurses in training in Northern Ireland. The breakdown of that number by training courses, years and nurse qualifications is as follows:

Place	*Course*	*Length*	*Numbers by years*	*With addresses in*		
				Northern Ireland	*Republic of Ireland*	*Elsewhere*
University of Ulster (Coleraine Compound)	BA Honours for registered nurses	4 years (Initial course commenced 1982)	1st year 18 2nd year 12 3rd year 10	20	2	18
University of Ulster (Coleraine Compound)	Part-time BA Honours degree	2 years (Initial course commenced 1984)	1st year 2	2	—	—
University of Ulster (Coleraine Compound)	Part-time MsC	2 years (Initial course commenced 1984)	1st year 3	3	—	—
University of Ulster (Coleraine Compound)	Diploma in Advanced Nursing Studies	1 year	2	1	—	1
University of Ulster (Coleraine Compound)	Certificate in Investigative Methods in Nursing	1 year	1	1	—	—
University of Ulster (Coleraine Compound)	M. Philosophy	2 years	1st year 1 2nd year 1	— 1	1 —	— —
University of Ulster (Jordanstown Compound)	Certificate in District Nursing	1 year	42	42	—	—
University of Ulster (Jordanstown Compound)	Certificate in Health Visiting	64 weeks	26	26	—	—
University of Ulster (Jordanstown Compound)	Certificate in Practical and Fieldwork Teachers	2 years (Part-time)	18	18	—	—

Place	Course	Length	Numbers by years	With addresses in Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland	Elsewhere
Queen's University Belfast	Diploma in Nursing	3 years (Part-time)	1st year 20 (Initial course commenced 1984)	20	—	—
Total			156	134	3	19

In addition:

There are 552 nurses in a range of post-registration and post-enrolled courses at the eight colleges of nursing and midwifery in Northern Ireland, Of these, 62 have addresses in the Republic of Ireland and eight have addresses elsewhere.

Western Health and Social Services Board

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1985, how many temporary staff are employed by the Western health and social services board; where those staff were located; what were the numbers at each location; and what were their religious affiliations.

Mr. Chris Patten: The available information is as follows:

	Number
Area Board Headquarters	18
Londonderry, Limvady and Strabane Unit of Management	155
Omagh Unit of Management	117
Fermanagh Unit of Management	75
Total Temporary Staff	365

Government Offices

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Government offices in Northern Ireland have been resited or are scheduled for siting or resiting for reasons to do with his equal opportunity policy; and which ones they are.

Dr. Boyson: None. The Government have, however, accepted the recommendation of the Fair Employment Agency that in siting offices it should consider the effect which location might have on equal opportunity and they will take this factor into account, bearing in mind also that offices must be located where they can most efficiently provide public services.

Roads (Maintenance and Improvement)

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums have been paid in value added tax in respect of *(a)* road maintenace works in Northern Ireland and *(b)* road improvement works in Northern Ireland in each of the financial years 1982-83 and 1983-84; and what is his estimate of the sums payable in the current year.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is as follows:

	1982-83 £ million	1983-84 £ million	1984-85 (estimated) £ million
Road maintenace works	3·1	3·9	4·2
Road construction and improvement works	0·2	0·2	1·0

Castledawson Bypass

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he now expects work to begin on the Castledawson bypass.

Mr. Chris Patten: No starting date has yet been fixed.

Primary Schools

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the Protestant-controlled primary schools in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: The controlled primary schools in Northern Ireland are as follows. They are not Protestant schools as such, since they are open to pupils of all denominations, and are required to provide non-denominational religious instruction.

BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

Controlled Primary Schools

Belmont Primary School
Currie Primary School
Euston Street Primary School
Malone Primary School
Rosetta Primary School
Forth River Primary School
Woodvale Primary School
Springfield Primary School
Strand Primary School
Harding Memorial Primary School
Mersey Street Primary School
Strandtown Primary School
Elmgrove Primary School
Seaview Primary School
Nettlefield Primary School
Argyle Primary School
Avoniel Primary School
Beechfield Primary School
Orangefield Primary School
Carr's Glen Primary School
Grove Primary School
Sydenham Primary School
Wheatfield Junior Primary School
Ballygolan Primary School
Lowwood Junior Primary School
Lowwood Infants' Primary School
Taughmonagh Primary School
Greenwood Primary School
Ulidia Primary School
Wheatfield Infants' Primary School
Springhill Primary School
Skegoniel Primary School
Vere Foster Primary School
Edenbrooke Primary School
Stranmillis Primary School
Ligoniel Primary Schoo
Finaghy Primary School
Cavehill Primary School
Suffolk Primary School
Knocknagoney Primary School
Blackmountain Primary School
Donegall Road Primary School
Ballysillan Primary School

Fernhill Primary School
Fane Street Primary School
Glencairn Primary School
Blythefield Primary School
Dundela Primary School
Cliftonville Primary School
Glenwood Primary School
Malvern Primary School
Botanic Primary School

WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
Controlled Primary Schools
Londonderry Model Primary School
Ebrington Primary School, Londonderry
Kesh Primary School
Moat Primary School, Lisnaskea
Belleek (2) Primary School
Shanmullagh Primary School, Ballinamallard
Aghadrumsee Primary School, Newtownbutler
Earl of Erne Primary School, Knockaraven
Newtownbutler (2) Primary School
Florencecourt Primary School, Enniskillen
Ballinamallard Primary School
Brookeborough Primary School
Drumskinney Primary School, Kesh
Derrygonnelly Primary School
Stragowna Primary School, Kinawley
Groarty Primary School, Londonderry
Culmore Primary School, Londonderry
Largy Primary School, Limavady
Bellarena Primary School, Limavady
Balloughry Primary School, Londonderry
Limavady Central Primary School
Killaloo-Cumber Primary School, Londonderry
Drumahoe Primary School, Londonderry
Dungiven Primary School
Maydown Primary School, Londonderry
Eglinton Primary School, Londonderry
Newbuildings Primary School, Londonderry
Burnfoot (New) Primary School, Dungiven
Straidarran Primary School, Claudy
Ballykelly Primary School
The McClintock Primary School, Omagh
Dunmullan Primary School, Omagh
Utney Primary School, Strabane
Drumlegagh Primary School, Newtownstewart
Cavancaw Primary School, Omagh
Ardstraw Primary School, Newtownstewart
Mayne Primary School, Omagh
Tullywhisker Primary School, Sion Mills
Deverney Primary School, Omagh
Bready Primary School, Strabane
Dervaghroy Primary School, Sixmilecross
Erganagh Primary School, Castlederg
Edwards Primary School, Castlederg
Killen Primary School, Castlederg
Gillygooley Primary School, Omagh
The Hutton Primary School, Beragh
Denmona Primary School, Fintona
Queen Elizabeth II Primary School, Trillick
Castletown Coronation Primary School, Omagh
Langfield Primary School, Drumquin
Glenagoorland Primary School, Dunamanagh
Bridgehill Primary School, Castlederg
Omagh Primary School
Sandville Primary School, Strabane
Dromore Primary School, Omagh
Strabane Primary School
Trillick Primary School, Omagh
Sixmilecross Primary School, Omagh
Donemana Primary School
Strathfoyle Primary School, Londonderry
Jones Memorial Primary School, Enniskillen
Drumachose Primary School, Limavady
Artigarvan Primary School, Strabane
Greenhaw Primary School, Londonderry
Gibson Primary School, Omagh
Tempo Primary School
Fort James Primary School, Londonderry
Maguiresbridge Primary School
Irvinestown Primary School
Enniskillen Model Primary School
Lack Primary School
Lisnagelvin Primary School, Londonderry
Lisbllaw Primary School
Newtownstewart Model Primary School
Gortin Primary School

NORTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
Controlled Primary Schools
Bruslee Primary School, Ballyclare
Tildarg Primary School, Ballyclare
Longstone Primary School, Ahoghill
Carnalbanagh Primary School, Glenarm
Larne and Inver Primary School, Larne
Ballymonten Primary School, Ahoghill
Dunamuggy Primary School, Templepatrick
Carnlough Primary School, Carnlough
Ballycregagh Primary School, Ballymoney
Carrickfergus Model Primary School
Duneane Primary School, Toomebridge
Straid Primary School, Ballycare
Carrowreagh Primary School, Ballymoney
Upper Buckna Primary School, Broughshane
Garryduff Primary School, Ballymoney
Ballyclare Primary School
Parkgate Primary School, Templepatrick
Millbrook Primary School, Larne
Olderfleet Primary School, Larne
Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus
Bulck Memorial Primary School, Cullybackey
Lisnamurrican Primary School, Broughshane
Hazelbank Primary School, Broughshane
Dunserverick Primary School, Bushmills
Creavery Primary School, Antrim
Loanends Primary School, Crumlin
Doegh Primary School
Mullaghdubh Primary School, Islandmagee
Lawther Primary School, Muckamore
Kirkhills Primary School, Ballymoney
Mullindreen Primary School, Broughshane
Thompson Primary School, Ballyclare
Kirkinriola Primary School, Ballymena
Harryville Primary School, Ballymena
Rathmore Primary School, Muckamore
Eden Primary School, Carrickfergus
Lislagan Primary School, Ballymoney
Killyrammer Primary School, Ballymoney
Stranocum Primary School, Ballymoney
Glengormley Primary School, Newtownabbey
Gracehill Primary School, Ballymena
Landhead Primary School, Ballymoney
Eden Primary School, Ballymoney
Maxwell's Walls Primary School, Ballymena
Ballynure Primary School, Ballyclare
Ballypriormore Primary School, Islandmagee
Straidbilly Primary School, Ballymoney
Glynn Primary School, Larne
Ballycarry Primary School, Carrickfergus
Mallusk Primary School
Randalstown Central Primary School, Antrim
Greenisland Primary School, Carrickfergus
Moorfields Primary School, Ballymena
Groggan Primary School, Randalstown
Ballyrock Primary School, Bushmills
Carnaghts Primary School, Ballymena
The Diamond Primary School, Cullybackey
Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey
Kilbride Central Primary School, Ballyclare
Antrim Primary School
Clough Primary School, Ballymena
Kells and Connor Primary School, Ballymena
Carrickfergus Central
The William Pinkerton Memorial Primary School, Ballymoney
Mosside Primary School, Ballymoney
The John Stewart Memorial Primary School, Ballymena
Whiteabbey Primary School, Newtownabbey
Portrush Primary School
Ballyboley Upper Primary School, Ballyclare

Crumlin Primary School
Sunnylands Primary School, Carrickfergus
Abbott's Cross Primary School, Newtownabbey
Ballymoney Primary School
Moyle Primary School, Larne
Seacon Primary School, Ballymoney
Derrykeighan Primary School, Ballymoney
Bushmills Primary School
Whitehead Primary School, Carrickfergus
Ballymena Primary School
Kilmoyle Primary School, Ballymoney
Straidhavern Primary School, Crumlin
King's Park Primary School, Newtownabbey
Linn Primary School, Larne
Fourtowns Primary School, Ahoghill
Ballytober Primary School, Bushmills
Knockhollet Primary School, Ballymena
Rathcoole Primary School
Newlands Primary School, Larne
Moneydig Primary School, Garvagh
Carnalridge Primary School, Portrush
Culcrow Primary School, Aghadowey
Carhill Primary School, Garvagh
Boveedy Primary School, Kilrea
Blagh Primary School, Coleraine
Cullycapple Primary School, Aghadowey
Damhead Primary School, Coleraine
Lismoyle Primary School, Kilrea
Hezlett Primary School, Castlerock
Tobermore Primary School, Magherafelt
Ampertaine Primary School, Maghera
Killowen Primary School, Coleraine
Ringsend Primary School, Garvagh
Portstewart Primary School
Ballyrashane Primary School, Coleraine
Drumard Primary School, Maghera
Millburn Primary School, Coleraine
Magherafelt Primary School
Kilrea Primary School
Culnady Primary School, Maghera
D. H. Christie Memorial Primary School, Coleraine
Castleroe Primary School, Coleraine
Ballaghy Primary School, Magherafelt
Maghera Primary School
Carnmoney Primary School
Broughshane Primary School
Moyarget Primary School, Ballycastle
Ballykeel Primary School, Ballymena
Camphill Primary School, Ballymena
Mossgrove Primary School, Glengormley
Leaney Primary School, Ballymoney
Glenarm Primary School
Victoria Primary School, Carrickfergus
Ballycraigy Primary School, Muckamore
Toreagh Primary School, Larne
Ballycastle Primary School
Macosquin Primary School, Coleraine
Kilross Primary School, Magherafelt
Castledawson Primary School
Silverstream Primary School, Greenisland
Antiville Primary School, Antrim
Templepatrick Primary School
Mossley Primary School
Greystone Primary School
Hollybank Primary School, Newtownabbey
Armoy Primary School
Harpur's Hill Primary School, Coleraine
Gorran Primary School, Coleraine
Parkhall Primary School, Antrim
Dunclug Primary School, Ballymena
Carvagh Primary School
Rasharkin Primary School, Ballymena
Carniny Primary School, Ballymena
Ballyhenry Primary School, Glengormley
Ballee Primary School, Ballymena
Woodlawn Primary School, Carrickfergus
Ballyduff Primary School, Newtownabbey
Rathenraw Primary School, Antrim
Ashgrove Primary School, Carnmoney
Springfarm Primary School, Antrim
Earlview Primary School, Newtownabbey
Ballysally Primary School, Coleraine
Oakfield Primary School, Carrickfergus
Cloughmills Primary School, Ballymena
Irish Society Primary School, Coleraine
Cairncastle Primary School, Larne
Knockloughrim Primary School, Maghera
Fairview Primary School, Ballyclare
Portglenone Primary School
Balnamore Primary School, Ballymoney

SOUTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
Controlled Primary Schools
Magheraberry Primary School, Craigavon
Dundrod Primary School, Crumlin
Broomhedge Primary School, Craigavon
Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School, Lisburn
Largymore Primary School, Lisburn
Brownlee Primary School, Lisburn
Soldierstown Primary School, Craigavon
Dunmurry Primary School, Belfast
Castlerobin Primary School, Lisburn
Lisburn Central Primary School
Seymour Hill Primary School, Dunmurry
Tonagh Primary School, Lisburn
Ballyeastborough Primary School, Newtownards
Ballyvester Primary School, Donaghadee
Loughries Primary School, Newtownards
Cargycroy Primary School, Lisburn
Greyabbey Primary School
Carrickmannon Primary School, Newtownards
Newtownards Model Primary School
Kirkistown Primary School, Newtownards
Magheraknock Primary School, Ballynahinch
Ravarnette Primary School, Lisburn
St. James' Primary School, Hillsborough
St. John's Primary School, Hillsborough
Castle Gardens Primary School, Newtownards
Maze Primary School, Lisburn
Annadorn Primary School, Downpatrick
Victoria Primary School, Ballyhalbort
Portavogie Primary School
Charley Memorial Primary School, Dunmurry
O'Neill Memorial Primary School, Belfast
Legacurry Primary School, Lisburn
Ballywater Primary School
Ballynahinch Primary School
Kircubbin Primary School
Derryboy Primary School, Downpatrick
Crossgar Primary School
Carr Primary School, Lisburn
Dundonald Primary School
Comber Primary School
Castlewellan Primary School
Portaferry Primary School
Gilnahirk Primary School, Belfast
Annahilt Primary School, Hillsborough
Newtownbreda Primary School, Belfast
Dromara Primary School, Dromore
Lambeg Primary School, Lisburn
Holywood Primary School
Cregagh Primary School, Belfast
Hillsborough Primary School
Killyleagh Primary School
Crawfordsburn Primary School
Victoria Primary School, Newtownards
Ballykeiglo Primary School, Comber
Hillhall Primary School, Lisburn
Ballyholmo Primary School, Bangor
Donaghadee Primary School
Lisnasharragh Primary School, Belfast
Clandeboye Road Primary School, Bangor
Knockbreda Primary School, Belfast
Ballycloughan Primary School, Ballynahinch
Bangor Central Primary School
Millisle Primary School
Braniel Primary School, Belfast
Drumbo Primary School, Lisburn
Redburn Primary School, Holywood
Newcastle Primary School

Moneyrea Primary School, Newtownards
Groomsport Primary School
Belvoir Park Primary School, Belfast
Carrowreagh Primary School, Dundonald
Tyrella Primary School, Ballykinlar
Glencraig Primary School, Holywood
Downshire Primary School, Newcastle
Bloomfield Road Primary School, Bangor
Cairnehill Primary School, Newtownbreda
Clough Primary School, Downpatrick
Conlig Primary School, Newtownards
Tullycarnett Primary School, Belfast
Newport Primary School, Hillsborough
Ardglass Primary School,
Comown Primary School, Bangor
Leadhill Primary School, Belfast
Carryduff Primary School, Belfast
Grangepark Primary School, Bangor
Alex Dickson Primary School, Newtownards
Harmony Hill Primary School, Lisburn
Forthill Primary School, Lisburn
Derriaghy Primary School, Lisburn
Glenavy Primary School, Crumlin
Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn
Kilcooley Primary School, Bangor
Londonderry Primary School, Newtownards
Carrowdore Primary School, Newtownards
Ballyoran Primary School, Dundonald
Rathmore Primary School, Bangor
West Winds Primary School, Newtownards
Moira Primary School, Lurgan
Tower View Primary School, Bangor
Spa Primary School, Ballynahinch
Andrews Memorial Primary School, Comber
Old Warren Primary School, Lisburn
Killowen Primary School, Lisburn
Kilmaine Primary School, Bangor
Saintfield Primary School,
Ballinderry Primary School, Lisburn
Downpatrick Primary School,
Pond Park Primary School, Lisburn
Killinchy Primary School,
Ballymacash Primary School, Lisburn

SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
Controlled Primary Schools
Foley Primary School, Armagh
Cladymore Primary School, Armagh
Collone Primary School, Armagh
Lurgan Model Primary School
Mullaglass Primary School, Newry
Aghavilly Primary School, Armagh
Derrycarne Primary School, Craigavon
Cabra Primary School (Tandragee)
Mulavilly Primary School, Craigavon
Annaghmore Primary School, Portadown
Markethill Primary School
Hardy Primary School, Armagh
Ardmore Primary School, Craigavon
Armstrong Primary School, Armagh
Tandragee Primary School
Drumsallon Primary School, Armagh
Darkley Primary School, Armagh
Salter's Grange Primary School, Armagh
Wastelands Primary School, Armagh
Kings Park Primary School, Lurgan
Carrick Primary School, Lurgan
Hart Memorial Primary School, Portadown
Ballynewry Primary School, Armagh
Killylea Primary School, Armagh
Newtownhamilton Primary School
Kinnego Primary School, Dungannon
Clare Primary School, Tandragee
Tullyroan Primary School, Dungannon
Ahorey Primary School, Portdown
Kingsmills Primary School, Armagh
Lisnadill Primary School, Armagh
Derryhale Primary School, Portadown
Mountnorris Primary School, Armagh
Lisdrumchor Primary School, Armagh
Richmount Primary School, Portadown
Birches Primary School, Portadown
Cortamlet Primary School, Newry
Bessbrook Primary School
Tynan Primary School, Armagh
Edenderry Primary School, Portadown
Tullygally Primary School, Craigavon
Carnew Primary School, Dromara
Shinn Primary School, Newry
Newry Model Primary School
Leitrim Primary School, Castlewellan
Donaghmore Primary School, Newry
Katesbridge Primary School, Banbridge
Dromore Road Primary School, Warrenpoint
Gransha Primary School, Dromara
Croreagh Primary School, Newry
Dromore Central Primary School, Dromara
Edendale Primary School, Newry
Abercorn Primary School, Banbridge
Moyallon Primary School, Portadown
Craigavon Primary School
Waringstown Primary School
Bleary Primary School, Lurgan
Iveagh Primary School, Newry
Ballydown Primary School, Banbridge
Tullymacaretto Primary School, Dromore
Ballyward Primary School, Castlewellan
Ballyroney Primary School, Banbridge
Kilkeel Primary School
Milltown Primary School, Banbridge
Loughbrickland Primary School, Banbridge
Closkalt Primary School, Banbridge
Scarva Primary School, Craigavon
Hilltown Primary School, Newry
Annalong Primary School
Maralin Village Primary School
Ballykeel West Primary School, Newry
Ballynenagh Primary School, Monoymore
Ballinderry Primary School, Coagh
Moneymore Primary School
Toberlane Primary School, Cookstown
Benburb Primary School, Dungannon
Coalisland Primary School
Churchill Primary School, Caledon
Lisfearty Primary School, Dungannon
Ballytrea Primary School, Dungannon.
Eglish Primary School, Dungannon
Aughnacloy Regional Primary School
Tamnamore Primary School, Armagh
Donaghmore Primary School, Dungannon
Tullaghoge Primary School, Cookstown
Augher Central Primary School
Moy Regional Primary School, Dungannon
Stewartstown Primary School
Howard Primary School, Dungannon
Coagh Primary School, Cookstown
Mullycar Primary School, Dungannon
Walker Memorial Primary School, Dungannon
Clogher Regional Primary School
Innismagh Primary School, Ballygawley
Lisnagleer Primary School, Dungannon
Carnall Primary School, Clogher
Ballygawley Primary School, Dungannon
Newmill Primary School
Dungannon Primary School
Cookstown Primary School
Glaskormore Primary School, Banbridge
Edenberry Primary School, Banbridge
Kinallen Primary School, Dromara
Woods Primary School, Magherafelt
Millington Primary School, Portadown
Kilbroney Primary School, Rostrevor
Drumhillery Primary School, Middletown
Keady Primary School, Armagh
Dickson Primary School, Lurgan
Poyntzpass Primary School
The Cope Primary School, Loughgall
Drumgor Primary School, Craigavon
Fivemiletown Primary School
Brackenagh West Primary School, Newry

Misterburn Primary School, Caledon
Ballyoran Primary School, Portadown
Bocombra Primary School, Portadown
Churchtown Primary School, Cookstown
Granville Primary School, Dungannon
Dollingstown Primary School
Donaclooney Primary School, Lurgan
Killyman Primary School, Dungannon
Pomeroy Primary School
Orritor Primary School, Cookstown
Donaghey Primary School, Dungannon
Bush Primary School, Dungannon
Windsor Hill Primary School, Newry

Equal Opportunities Unit

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table indicating the number, grades, names, religious affiliation, political affiliation, sex, race and nationality of the staff of the Equal Opportunities Unit as soon as the information is available.

Dr. Boyson: The unit has 12 staff (seven men and five women). It is not the practice to provide personal information about individual civil servants.

Strip Searches

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if any staff members have been reprimanded as a result of conduct during a strip search in prisons in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: There is no record of any such reprimand.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many strip searches of women prisoners have taken place in the presence of one or more male prison officers in each of the past six years.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985 c. *69*]: None: male officers are never present during such searches.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what type of items which may constitute a danger to the prison system are intended to be discovered by strip searching.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: This form of searching, in Northern Ireland as elsewhere, is one of the precautions necessary to minimise the risk of illicit items being brought into or taken out of the prison: in particular firearms, explosives and drugs.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing those items which have been found during a strip searching in each of the past five years.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: One of the most important aspects of any form of searching is its deterrent value. Whilst detailed records are not kept of all the items found during strip searches carried out at individual prison establishments, detonators, drugs, unauthorised cash and illicit letters have been among the items discovered.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make a statement on the contribution of strip searches to prison security in Northern Ireland;

(2) what study of strip searching he has made since his appointment; and what consideration he is giving to such investigations;

(3) if he will order an end to strip searches in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 21 December 1984, at column 382.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many strip searches have taken place in each of the Northern Ireland prisons in each of the past 10 years;

(2) how many prisoners have been subjected to strip searching in each of Northern Ireland's prisons in the past 10 years.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: Records are available only in respect of women prisoners in Armagh prison since November 1982. These are as follows:

Year	*Total number of searches*	*Number of women prisoners involved*
1982 November—December	400	(figures not available)
1983	1,218	358
1984	355	228

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what medical or nursing staff are required to be present during a strip search of a prisoner.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: Medical or nursing staff are not normally required to be present during a strip search of a prisoner, but prison rules provide that the governor shall, without prejudice to his other duties, draw the attention of the medical officer without delay to any prisoner whose physical or mental condition appears to require attention.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at what level of authority individual strip searches are ordered or authorised.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: Prison governors are responsible for such searches carried out in their establishments within the policy laid down by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. In those situations where it is the policy for strip searching to be carried out on a random basis, governors may, in accordance with prison rules, delegate responsibility for selecting individual inmates to other members of the governing grades or to appropriate uniformed officers.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidelines are issued to prison staff regarding strip searches; and what sanction there is against a member of staff who breaches those guidelines.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: Detailed instructions are given to staff who carry out this form of search explaining how the searches are to be carried out.

Like all complaints, any complaint against a member of staff arising from a search is carefully investigated and if appropriate, action is taken under the code of discipline.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if there has been any evidence, from medical

reports on prisoners, of mental, nervous or physical injuries caused by strip searching in Northern Ireland prisons.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: I am not aware of any such evidence.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what efforts his Department is making regarding the welfare of women prisoners in Northern Ireland; and what further initiatives he proposes in this regard.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *69*]: Every effort is made, consistent with the necessary security precautions, to provide for the welfare of women prisoners. These efforts include the work of prison welfare staff and others concerned with rehabilitation, the provision of a wide range of day and evening activities and considerate home leave arrangements. The regime for women prisoners will be reviewed when the new women's prison at Maghaberry is occupied, which is expected to be in about a year's time.

Security

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that necessary extra resources, including teachers, are made available in controlled primary and secondary schools serving communities close to the frontier with the Irish Republic which have been disadvantaged by the Irish Republican Army's murder campaign against Protestants.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *70*]: In the allocation of teaching posts my Department will continue to give sympathetic consideration to cases made on behalf of border schools. As I said in response to the report of the Northern Ireland Assembly on the rationalisation of schools, this will apply to both controlled and voluntary schools.

A-level Curriculum

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the criteria used by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland when deciding whether or not to approve arrangements for the provision of an A-level curriculum in schools in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *71*]: Criteria for A-level provision are contained in the arrangements for approval of extended course provision in secondary schools. Details are contained in the Department of Education circular 1983/17 dated 29 April 1983, which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of A-level students in *(a)* Enniskillen collegiate school, *(b)* Fivemiletown high school and *(c)* Portora royal school during (i) 1983-84, (ii) 1984-85 and (iii) the projected figures for 1985-86.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *71*]: The number of pupils following GCE A-level courses in these schools is as follows:

	1983-84	*1984-85*
A. Enniskillen Collegiate	114	113
B. Fivemiletown High School	18	23
C. Portora Royal School	85	86

Projected figures for 1985-86 are not available centrally.

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the subjects offered at A-level and the number of students taking each subject in *(a)* Enniskillen collegiate school, *(b)* Fivemiletown high school and *(c)* Portora royal school during (i) 1983-84, (ii) 1984-85 and (iii) the projected figures for 1985-86.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *71*]: Information on subjects offered at A-level is not held centrally, but the numbers of pupils entered for NI GCE A-level subjects in Enniskillen collegiate and Fivemiletown high school in 1983 and 1984 is as follows:

	Fivemiletown High School 1983-84	*Enniskillen Collegiate 1983-84*
Art	—	4
Biology	3	37
Chemistry	4	14
English Literature	1	25
German	—	7
French	—	8
Geography	—	7
History	1	11
History and Appreciation of Art	1	10
Home Economics	1	11
Mathematics	4	7
Physics	6	15
Spanish	—	—
Technical Design and Graphics	1	—
Music	—	2
Latin	—	—
Further Mathematics	1	—

Similar information is not available centrally for Portora royal school, as most of its A-level students are entered for examinations conducted by Great Britain examination boards. Projected figures for 1984-85 and 1985-86 are not available centrally.

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what circumstances the Department of Education for Northern Ireland has approved the provision of an A-level curriculum in Northern Ireland schools where there are only two, three or four students per subject; and if he will now agree to extend such approval to any secondary schools which make such a request and will provide adequate extra staff for this purpose.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *71*]: It is possible within the criteria that the overall extended course approval for a school could include classes with a relatively small number of pupils. In addition, in the first year of operation of the new extended courses policy the Department was prepared to give provisional approval in some marginal cases. A number of these approvals will be reviewed for the 1985-86 school year. Requests from each individual school to provide extended courses will be considered on their merits having regard to the criteria.

DEFENCE

Trident

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimated cost of the Trident programme at current prices.

Mr. Butler: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is currently reviewing the estimate of the cost of Trident and expects to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report*, on the basis of the current programme for Trident, the amount of work by type and value which might be available for the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry; and what is, for each calendar year over the next decade, the amount of money involved.

Mr. Butler: The United Kingdom Trident force will consist of four submarines which will be built in the United Kingdom. The cost of the submarines represents approximately one-third of the estimated total cost of Trident. It is not our practice to publish year-by-year cost profiles for projects.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete the placing of the main contracts for the Trident D5 weapon system.

Mr. Butler: We are purchasing the Trident D5 strategic weapon system from the United States of America under the terms of the Polaris sales agreement. Specific orders are placed by the United States authorities on our behalf. In line with normal financial and contractual procedures, we are giving them progressive authority to enter into commitments. Contracts are being placed to ensure timely delivery to meet submarine fitting dates.

34. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, in light of recent currency fluctuations, he will re-estimate the cost of the Trident programme.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer to the answer given earlier today to the hon. Members for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang), for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft).

35. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the Trident budget as a whole will be spent in the United States of America; and what proportion of the submarines will be built in the United States of America.

39. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the Trident budget as a whole will be spent in the United States of America; and what proportion of the submarines will be built in the United States of America.

Mr. Butler: I refer to the answer given earlier by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Members for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) and for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). About 45 per cent. of the estimated total cost is expected to be spent in the United States. The four Trident class submarines will be built in the United Kingdom. A relatively small proportion of their estimated cost represents dollar expenditure.

36. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the development of anti-ballistic missile defence systems in space has implications for the Trident missile.

Mr. Heseltine: We are satisfied that the Trident II (D5) missile system will provide us with the most cost-effective means of ensuring the credibility of our national strategic nuclear deterrent, well beyond the turn of the century.

37. **Mr. O'Neill** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has considered the recent fluctuations in the value of the £ sterling in assessing the cost of Trident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer to the answer given earlier today to the hon. Members for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang), for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft). $1·38 is the rate being used by my Department for this year's recosting of the defence programme, reflecting the long held convention of using the exchange rate current at the end of June preceding the financial year in question. Expenditure on Trident is currently at a comparatively low level. What matters chiefly is the exchange rate when Trident expenditure begins to peak at the end of the decade.

42. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current level of expenditure on the Trident programme.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer to the answer given earlier today to the hon. Members for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang), for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft). About £300 million has been spent on the Trident programme to date.

50. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether expenditure on Trident will have any effect on the currently planned in-service dates for *(a)* EH 101, *(b)* MCV 80, *(c)* AST 404, *(d)* Type 23 frigate, and *(e)* AST 412.

Mr. Butler: The in-service dates currently assumed for planning purposes for the equipments listed will not be affected by planned expenditure on Trident.

Boarding School Allowance

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Defence what study his Department is currently making of the impact of the practice of grossing-up boarding school allowance for tax purposes where service men serving in the United Kingdom are concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The Ministry of Defence is participating in an interdepartmental study of the effect for service men and other Government employees in certain circumstances of the grossing-up of boarding school allowance for tax purposes. It is too early to say what the outcome will be.

Mean Temperatures

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will list in the *Official Report* the mean temperature for each mainland meteorological station in the United Kingdom for each day from 1 November 1984 until the present.

Mr. Lee: To provide the data required would involve some 40,000 values and disproportionate effort. Those for

the 23 key stations representative of the areas in which they are sited are too voluminous to publish in the *Official Report*. I am therefore sending them to the hon. Member and placing a copy in the Library.

RAF Uxbridge

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the purpose of the 230 ft tower which it is proposed to erect at Royal Air Force Uxbridge; if he will take account of the views expressed by the Hillingdon council and local residents on ways of minimising the effect on the skyline; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The 230 ft tower is part of a new communications scheme for the United States Air Force. It may also carry Royal Air Force communications equipment. The local planning authority has of course been consulted in the usual way. They have made some observations which are now under consideration.

Canberra PR9

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Canberra PR9s were in service in the Royal Air Force in March 1982 and March 1983; and if he will make a statement on the difference in the numbers.

Mr. Stanley: It is not the practice to reveal details relating to numbers of operational aircraft.

Chile (Aircraft Acquisitions)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any aircraft in operation in the Royal Air Force or Royal Navy in March 1982 have been subsequently transferred or sold to Chile; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: Yes. Royal Air Force Hunter and Canberra aircraft in service in March 1982 were subsequently sold to Chile. It has been the consistent policy of this and previous Administrations not to reveal details of defence sales business with other countries.

Shipbuilding Orders

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of vessels by type and by value for which he expects to place orders in the years 1985, 1986 and 1987, respectively.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement on frigates made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. No firm decisions have been taken on the number or timing of other orders in these years. Such orders will be announced as and when appropriate, and contract values would, of course, depend on negotiation.

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of vessels by type and by value under construction for his Department in United Kingdom shipyards; and if he will give the information by shipyard and state the expected delivery dates on each vessel.

Mr. Lee: Thirty-two ships are currently on order for the Royal Navy with a total value of nearly £3,000 million at today's prices.

The following are the vessels under construction or on order at each shipyard:

Brooke Marine Limited
Coastal Survey Vessel
—HMS Roebuck

Cammell Laird Shipbuilders Limited
Sheffield Class Destroyer (Type 42)
—HMS Edinburgh*

Hall Russell & Co. Limited
Hong Kong Patrol Craft
—HMS Swift*

Harland and Wolff Limited
Aviation Training Ship
—RFA Argus

Richards Shipbuilders Limited
River Class Fleet Minesweepers
—HMS Humber*
—HMS Blackwater*
—HMS Helmsdale*
—HMS Itchen*
—HMS Helford*
—HMS Orwell*
—HMS Ribble*
—HMS Spey
—HMS Arun

Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Limited
CVS-03
—HMS Ark Royal*
Sheffield Class Destroyer (Type 42)
—HMS York*
Broadsword Class Frigates (Type 22)
—HMS Sheffield
—HMS Coventry
Royal Fleet Auxiliary
—Sir Galahad replacement

Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited
Trafalgar Class Fleet Submarines
—HMS Tireless*
—HMS Torbay
—HMS Trenchant
SSN-18
Upholder Class Patrol Submarine
—HMS Upholder

Vosper Thornycroft (UK) Limited
Sheffield Class Destroyer (Type 42)
—HMS Gloucester*
Hunt Class Mine Counter-Measures Vessels
—HMS Hurworth*
—HMS Bicester
—HMS Atherstone

Yarrow (Shipbuilders) Limited
Duke Class Frigate (Type 23)
—HMS Norfolk
Broadsword Class Frigate (Type 22)
—HMS Brave*
—HMS London
—HMS Cornwall
—HMS Cumberland

* Denotes expected to be accepted from the shipbuilder during 1985. It is not the practice to give planned acceptance dates. Information on costs of individual contracts is not provided as this is commercially confidential.

Soviet Union

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information is available to him about the scope and nature of research currently being conducted by the Soviet Union into the development of technologies comparable to the United States strategic defence initiative.

Mr. Stanley: For non-classified information I refer the hon. Member to the 1984 edition of "Soviet Military Power" published by the United States Department of Defence, a copy of which I am placing in the Libray. My Department would broadly endorse what is said in that publication about Soviet research and development that is, or could be, relevent to ballistic missile defence.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state Her Majesty's Government's position on proposals for limiting nuclear tests to 150 kilo tonnes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: The United Kingdom Government fully support the Threshold Test Ban Treaty of 1974 between the United States and the USSR, which limits nuclear tests to 150 kilo tonnes, and United Kingdom nuclear tests are conducted within this limit.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Defence if blood tests were taken from service personnel before and after nuclear tests in Australia and Christmas Island; and whether records are available.

Mr. Butler: Every United Kingdom service man involved in the test programmes was given a medical examination beforehand. The purpose of this was to determine his fitness to participate. In appropriate cases, this included a blood test. A record of any medical condition so revealed would have been included in the service man's medical record.

Departmental Staff

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the responsibilities of each of the deputy secretaries in his Department and the number and ranks of staff reporting to each.

Mr. Butler: The information requested is as follows:

1. Responsibilities

Deputy Under Secretary (Policy) and his staff, both military and civilian, keep under review defence strategy and policy in their planning and presentational aspects, and carry out long-range studies. The grouping brings together nuclear planning, policy and operational issues.

Deputy Under Secretary (Resources and Programmes) is responsible for co-ordinating the annual long-term costing, including the issue of assumptions in accordance with priorities developed jointly with the defence staff, and for the Ministry's contribution to the Government's public expenditure survey. Major proposals for expenditure, including new equipment programmes, are scrutinised on behalf of the permanent under secretary of state by the finance staff accountable to Deputy Under Secretary (Resources and Programmes).

Deputy Under Secretary (Finance), as the principal finance officer, is responsible for the Ministry's financial management, including cost control and accounts and matters of parliamentary accountability and propriety. All senior finance officers in the Ministry have a responsibility to the PFO.

Deputy Under Secretary (Personnel and Logistics) exercises central responsibility for financial scrutiny of expenditure proposals in the service personnel and logistics areas; and deals with defence lands and works, legal, claims and health and safety policy. He is responsible for the supervision and direction of secretariat aspects of single Service personnel and logistics work.

Deputy Under Secretary (Defence Procurement) is responsible for the formulation and co-ordination of Ministry of Defence procurement policy (including industrial, sales and international aspects), MOD procurement processes and procedures, for relations with industry and other Government Departments on defence equipment issues, and general issues affecting the Procurement Executive as a whole, including the allocation of PE manpower and privatisation. He is also responsible for co-ordination of the PE element of long term costing and defence Estimates, general oversight of the work of the Director General Defence Contracts and the Director General of Quality Assurance.

Deputy Under Secretary (Civilian Management) is the Ministry's principal establishment officer responsible for civilian personnel management, training and conditions, industrial relations and other support functions, including headquarters security and office services.

Deputy Chief Scientific Adviser is responsible for day-to-day management of the central scientific staff and the Defence Operational Analysis Establishment (excluding the nuclear area) and for the professional scientific oversight of all headquarters scientists. He has particular responsibility for operational analysis policy, the formulation of priorities for defence research and technology, including liaison with outside bodies, and advising the chief scientific adviser on the technical and operational feasibility of equipment proposals.

Director General Meteorological Office controls the Meteorological Office. He is responsible for the United Kingdom state meteorological service, including the provision of services to defence, civil aviation, industry and commerce, and the general public, and research in all aspects of meteorology, as well as for United Kingdom participation in the international arrangements for meteorological services and research.

Director Royal Aircraft Establishment is responsible for the management of the Royal Aircraft Establishment and all its activities; and for providing advice on aerospace matters to MOD and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Deputy Controller Establishments and Research is responsible for the overall policy governing the allocation and control of establishment resources (manpower, finance and capital facilities) to meet the needs of the defence research and equipment programme. He is responsible for the defence research programme including research by contract in industry and the universities, and for intramural research collaboration, and for co-ordination of the technology demonstrator programme. He is also chairman of the steering committee on capital expenditure.

Director Atomic Weapons Research Establishment is responsible for the management of the establishment and the conduct of its work for research and development production, including related responsibilities for safety, personnel, capital expenditure and technical co-operation with the United States of America.

Deputy Controller Warships is responsible, after acceptance of the naval staff target, for the design, development, production introduction into service, acceptance and support of all warships to meet approved MOD requirements.

Deputy Controller Aircraft is the senior civilian officer in the air systems controllerate and engages in corporate decision making on major questions concerned with the aircraft procurement programmes under his control. He is responsible for the overall management of the project officers in his organisation and is accountable to the Chief of Defence Procurement (the accounting officer for Vote 2) for the annual expenditure on projects in his area.

2. Numbers and Grades

Numbers of posts in each of the above areas at grade 3 (under secretary or equivalent), grade 4 (executive director (middle band) or equivalent) and grade 5 (assistant secretary or equivalent) levels are as follows. Because of the substantial reorganisation of the Ministry of Defence which came into effect on 2 January 1985, complementing action and computer programming in the manpower areas are still in progress. Therefore the full breakdown of staff numbers requested could not be obtained without disproportionate cost or within the time available.

	Centre				Air Force			Procurement Executive				
	DCSA	DUS(P)	DUS(RP)	DUS(F)	DUS(PL)	DUS(CM)	DG Mn O	DUS(DP)	DCE	DAWRE	DRAE	DCA	DCW
Grade 3	2	1	3	2	2	4	1	3	2	1	3	1	6
Grade 4	1	—	—	—	1	2	2	1	—	—	—	1	1
Grade 5	7	2	7	8	7	16	7	9	8	14	19	18	20
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	10	3	10	10	10	22	10	13	10	15	22	20	27

Departmental Organisation

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* how the new office of management and budget in his Department relates to defence secretariate 1 and *(b)* whether, under the new reorganisation, the head of defence secretariat 1 still takes the minutes of the Defence Council and if he is still secretary to the finance, planning and management group.

Mr. Butler: The defence secretariat divisions in the Ministry of Defence ceased to exist with the reorganisation of the Department on 2 January. The duties to which the hon. Member refers, and which were previously carried out by the head of defence secretariat 1, are now the responsibility of the head of the programme and budget division within the resources and programmes area of the office of management and budget. The new central organisation for defence is described in Cmnd. 9315, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Enhanced Radiation Artillery Shells

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is considering enhanced radiation artillery shells as a possible replacement for current stocks of tactical nuclear weapons.

Mr. Butler: Nuclear shells for artillery deployed by the United Kingdom in support of NATO are provided by the United States of America. No proposals have been made for their modernisation.

Battlefield Nuclear Weapons

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has any plans to replace current stocks of battlefield nuclear weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: No; although it is normal practice to keep under review the need to replace all United Kingdom in service weapon systems.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of maintaining the United Kingdom's current stocks of battlefield nuclear weapons.

Mr. Butler: The United Kingdom has no battlefield nuclear warheads; we do, however, provide and man delivery means for United States warheads which are held under the usual custodial arrangements. The only cost to the United Kingdom is therefore in maintaining the Lance missile system and the nuclear capable artillery. It has been the practice of successive Governments not to give information on the cost of supporting individual weapon systems.

Armed Services (Manpower)

Mr. Churchill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the Regular, Reserve and total manpower of each of the armed services in the years 1950, 1960, 1970 and 1980; and what is his forecast for 1990.

Mr. Lee: The information is as follows:

thousands†*

	1950	*1960*	*1970*	*1980*
Royal Navy				
Regular	116·5	88·4	77·8	64·4
National Service	9·8	0·6	—	—
Reserve & Volunteer Forces	70·6‡	62·8‡	34·1	32·1
Total	196·9	151·8	111·9	96·5
Royal Marines				
Regular	12·0	8·8	8·3	7·6
National Service	0·6	—	—	—
Reserve & Volunteer Forces	‡—	‡—	2·3	3·0
Total	12·6	8·8	10·6	10·6
Army				
Regular	192·6	166·3	174·0	159·0
National Service	180·1	98·0	—	—
Reserve & Volunteer Forces	143·8	596·5	340·0	203·8
Total	516·7	860·8	514·0	362·8
Royal Air Force				
Regular	125·6	145·1	113·0	89·6
National Service	76·0	18·4	—	—
Reserve & Volunteer Forces	47·0	192·5	33·6	30·8
Total	248·6	356·0	146·6	120·4

Notes:—
* All figures at 1 April
† Figures exclude locally enlisted personnel
‡ Royal Marine figures included with Royal Navy

It is not the practice to give details of future targets.

RAF Pilots (Training)

Mr. Churchill asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the decision to suspend, until further notice, initial fast-jet low-level training for the Royal Air Force; and if he will assess its cost-effectiveness.

Mr. Lee: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers given to the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) on 23 January 1985, at column 454.

Vehicle Security

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will give top priority to considering the improvement of the security of vehicles and their personnel, carrying funds for the armed services.

Mr. Lee: A review of the arrangements for the security of cash in transit in the armed forces has already been set in hand in parallel with the continuing police investigations into the recent armed robbery in Scotland. Any recommended changes would be implemented as soon as possible.

Greenham Common

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence why his Department has stopped repairing the outer perimeter fence at Greenham common.

Mr. Stanley: Repairs continue to be carried out as judged necessary.

Nimrod Aircraft

15. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the long-term future of those British Aerospace workers now engaged on work on Nimrod; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: I have received many representations about the position at British Aerospace, Woodford, including those from my hon. Friend, and I am aware of the skills and experience of the production and design teams at British Aerospace, Woodford. I am sorry that I am not yet in a position to make an announcement about the major servicing of the Nimrod, but hope to do so shortly.

47. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he hopes to make an announcement about Nimrod major servicing.

Mr. Butler: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave on 9 January, at column *460*, to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara).

Space Weapons

17. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will meet his American counterpart for the purpose of dissuading the United States of America from further research into the use of nuclear weapons in space.

Mr. Heseltine: Research into weapons is permitted under existing US-Soviet treaties, and the Soviet Union is also conducting research in this field. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, however, deployment would, in view of treaty obligations, have to be a matter for negotiation.

Youth Training Scheme

18. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the results of the youth training scheme as it relates to the armed forces.

24. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the armed services youth training scheme.

Mr. Lee: The Armed Services youth training scheme continues to provide very worthwhile work and training opportunities for young unemployed people. The scheme has so far attracted over 5,000 applications, 1,400 of which have been accepted.

VE Day (40th Anniversary)

19. **Mr. Pawsey** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any arrangements have been made for the armed forces to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Victory in Europe day.

Mr. Stanley: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on 15 January, the form of a national commemoration is being considered, and an announcement will be made in due course.

Chemical Weapons

20. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the United Kingdom ceased to stockpile chemical weapons.

Mr. Heseltine: The United Kingdom unilaterally abandoned chemical weapons in the late 1950s.

43. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Government policy to counteract the chemical threat from the Warsaw pact.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) and for Billericay (Mr. Proctor).

44. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are any stocks of chemical weapons at United States bases in Great Britain.

Mr. Heseltine: No.

Chemical Weapons Research Establishment

21. **Mr. Gould** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the work of the chemical Weapons Research Establishment at Porton Down.

25. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the work of the chemical Weapons Research Establishment at Porton Down.

Mr. Lee: The primary role of the Chemical Defence Establishment is to carry out research and development in order to improve our defences against attack by chemical weapons. This involves the detection of chemical agents, the protection of personnel and equipment, and therapy. The establishment has other roles, including research to improve our protection against biological attack; the study of wounds with a view to improving medical understanding and hence treatment; work relating to the safe use of riot control agents; and research into screening and coloured smokes.

Cruise Missiles

22. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any recent discussion with the United States of America concerning the acquisition of sea-launched cruise missiles by Britain.

Mr. Butler: No.

29. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any cruise missiles are used for practice firing in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley: No United States cruise missile test-flying takes place in the United Kingdom.

30. **Mr. Maxton** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any recent discussion with the United States of America concerning the acquisition of sea-launched cruise missiles by Britain.

Mr. Butler: No.

32. **Miss Maynard** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any special security regulations will be needed on the roads between the proposed cruise missile base at Molesworth and its support base facility at Alconbury.

33. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any special security regulations will be needed on the roads between the proposed cruise missile site at Molesworth and its support facility at Alconbury.

Mr. Stanley: Appropriate security measures are always taken to protect military bases and equipment. It is not at present anticipated that any additional regulations will be needed on the roads between RAF Molesworth and RAF Alconbury.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any recent discussion with the United States of America concerning the acquisition of sea-launched cruise missiles by Britain.

Mr. Butler: No.

China

23. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet his counterpart in the People's Republic of China; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The Chinese Minister of National Defence, Mr. Zhang Aiping, has accepted in principle an invitation to visit the United Kingdom. No dates for the visit have yet been set. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces had talks with the Ministers when he visited Peking in April last year.

Falkland Islands

26. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what policy changes he proposes in relation to the defence of the Falklands in the light of recent reports of Argentine rearmament.

Mr. Stanley: I have nothing to add to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member on 16 January at column 123.

49. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any changes have been made during the past two months regarding deployment relating to the Falkland Islands; and what is the latest estimate of the annual cost of defending the Falklands.

Mr. Stanley: It would not be in the public interest to provide details of changes in deployments in the South Atlantic. For the latest estimate of the running costs of the Falklands garrison, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that that I gave to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 11 December 1984 at column *431*.

Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total defence expenditure on the Falklands Islands since the end of the war in 1982.

Mr. Stanley: The cost of the Falklands campaign and subsequent expenditure in 1982-83 was £780 million; it is not possible to disaggregate the campaign and post-campaign costs for that year. Provision of £624 million in 1983-84 and £684 million in 1984-85 was included in the defence budget to meet the extra costs of the Falklands garrison, the cost of replacing capital equipment lost and residual campaign costs.

Departmental Arms Control Unit

27. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the work carried out by the arms control unit in his Department.

Mr. Stanley: The defence arms control unit was formed on 2 January. It has combined and strengthened existing civilian and military expertise within the Ministry of Defence in this area. It provides the focus within the Ministry for advice to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on how best to support the Government's policy of balanced and verifiable arms control on which the lead responsibility continues to lie with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Devonshire and Dorset Regiment

28. **Mr. Speller** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the regimental headquarters of the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment will be retained within the county of Devon, despite any proposals to move other military establishments from Exeter.

Mr. Lee: We have no plans to move the regimental headquarters of the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment from Devon.

Conventional Weapons

31. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent commitments Her Majesty's Government have entered into with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in respect of increased expenditure on conventional weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: At the meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in December 1984 my right hon. Friend and his colleagues agreed to increase substantially the level of NATO infrastructure funding and to set in hand studies within NATO aimed at producing early proposals for improvements to conventional defence. The initial results of these studies are to be considered by NATO Ministers this spring. The Government's defence expenditure plans were set out in the public expenditure White Paper 1985 (Cmnd. 9428) published on 22 January.

Privatisation

38. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he has taken recently to privatise services within his Department.

Mr. Butler: My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) detailed the position as it stood last July in a reply to a question from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 10 July 1984, at column 453. Since then the royal ordnance factories have been established as a public limited company under the Companies Act and the following work has been, or is about to be, tranferred to contract:

Areas in which contracting out has taken place

Location of Service	*Service/Function*
A & AEE Boscombe Down	Air Traffic Control Equipment Support
RAF Quedgeley	Defence Accommodation Stores
APFS Woolwich	Warehousing
London	Printing
RMCS Shrivenham	Teaching and Research
MOD Navy	Warship Refitting
RAF St. Athan	Driver Training
Contracting out is about to take place as follows:	
Naval Proof and Experimental Test Centre Chorley	Proofing of Armament Stores
Kyle of Lochalsh	Further Contracting out at the British Underwater Test Evaluation Centre
DGME Bath/DGSW Portsdown	Technical Publications
RAF Linton-on-Ouse	Aircraft Servicing and Supply

Nuclear War (Prevention)

40. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the existing level of co-operation between international armed forces to prevent the unintentional or accidental outbreak of nuclear war.

41. **Mr. Michie** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the existing level of co-operation between international armed forces to prevent the unintentional or accidental outbreak of nuclear war.

Mr. Stanley: There are stringent safeguards to ensure that nuclear weapons would be launched only if a decision were taken at the highest political level. In addition, the United States, the United Kingdom and France all have agreements with the USSR both on reducing the risk of accidental nuclear war and on "hot line" communications. These were detailed in the reply given by my predecessor my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) on 14 December 1982 at column 119.

European Fighter Aircraft

45. **Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make an up to date statement on the proposal for the European fighter.

Mr. Butler: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins).

RAF Trainer Aircraft

46. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make a decision on the RAF trainer replacement.

Mr. Butler: I hope that a final decision between the options, which still include the possibility of refurbishing the Jet Provost, will be made in the spring.

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the maximum speed at maximum engine power which is required at sea level for a new Royal Air Force trainer aircraft;

(2) why the Royal Air Force specification for a new trainer has been changed from requiring a sea level speed of 240 knots to requiring a useable speed of 240 knots.

Mr. Butler: The specification for a future basic trainer aircraft for the Royal Air Force, which has not been changed, seeks a level speed of 240 knots at sea level with maximum continuous engine rating. Our evaluation of the revised bids will include, along with other important factors such as price and industrial implications, a detailed assessment, from a cost-benefit point of view, of the overall performance of each aircraft.

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, in reaching a final decision on the choice of aircraft for the new Royal Air Force basic trainer, he will take account of any Government subsidies enjoyed by the manufacturers of any of the overseas contenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: A full assessment of all the relevant operational, financial, industrial and other factors will be made before a final decision is taken.

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Defence what account he intends to take in his analysis of bids for the new Royal Air Force trainer of the extent to which aspects of the performance of the contenders exceed the minimum requirements of the specification.

Mr. Butler: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave my hon. Friend earlier today.

United States (Strategic Defence Initiative)

48. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has held in recent weeks with the United States administration over the future of its strategic defence initiative.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend has had no such consultations himself in recent weeks, but my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did, of course, discuss the matter when she met President Reagan at Camp David on 22 December.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of Tornado aircraft which have been produced; how many more are due to be produced in each of the next five years; and what is the estimated current price of each such aircraft.

Mr. Butler: The total number of Tornado aircraft on order for the United Kingdom is 385, of which 186 have been produced by 31 December 1984. Production is currently planned to continue as follows:

	Number
1985	36
1986	41
1987	44
1988	44
1989	34

The current estimated cost is £13·2 million for an interdiction strike aircraft and £16·6 million for the air defence variant.

Wintex

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the Wintex exercise schedule for February 1985 is to go ahead as planned.

Mr. Stanley: The United Kingdom will participate in Wintex-Cimex 85 as planned.

Service Personnel (Drugs)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish figures of the numbers of service personnel convicted of offences connected with drugs for each year since 1980, by service, rank and type of drug concerned.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Royal Ordanance Factories plc

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to sell his shareholding in the Royal Ordnance Factories plc.

Mr. Butler: As soon as it makes sound commercial sense so to do, but it is too early in the life of the company to determine a date.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Relocated Employees

Mr. Stern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer for how many years the Inland Revenue practice noted in SP1/85, "Income Tax: Treatment of Certain Payments to Relocated Employees", has been in operation; why no publicity was given to the practice at the time it was introduced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: Payments of the kind referred to in the Inland Revenue statement of practice, SP1/85, have never been regarded as taxable. As the Inland Revenue press release, issued on 18 January, makes clear, the practice had not previously appeared in the series of practice notes which were first introduced in 1978. It had, however, been mentioned in a number of commercial publications on tax matters, and there is no reason to believe that it was not known to employers who have provided the kind of payments covered by the practice.

More generally, since 1978 the Inland Revenue has published details of its practice in many areas. Given the great volume of the tax legislation, a judgment has to be made in each case, whether it is of sufficient importance and general interest to justify a published statement. The decision to publish SP1/85 was taken in the light of some earlier published comment, which seemed likely to create uncertainty about the correct position.

Public Sector Employment

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is *(a)* the total figure for United Kingdom public sector employment, *(b)* the figure for each principal Government Department and *(c)* the estimate for *(a)* and *(b)* for 1985; and what percentage of the total employed labour force was represented by the public sector in mid-1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Peter Rees: The public sector employment figures are as follows:

	Thousands	*Per cent. of total employed labour force*
1979	7,417	29·2
1980	7,356	29·1
1981	7,154	29·4
1982	6,992	29·1
1983	6,904	29·0
1984	6,825	28·4

Estimates for 1985 are not yet available, but the privatisation of British Telecom will have reduced public sector employment by 240,000 or 1 per cent. of the total employed labour force. The effect of previous privatisations is shown in the regular article "Employment in the public and private sectors" (*Economic Trends*, March 1984).

Numbers of civil servants in post at 1 October 1984 in Great Britain by principal Government Department can be found in summaries of the Civil Service quarterly staff returns. Targets for individual Departments for 1985 are shown in table 2.17 of Cmnd. 9428 (part II)—"The Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 to 1987-88", published on 22 January. Both these documents are available in the House of Commons Library.

Income Tax and National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Churchill asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is estimated to be the revenue likely to be raised in the current financial year from the lowest 10 per cent. of wage earners *(a)* in income tax and *(b)* in national insurance contributions.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Churchill asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in net take-home pay or benefit since 1979 of a married man with two children aged under 10 years who is *(a)* employed and in the lowest 10 per cent. of wage earners and *(b)* unemployed and in receipt of supplementary and other benefits.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

EC (Expenditure)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what percentage total European Economic Community expenditure has increased in each year since 1970.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

EC (Budget)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the proportion of the European Economic Community budget devoted to *(a)* agriculture, *(b)* regional development, *(c)* transport, *(d)* social fund, *(e)* energy *(f)* science and technology, *(g)* industry and *(h)* research and investment for each year since 1972.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Trustee Savings Banks

Mr. Craigen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received any outside legal opinions on the question of ownership of the trustee savings banks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Government are confident that the legal position is as stated in chapter 4 of the White Paper (Cmnd. 9415) published on 18 December. It is not normal practice to diclose from whom the Government may have sought legal advice.

Plant and Machinery (Balancing Allowances)

Mr. Grylls asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost of restoring the position prior to the Finance Act 1974 whereby balancing allowances were given in respect of unrelieved expenditure on plant and machinery disposed of during the accounting period.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *321*]: I regret that this information is not available.

Plant and Machinery (Writing Down Allowance)

Mr. Grylls asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost of changing the writing down allowance on plant and machinery from 25 per cent. on the reducing balance to *(a)* 25 per cent. straight line and *(b)* 20 per cent. straight line.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 January 1985, c. *365*]: The costs would build up over a number of years so that estimates depend crucially upon future levels of investment. Only very tentative estimates can be provided of the peak year cost which could be up to *(a)* £2 billion and *(b)* £1 billion.

Capital Transfer Tax

Mr. Cormack asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the yield from capital transfer tax in 1983-84.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *68*]: £599 million.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Heating Allowances

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the chief adjudication officer has now ruled that supplementary heating allowances will be paid in Scotland.

Mr. Whitney: I understand that the chief adjudication officer has decided not to advise local adjudication officers that the exceptionally severe weather condition in the regulations was satisfied in the week ending 26 January in any part of Great Britain. This decision was based on the criteria published in paragraphs 7426-7459 and appendix 19 of the S Manual (a copy of which is in the Library), which he applied using temperature data for that week from the Meteorological Office.

Medicines (Safety)

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what requirements he places on the Committee on Safety of Medicines to carry out independent investigation on products referred to it and to check the veracity of the manufacturer's research conclusions; and what facilities are made available to the committee to enable it to do so.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The committee is not required to carry out medical or scientific tests of its own on products referred to it. An applicant for a product licence must submit to the licensing authority, amongst other information, copies of reports and evaluations of any experimental and biological studies and of any clinical, preclinical or laboratory studies of the product which are relevant to the assessment of its safety, efficacy and quality, together with references to relevant publications. Where the licensing authority seeks the advice of the committee on applications the committee, supported by its professional and administrative secretariat, assesses all submitted reports, studies and publications. It also considers all other evidence which it believes might bear on the issue and can consult other experts. Where, as a result, the committee is not satisfied with the evidence submitted, it can specify what further studies or data it would require to enable it to give further consideration to the application. Similar procedures are followed by the committee if new evidence comes to light which suggests that variation or revocation of a licence may be necessary. for example, on grounds of safety.

Unemployed Persons

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will seek to amend the relevant legislation to allow those who take up seasonal work for more than three successive seasons to claim unemployment benefit at other times provided that they are properly registered as available for work at their local employment offices.

Mr. Whitney: A seasonal worker may receive unemployment benefit during his off season, but only if he satisfies a condition additional to those which all unemployment benefit claimants have to meet. This condition is that he has had, or can reasonably expect to obtain, a substantial amount of employment during that off season. This condition is designed to ensure that unemployment benefit is not paid to those seasonal workers who are not in employment during their off seasons. There is no practical way of distinguishing between the voluntary and involuntary seasonal worker —registration at an employment office would not be a test in itself. We therefore have no proposals for altering these arrangements. I would add that these regulations do not apply to supplementary benefit; an unemployed seasonal worker can receive benefit if otherwise eligible, though there are special rules about income earned during the on season.

Yellow Fever Vaccinations

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the places in the Wessex health region where yellow fever vaccinations are available.

Mr. John Patten: The following centres in the Wessex health region are designated to provide yellow fever vaccinations for members of the public:

The Basingstoke district hospital, the Avebury child health clinic, Bournemouth, and the central health clinic in Southampton.

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the present provision of yellow fever vaccinations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Yes, but there are difficulties, which we hope to resolve shortly.

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give further consideration to allowing yellow fever vaccinations to be carried out by general practitioners who wish to provide such a service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Possible improvements to present arrangements are currently under review and if these prove practicable we hope to announce some changes shortly.

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many yellow fever vaccinations have been carried out in each health region each year since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally.

Foot Health

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what study his Department has made of the findings of the survey of foot health conducted by the Wessex health authority; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have read the first volume of the report with interest and look forward to seeing the second. It will be for health authorities themselves to consider whether, in their own circumstances, any action is required. I understand the authors are considering how the report can best be given wider circulation.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what health education provision exists in relation to foot care for *(a)* children, *(b)* pre-retirement adults, *(c)* the elderly and *(d)* women; and if he is satisfied with existing provision.

Mr. John Patten: Foot health education is carried out by local National Health Service health education units and the Health Education Council. Leaflets, foot care education programmes and seminars feature among the initiatives sponsored locally. The council has funded studies aimed at developing the health education and preventive roles of the professions allied to medicine, including chiropodists, is developing a programme of education for health in old age which includes the maintenance of mobility, and produces leaflets on foot health.

Chiropodists

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many chiropodists are employed by the National Health Service; if he considers the number to be adequate; and if he has had any representations to the contrary.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There were 2,392 whole-time equivalent chiropodists employed in the National Health Service in England at 30 September 1983. Figures for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for those countries. There is undoubtedly some shortage of chiropodists in the NHS and we occasionally receive representations about the adequacy of particular local provision.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has given any consideration to the evidence submitted by the executive director of John Groom's Association for the Disabled to the Social Security Advisory Committee about the proposals for changing board and lodgings payments of supplementary benefit; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: We shall be giving full consideration to all the representations submitted to the Social Security Advisory Committee before finalising our proposals.

Women Patients (Treatment)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the National Health Service units, centres, clinics and hospitals where women patients can be guaranteed treatment by female staff; and which services are provided in each of these places.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this sort of detailed local information centrally.

Departmental Publications

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what sums have been expended by his Department on documents and publications issued free of charge to *(a)* doctors, *(b)* pharmacists and *(c)* other persons or bodies in each of the last two years; and what were the sums expended in (i) 1970, (ii) 1975 and (iii) 1980, in cash and at constant prices taking 1970 as the base.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Resettlement Units

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current annual cost of the Camberwell resettlement unit; what is the cost of other such units; what plans he has for these units; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The information about the cost of Camberwell resettlement unit and the other units is as follows:

Annual expenditure 1983-84 (latest available figure, excluding major capital works)

	£
Camberwell	2,549,447
Brighton	203,490
West End House, Soho	554,016
Pound Lodge, Willesden	398,651
Lancelot Andrewes House, Southwark	389,615
Camden (women only)	300,705
Cedars Lodge, Battersea	515,020
Spur House, Lewisham*	837,801
Bridge House, Notting Hill*	538,368
Alvaston, Derby*	371,221
Fazakerley, Liverpool*	404,688
Bishopbriggs, Glasgow*	495,744

	£
Leeds*	436,020
Leicester*	452,907
Newbury*	359,601
Plawsworth, Co. Durham*	500,511
Crown Quay Lodge, Sittingbourne*	376,165
Southampton*	456,464
South Wales, Nr. Bridgend*	334,245
Walkden, Manchester*	489,182
West Midlands, Stourbridge*	481,750
Winterbourne, Bristol*	325,402
Woodhouse, Sheffield*	437,793

* Denotes combined resettlement unit and re-establishment centre.

We hope to make a statement about the future of resettlement units soon.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what date he intends that the Camberwell resettlement unit will be closed by his Department.

Mr. Whitney: Camberwell resettlement unit will close on 27 September 1985.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total cost in 1983-84 to his Department of maintaining the 23 resettlement units provided by his Department; and what is his estimate of the cost per capita for each occupant of the units.

Mr. Whitney: The total cost of maintaining the 23 resettlement units in 1983-84 was £12,208,806. This includes the cost of re-establishment centres where the sites are shared. The average annual cost per occupied bed in 1983-84 was estimated to be £6,450.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate how many persons staying in the 23 resettlement units provided by his Department, on the night of 30 November 1984, had formerly been an inpatient of a mental hospital or a mental handicap hospital; and how many of the persons staying at the Camberwell resettlement unit on that night had formerly been in such hospitals.

Mr. Whitney: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinsion asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many men, and how many women, are currently living in his Department's reception centres; and if he will give comparable figures for each year since 1974;

(2) how many persons stayed in the 23 resettlement units provided by his Department on the night of 30 November 1984; how many of those were eligible for housing accommodation from a local housing authority by virtue of being vulnerable through old-age, mental illness or handicap, physical disability or pregnancy, under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977; and what arrangements exist between each of the 23 resettlement units and local housing authorities for the rehousing of those homeless people who are vulnerable under the Act;

(3) how many beds were provided in each of the 23 resettlement units during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and what was the average rate of occupancy for each unit during the same period;

(4) during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available, how many individuals were provided, when leaving each of the 23 resettlement units, with accommodation under the following categories: *(a)* local authority tenancies, *(b)* housing association tenancies and *(c)* local authority part III accommodation.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Heart Transplants

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why the expert evaluation on the costs and benefits of heart transplants will not be published before the early spring when it was to have been received by him at the end of 1984.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The report was submitted to the Department's chief scientist at the end of 1984 and, in accordance with the normal practice of peer review, referred to external scientific referees. Their comments, together with those from within the Department, were discussed with the authors who are considering whether they wish to make any final minor revisions before the report is published.

Hospitals (Ethical Committees)

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospitals have ethical committees to consider research projects before they commence.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Depo Provera

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether, in view of the World Health Organisation's preliminary results of its study on the long-term effects of Depo Provera, he has given further consideration to the long-term licence for Depo Provera; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We shall consider the full text of the preliminary results, and the final report of the study, when they are available.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has received a copy of "Families Rent Apart", published by the Child Poverty Action Group and Youthaid on the effect on families with working children living at home of the reductions in the parents' entitlement to housing benefit; if he will meet the authors of the pamphlet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: We have not received a copy of the pamphlet and we have no plans to meet the pamphlet's authors.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the best available estimate of the number of families whose entitlement to housing benefit has been reduced as a result of the introduction in April 1984 of reductions for parents whose children are working and living at home; and what is the best available estimate of the number of families now claiming housing benefit who have working children living at home.

Mr. Whitney: The information is not available in the precise form requested. The table gives estimates relating

to households containing non-dependants aged 18 to pension age affected by the increases in the housing benefit non-dependant deductions in April 1984.

Thousands, Great Britain

	Standard cases	*Certificated cases (Those in receipt of supplementary benefit)*
Household contains one or more non-dependants aged:		
18-20	80	225
21-pension age	275	

An estimated 115,000 households were affected by the introduction of a non-dependant deduction for 16-17 year olds from November 1984. More recent information relating to the numbers of households affected by these non-dependant deductions is not available.

Homeless Persons

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many day-care centres for single homeless people there are; and what financial support they received in 1983-84 from his Department.

Mr. Jonn Patten: The Department does not hold any statistical figures indicating the number of day care centres for single homeless people and there is no record of these centres receiving financial support for the year 1983-84 from this Department.

Epilim

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will take steps to secure the inclusion in the British data sheet for Epilim of the psychiatric adverse reactions currently included in the United States Food and Drugs Agency data sheet;

(2) if he will take steps to secure the inclusion in the British data sheet for Epilim of the precautions regarding infertility currently included in the United States Food and Drugs Agency data sheet.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *324-5*]: For prescription medicines such as Epilim, the product licence holder is responsible for producing a data sheet which must state, amongst other things, any essential warnings that the licensing authority included on the licence. If subsequently it is considered that additional warnings are necessary on grounds of safety, these can be added either voluntarily by the licence holder or, under the procedure of the Medicines Act, compulsorily by the licensing authority. The warnings issued by licensing authorities in other countries are taken fully into account by the licensing authority but are not in themselves conclusive grounds for altering the United Kingdom licence.

The licence holder of Epilim is currently reviewing the psychiatric adverse reactions reported in association with Epilim and, in the light of the evidence available and in consultation with the licensing authority, will be considering amendments to its data sheet.

Neither the licensing authority nor the licence holder has evidence of any effects on fertility that would justify an amendment to the data sheet.

Invalidity Pension

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applications for *(a)* non-contributory invalidity pension and *(b)* housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension were received in each month during 1984; how many of each were successful; and how many applications for housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension failed on account of (i) the incapacity test and (ii) the household duties test.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *326*]: I regret that one of the figures given in my reply was incorrect. Over the last year 977 married women claiming housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension failed the incapacity test.

NHS (Achievements and Objectives)

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list the principal achievements of the National Health Service in 1984;

(2) what are his principal objectives for the National Health Service in 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 January 1985, c. *169-70*]: Although detailed figures for 1984 are not yet available to us, we expect the substantial increases of the previous five years in the number of patients treated in England to have been maintained. We also expect the service to have achieved further improvements in the quality of care, particularly for our priority groups — the mentally ill, the mentally handicapped, and the elderly. I regret that no precise measure of the growth of the service will be available until we have the full figures.

Planned expenditure in the National Health Service is up in 1984-85 by more than 7 per cent. over the previous year. Our latest figures show that in the year to March 1984 hospital inpatient waiting lists fell by some 33,000. In the six months following the launch in February 1984 of a new campaign on kidney donation, kidney transplants rose by 40 per cent. over the equivalent period in 1983. We funded improvements in primary care in inner cities and promoted better joint planning of local services among the statutory and voluntary bodies and the development of community care. Health authorities were asked to take urgent action to improve services for drug misusers. In line with our policy on prevention, over 30 districts which were previously without a health education service established one. Also in 1984, seven major capital schemes, costing £5 million or more each and providing a total of 1,380 new beds and full supporting services, were completed and 11 major schemes were started on site.

The service's drive for better management continued in 1984. Of the 13 general managers now appointed by regional health authorities, 12 were in post by the end of the year; 63 of the 192 district health authorities and five of the eight special health authorities had also appointed their general managers. Progress was made in the development of management budgeting in four demonstration districts. Latest figures indicate that NHS manpower was lower at 30 September 1984 than a year previously whilst we expect the number of patients treated to have continued to rise. Health authorities identified current expenditure savings of about 1 per cent. in 1984-85 through cost improvement programmes which released

about £100 million to improve patient services. We also published six reports of Rayner efficiency scrutinies carried out by staff in the service which identified potential recurrent savings of up to £40 million a year plus substantial scope for one-off savings. Following instructions to health authorities in September 1983, health authorities are making very worthwhile savings by putting their domestic, catering and laundry services out to competitive tender. The savings achieved by all these various means release resources for better patient care.

In 1985 we shall be looking for these encouraging trends of the past year to continue and for further improvements in the quantity and quality of service provided to the public. The Government have already announced that we shall be spending over £600 million more on the NHS in England in 1985-86. We shall also be examining carefully health authorities' plans for service development and for the better use of financial, manpower and capital resources. We shall be publishing a Green Paper on the development of primary care services. We shall continue to promote joint planning and the care in the community programme. We hope that by the end of 1985 all districts will have, or have access to, a health education service. Seven more major capital schemes are expected to be completed in 1985.

We shall be looking to health authorities: to complete the appointment of general managers at regional and district level and the revised management structures to complement this and to carry forward the establishment of the general management function into hospitals and other units; to identify an increased level of savings through their cost improvement programmes; and to complete a further round of efficiency scrutinies. We intend no overall rise in NHS manpower but will achieve growth and improvement in services by better productivity. We shall be giving priority to improving training for management in the service and to bettering the quality and use of management information. Management budgets will be extended to a further limited number of demonstration districts. The new family practitioner committees, directly accountable to my right hon. Friend, will come into being in 1985 and we shall be looking to them to play a major part in promoting and improving primary health care.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 30 January 1985

ENVIRONMENT

Empty Dwellings

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the percentage of empty dwellings in *(a)* the public sector, *(b)* the voluntary sector, *(c)* the private sector and *(d)* those owned and controlled by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Gow: The available estimates for April 1984, derived from English local authorities' housing investment programme returns, are as follows:

	per cent.
Local authorities	2·3
Housing associations	3·6
Other public sector	6·8
Total public sector	2·7
Private Sector	4·2

"Other public sector" includes housing owned by new towns, Government Departments, county councils and other public agencies.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount of the Housing Corporation's gross expenditure in 1983-84 was accounted for by value added tax.

Mr. Gow: £20 million.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the £30 million value added tax paid from the Housing Corporation's 1984-85 gross expenditure was accounted for by the Budget changes incorporated into the Finance Act 1984; and if resources to the corporation were increased to take account of the changes.

Mr. Gow: It is estimated that the extension of VAT to building alterations will account for £15 million of the Housing Corporation's gross expenditure in 1984-85. The Government have given approval for an equivalent amount of index-linked private finance to be used for shared ownership projects in 1984-85.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many jobs created in the London Docklands Development Corporation area since July 1981 have moved into existing building or buildings commenced prior to July 1981.

Sir George Young: Of the 3,619 new jobs created in the LDDC area since July 1981—excluding 574 Inner Urban Areas Act related jobs created over the same period — 2,374 are in existing buildings or buildings commenced prior to July 1981, a substantial proportion of which have been renovated since this date.

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *484*, if he will give the date of the meeting of the London Docklands Development Corporation at which the application for a grant or contract to Inter-Action was approved; and what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that that decision was in accordance with the recommendation of the House of Lords Select Committee on the London Docklands Development Corporation Order, Paragraph 8.7 (HL 198 of 1980) and with his reply to the hon. Member for Newham, South of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *473*.

Sir George Young: I shall answer this question shortly.

Local Authority Expenditure (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what the outturn of gross revenue expenditure and income was for each London borough and the city of London by service and for all services in 1982-83.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall answer this question shortly.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what the level of outturn capital expenditure, loan charges and net outstanding debt was in the city of London and each London borough in 1982-83.

Mr. Waldegrave: This information requested is as follows:

City of London and London boroughs: Gross capital expenditure loan charges and outstanding debt 1982-83

£ million

	*Gross capital expenditure**	*Loan charges†*	*Total debt at 31 March 1983‡*
Inner London Boroughs			
City of London	14·3	32·4	236·1
Camden	37·3	66·8	505·8
Greenwich	24·7	41·5	254·1
Hackney	57·8	47·5	355·2
Hammersmith and Fulham	36·8	27·3	199·8
Islington	71·7	73·0	524·0
Kensington and Chelsea	30·7	19·3	299·2
Lambeth	50·1	70·8	548·5
Lewisham	31·9	44·9	295·1
Southwark	60·1	83·1	492·1
Tower Hamlets	17·6	20·4	166·7
Wandsworth	33·2	45·7	303·2
Westminster	28·7	31·3	220·6
Outer London Boroughs			
Barking and Dagenham	7·9	13·7	89·5
Barnet	13·5	21·4	168·1
Bexley	14·6	11·0	100·7
Brent	38·2	40·5	312·0
Bromley	15·8	15·5	133·8
Croydon	15·8	16·6	139·5
Ealing	26·6	29·6	229·2
Enfield	13·6	23·9	187·1
Haringey	50·4	42·2	340·6
Harrow	12·6	12·6	97·8
Havering	9·7	13·8	111·5
Hillingdon	22·8	30·5	220·7
Hounslow	20·4	24·2	210·8
Kingston-upon-Thames	8·9	8·1	62·3
Merton	13·2	18·0	134·6
Newham	27·5	41·2	353·1

	Gross capital expenditure*	Loan charges†	Total debt at 31 March 1983‡
Redbridge	9·6	11·3	110·0
Richmond-upon-Thames	8·8	9·1	74·2
Sutton	10·3	10·8	89·7
Waltham Forest	19·4	23·4	177·0

* Based on outturn returns provided by local authorities. Gross capital expenditure is all capital expenditure charged to capital accounts or charged direct to revenue or other funds. Where an authority undertakes agency work for another authority the expenditure is included by both authorities.

† Based on outturn returns provided by local authorities. Loan charges consist of repayments of principal and interest and include loan charges paid to GLC in respect of transferred dwellings.

‡ Local authorities' own debt whether administered by themselves or not.

Source: CIPFA "Capital Expenditure and Debt Financing Statistics 1982-83".

Unitary Development (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, in making his decision to replace the structure/local plan system in London with unitary plans, what information he had before him concerning *(a)* the anticipated duration of the new planning processes compared with the existing system, *(b)* the number of staff required in the London boroughs and his own department and *(c)* the costs of preparing, consulting on and publicising and inquiring into 33 unitary development plans; and if he will place this information on costs and organisation in the Library.

Sir George Young: In considering the new planning arrangements for London, the Government took into account the time taken to process the Greater London development plan. The introduction of unitary development plans will build on the extensive experience of London boroughs and will provide a simpler process for them than separate procedures for structure and local plans. Although some additional departmental staff may be needed, these will be met from within the overall planned allocations of the Department. Staffing for the London boroughs themselves are matters for them to decide. As the scale of work for the introduction of unitary development plans will vary from area to area, it would have been inappropriate to undertake the detailed calculations referred to.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many respondents to the consultation paper, "Streamlining the Cities: Housing", proposed that the nomination rights to dwellings in a Londonwide mobility scheme and in the Greater London council's seaside and country homes be vested in the Secretary of State.

Sir George Young: The consultation paper proposed that voluntary arrangements should be established to maintain opportunities for mobility and for access to the seaside and country homes. In response to comments made by consultees, we have announced our intention that both should instead be the subject of statutory schemes.

Air Pollution

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the review of air pollution control legislation will be completed.

Mr. Waldegrave: The timing of completion of the review will depend on the response to a consultation paper on air pollution control legislation which we intend to publish later this year.

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be able to implement the findings of the review of air pollution control legislation.

Mr. Waldegrave: The findings of the review, including the outcome of the proposed consultation exercise, will themselves determine the timing and manner of implementation.

Stornoway Airport

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people have been employed in construction work at Stornoway airport during phase 1 of the redevelopment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation base; how many of the construction force were local; and what types of employment the local workers participated in.

Sir George Young: Numbers varied as works progressed. When construction was in full swing between April and June 1984, the labour force totalled 131, of whom 91 were engaged locally. These included carpenters and bricklayers, plant operators, electricians, asphalt gang labourers and site staff.

Local Authorities (Legal Proceedings)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which have commenced, or have given notice of their intention to commence, legal proceedings against him in respect of the administration of block grant, expenditure guidance and grant holdback whether by way of an action for judicial review, for a declaration or otherwise since 1 April 1981; and in each instance if he will summarise the grounds upon which the actions were stated to have been brought and, where appropriate, the outcome.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The information is as follows:

Authority	Grounds	Outcome
London boroughs of Brent, Camden, Hackney, Hounslow, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest	Decisions to reduce 1980-81 rate support grant unlawful	Decision quashed on ground that Secretary of State had failed to hear late representations

Authority	Grounds	Outcome
London boroughs of Camden and Hackney	Further decisions on 1980-81 rate support grant unlawful	Application for judicial review, and Camden's appeal dismissed
London borough of Hackney	1984-85 expenditure guidance unlawful	Heard March 1984; application for judicail review dismissed. Appeal to be heard
Leicester City Council	Notice of 1985-86 rate limit invalid	Application for judicial review dismissed
Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council	1985-86 expenditure guidance unlawful	Intention to proceed notified
Derbyshire County Council	1985-86 expenditure guidance unlawful	To be heard
London boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham	Secretary of State misdirected himself in refusing disregard	To be heard
London borough of Lambeth	1984-85 expenditure guidance unlawful	To be heard
Nottinghamshire County Council	1985-86 expenditure guidance and 1984-85 grant-related expenditure unlawful	To be heard

Inner City Partnership Funds

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the projected totals of inner city partnership funds to be allocated for 1985-86, by authority, listing separately the public and voluntary sectors.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown) on 14 January at columns 1-2. Until detailed inner area programmes have been agreed for the partnerships, I cannot estimate the proportions going to the different authorities or the public and voluntary sectors.

Local Government Staff (Salaries)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the value of salaries for local government employees for 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Waldegrave: The aggregate pay bill for local government white collar and manual employees in 1982-83 was £6,310 million. In 1983-84, it was £6,697 million. These figures exclude teachers, lecturers, police and firemen.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will provide an analysis of the figures given in table 3.8.7, of Cmnd. 9428 between the two urban development corporations;

(2) if he will extend table 3.8.8 of Cmnd. 9428 to 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Sir George Young: An analysis of the figures published in table 3.8.7 of Cmnd. 9428 — "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 to 1987-88"— is attached for the years up to 1985-86. Details of the allocations for 1986-87 and 1987-88 are not yet available.

*£ million**

	1981-82 outturn	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85 forecast outturn*	*1985-86*
LDDC					
Public expenditure provision	32	41	62	55	51
Estimated receipts (net of corporation tax)	—	—	0·2	6·8	8·9
TOTAL RESOURCES	32	41	62	62	60
MDC					
Public expenditure provision	6	21	32	30	29
Estimated receipts (net of corporation tax)	—	—	0·1	0·2	0·7
TOTAL RESOURCES	6	21	32	30	29

* Totals may not sum due to roundings.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the 1985-86 housing investment programme allocation for Leeds metropolitan district council is intended to cover the cost of repair and improvement of prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend takes account of many factors in determining individual authorities' HIP allocations. It is not possible to identify a precise amount which relates to the need for expenditure on prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the 1985-86 housing investment programmes allocation is intended to meet the costs of repairs and improvement of prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings.

Sir George Young: It is not possible to say how much of the total housing investment programme resources were allocated to meet the costs of repairs and improvements to

PRC dwellings since HIP allocations to individual authorities are determined partly by the generalised needs index (GNI) and partly by the local discretionary element, which enables my right hon. Friend to take into account a whole range of local factors, including, where appropriate, the need for expenditure on prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings. The defective dwellings indicator, which was introduced for the 1985-86 allocations to reflect the need for expenditure on prefabricated reinforced concrete houses, takes up 3 per cent. of total GNI.

Manchester City Council—Manchester Ship Canal Company

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has had from the leader of Manchester city council about his recent public statement in which he questioned the rationale of the continued connection between Manchester city council and the Manchester Ship Canal Company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have received representations from Councillor Stringer, and in reply have reiterated my view that, whatever the long-standing relationship between his council and the Ship Canal Company, it needs to be reviewed from time to time in the light of new circumstances. I look for such a review to take place in the context of the local study on the future of the upper reaches of the ship canal which is in hand at the moment. The city council and the canal company are both taking part in that study, and I understand that a report is due later this year.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Rowe asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average length of time now taken by his Department *(a)* between the lodging and the hearing of planning appeals and *(b)* between the hearing and the decision.

Mr. Macfarlane: Statistics of the average times taken for planning appeals are not kept; instead, median times are used. The median times for Secretary of State inquiries during October 1984 were 27 weeks from receipt to inquiry and approximately 18 weeks from inquiry to decision. For inspectors inquiries, the median was 22 weeks from receipt to Inquiry and five weeks from Inquiry to decision; and for inspectors informal hearings, 20 weeks from start to hearing and four weeks from hearing to decision. Only 16 per cent. of appeals are now dealt with by inquiries; the remainder are dealt with by written representations, which on the whole is a faster procedure.

Radio Stations

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications have been submitted to local planning authorities relating to cellular radio base stations; how many of these have been approved and refused, respectively; and how many are pending.

Mr. Macfarlane: Local planning authorities' quarterly returns to us on planning applications made to them do not provide information at this level of detail on the nature of the development concerned.

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to require communications systems companies to obtain planning permission before erecting radio transmission masts with ancillary buildings and fenced compounds.

Mr. Macfarlane: Most such developments aleady require specific planning permission. I have no plans to relax this requirement in the case of ancillary buildings or compounds, but I propose certain relaxations in respect of some types of minor telecommunications apparatus. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 25 October 1984, at columns 689-90, which outlined our intentions in this area.

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the environmental safeguards relating to the erection of radio transmission masts and ancillary buildings, particularly in green belt areas.

Mr. Macfarlane: Yes. Radio masts installations generally require specific planning permission, and the local planning authority dealing with an application will have regard to the normal considerations, including green belt policies. Our policy for the protection of the green belt was reaffirmed in circular 14/84, and remains unchanged. Under our current proposals to amend the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1977, some small masts will not require specific planning applications, but telecommunications operators will be required to abide by conditions in their telecommunications licences designed to safeguard the environment.

Water Authorities

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr, *Official Report*, 25 January, column 555, on what date the letter was sent to the chairman of the English water authorities; and on what date the order he referred to was laid before the House.

Mr. Macfarlane: The dates on the letters were 7 January—all except Thames—and 23 January—Thames. The order was laid on 24 January.

Public Sector Housing Management

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to improve the professional quality of public sector housing management.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friend intends to provide funding, starting with the next academic year, for up to 15 post-graduate studentships a year in housing management. The studentships will be available in England and Wales for approved full-time post-graduate courses of two years' duration, which meet the professional standards of the Institute of Housing.

The new diploma of housing course at the London School of Economics meets these criteria and will be approved by my right hon. Friend for the studentships. It has been developed in consultation with the Institute of Housing and will, in our view, contribute to raising standards in public housing management. The first year will be largely academic in content; most of the second year will be spent working with selected housing authorities.

The studentships will provide for maintenance and fees in the first year, and normally for fees only in the second year, when the students are working with the housing authorities.

My right hon. Friend will give careful consideration to making studentships available for further courses which may be developed and meet the criteria.

Norfolk Broads (Livestock Grazing)

Mr. Ryder asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statment on the proposal for an experimental scheme to support livestock grazing in the Broads area.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Yes. I am pleased to announce that approval in principle has now been given for a three-year experimental scheme in the Broads to be operated by the Countryside Commission, in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, under which payments will be made to farmers and landowners who agree to keep their land in grazing use. The scheme will be introduced in time for the 1985 grazing season. I have already announced, on 27 November 1984, at column 793, an addition of £2 million to the Countryside Commission's grant-in-aid for 1985-86, part of which will be available to finance half the costs of the scheme. The remaining half will be met by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I believe that this proposal presents an excellent opportunity to integrate the interests of agriculture and conservation in the Broads area and should prove a flexible and effective means towards safeguarding this nationally important and unique landscape.

Home Improvement Grants

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list giving the names of those local authorities known by his Department as having suspended discretionary home improvement grants during 1984; and what representations he has received so far concerning the likelihood of these authorities lifting their moratoriums for the financial year 1985-86.

Sir George Young: Local authorities are responsible for administering the home improvement grant system and the Department does not collate or publish information on the grant approval practices of individual authorities. My right hon. Friend has received no representations about the specific policies of individual local authorities in 1985-86.

Prefabricated Reinforced Concrete Dwellings

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department will conclude its discussions with the National House Building Council to establish agreed standards of repairs to the various types of prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings designated under the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Mr. Gow: The National House Building Council—NHBC—has agreed that it will set up arrangements under which

(1) methods of repairing prefabricated reinforced concrete (PRC) houses of types designated under the Housing Defects Act will be assessed;

(2) works of repair by an approved method will be inspected while they are in progress; and

(3) a warranty for two years in respect of the repairs will be given by the designer or repairer and guaranteed by the NHBC, which will then provide insurance in respect of the repairs for a further eight years.

The details of the arrangements are being finalised in consultation with the relevant Departments.

From discussions with representatives of building societies, I am confident that houses repaired under these arrangements will generally be acceptable to building societies as security for lending, subject to the usual requirements when a society considers lending on mortgage in any particular case.

As soon as the arrangements are finalised, the Department intends to consult the local authority associations urgently and following that to write to local authorities to inform them of the arrangements and of how they will affect the administration of the scheme of assistance under the Act. The Scottish and Welsh Offices will be taking similar action. But I expect that it will be possible for methods of repair to be received for appraisal shortly, leading to approval for warranty as soon thereafter as practicable.

Housing Defects Act

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what discussions he has had with building societies about the operation of the Housing Defects Act; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what undertakings he has received from building societies about the mortgageability of houses in categories named in the Housing Defects Act;

(3) what information he has as to those categories of housing which, prior to the passing of the Housing Defects Act, were difficult to mortgage on account of structural defects, real or potential, and which have become mortgageable since the passing of the Act.

Mr. Gow [*pursuant to his answer*, 20 December 1984, c. *263*]: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I have given today to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price).

Prefabricated Reinforced Concrete Dwellings

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of discussions between his Department and the Building Societies Association relating to the future mortgageability of prefabricated reinforced concrete homes designated under the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Mr. Gow [*pursuant to his answer*, 9 January 1985, c. *474*]: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I have given today to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price).

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if Her Majesty's Government will take steps to underwrite a warranty scheme for homes covered by the Housing Defects Act;

(2) if any progress has been made on an approved warranty scheme for homes covered by the Housing Defects Act.

Mr. Gow [*pursuant to his answer*, 9 January 1985, c. *480*]: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given today to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price).

Falkland Islands

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest expected date of completion of the Falkland Islands airport including the ancillary Army provision; and how this compares with the original date.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his answer*, 28 January 1985, c. *4*]: I expect the main runway to be ready for use in April 1985 and the remaining airfield facilities by about February 1986. These dates are the same as those announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 27 June 1983 at column 345. The further construction work at Mount Pleasant, which consists largely of facilities for the Army and which was announced on 21 September 1984, should be complete in early 1987.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest estimate of the cost of the Falkland Islands airport and ancillary provision; and how this compares with the original estimate.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his answer*, 28 January 1985, c. *4*]: As announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 21 September 1984, the original, June 1983 cost of the airfield works at £215 million was increased to £250 million mainly to provide for joint service facilities in the interests of overall economy. At the same time, he announced the award of new contracts to the value of £119 million to enable the garrison to be concentrated at the Mount Pleasant site. The latest costs of these two elements are respectively £260 million and £116 million. All the estimates for the airfield works include £10 million for MOD supplied navigation aids and communication equipment.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Jury Vetting

Mr. Dalyell asked the Attorney-General if he will list his powers to authorise the vetting of juries in criminal cases.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 28 January 1985.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Attorney-General if he will list the criteria that are applied in the vetting of juries in criminal cases when such vetting is authorised by him.

The Attorney-General: I issued guidelines on this matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions on 31 July 1980. A copy is in the Library of the House. The guidelines are strictly observed.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Attorney-General on what grounds a member of a jury panel would not be permitted to serve on a jury following vetting authorised by him in a criminal case.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 9 of the guidelines that I issued to the Director of Public Prosecutions on 31 July 1980. A copy of those guidelines is in the Library of the House.

Public Records

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Attorney-General whether the Lord Chancellor will now take steps to implement those aspects of the report of the Wilson committee relating to public records designed to reduce obstacles to research in some areas of contemporary history.

The Attorney-General: In a White Paper (Cmnd. 8204, March 1982) the Government listed those recommendations of the Wilson committee that were acceptable. Most have already been or are now being implemented; others will be when resources permit or a suitable legislative opportunity occurs.

TRANSPORT

Seat Belts

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Transport when the Government will be responding to comments about rear seat belts for cars in the Transport Committee's recently published report on road safety; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I am considering the report and will respond as soon as possible.

Coal Industry Dispute (British Rail)

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated loss of revenue caused to British Rail up to 15 January as a direct consequence of the miners' dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Ridley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 28 January at column *11*.

Train Crash (Micheldever)

Mr. John Browne asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the circumstances surrounding the train crash at Popham tunnel, Micheldever, near Winchester, on the morning of Sunday 27 January.

Mr. Ridley: Shortly before 5 am on Saturday 26 January a Bournemouth to Woking electric multiple-unit train conveying railway staff ran into a minor chalk slip near Micheldever. The train's collector shoes, which collect traction current from the third rail, were damaged and the train immobilised. A diesel-electric locomotive was sent from Worting junction, near Basingstoke, to assist the train, but collided heavily with it. The driver of the locomotive and his assistant were trapped in the cab and suffered leg injuries. Four BR employees and a Post Office sorter, all passengers on the train, were treated in hospital for minor injuries. An inquiry will be held by the Railway Inspectorate. Evidence will be heard in public and there will be a published report.

Public Transport (Revenue Support)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he has given to the metropolitan county councils under the provisions of the Transport Act 1983 about protected levels of revenue support to public transport in the next financial year.

Mr. Ridley: I have given these authorities guidance under the provisions of section 4(5) of the Transport Act

1983 that the maximum amounts of revenue grants which it would in my opinion be appropriate for them to make in the year beginning 1 April 1985 are as follows:

Authority	*Protected Expenditure Level (PEL) £ million*
Greater Manchester	45
Merseyside	39
South Yorkshire	32
Tyne and Wear	21
West Midlands	27
West Yorkshire	41

EMPLOYMENT

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Employment how long applicants for the enterprise allowance scheme in *(a)* the Huddersfield area, *(b)* the Kirklees area, *(c)* West Yorkshire and *(d)* the Yorkshire and Humberside region currently have to wait on average before being granted an appointment at the initial information seminar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The frequency of information seminars is determined by the level of demand, and in Huddersfield and Kirklees, West Yorkshire and the Yorkshire and Humberside region potential applicants for the enterprise allowance scheme have on average to wait no more than one week to attend a seminar.

I am pleased that as a result of the increase in the rate of take-on from 1 May 1984 we have been able to eliminate the delays that were facing potential applicants earlier in the year. This successful and worthwhile scheme will be further extended on 1 April 1985 to assist up to another 62,500 unemployed people in 1985-86 to create their own jobs and start up in business.

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in *(a)* the Yorkshire and Humberside region, *(b)* West Yorkshire and *(c)* the employment division area covering Huddersfield are currently in receipt of the enterprise allowance; and how many people in each area have now completed one year on the scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 22 January 1985 the number of people in receipt of the enterprise allowance in Yorkshire and Humberside and West Yorkshire was as follows:

	Number
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,662
West Yorkshire	1,920

No separate figures are available for the Huddersfield area, but these are included in the Manpower Services Commission's employment division area centred on Dewsbury which covers Bradford, Halifax, Dewsbury and Huddersfield. The number of people currently receiving the enterprise allowance in that areas is 877.

On the same date the number of people who had completed 12 months on the scheme in these areas was as follows:

	Number
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,825
West Yorkshire	976
Dewsbury	460

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Employment how long applicants for the enterprise allowance scheme in *(a)* Burnley, *(b)* Lancashire and *(c)* England as a whole have to wait on an average before being given an interview at the initial information seminar.

Mr. Alan Clark: Potential applicants for the enterprise allowance scheme in Burnley, Lancashire and England as a whole have to wait on average no more than one week to attend an information seminar.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committees

Mr. Mason asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will list the overseas visits undertaken by the 14 Select Committees since 1979; for what purpose they were undertaken; how many officers and advisers accompanied each delegation; and what have been the total costs incurred by each Committee on these visits.

Mr. Biffen: I shall reply to the right hon. Member as soon as possible.

WALES

Dairy Farmers

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many dairy farmers in Wales with less than 40 cows have left the industry in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In the year ending 31 December 1984 the number of registrations relating to herds of less than 40 cows decreased by 241 in Wales. This figure reflects a number of acceptances under the outgoers scheme. In the same period there were 97 new registrations associated with herds of less than 40 cows.

Renal Dialysis

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to achieve a target of 40 new patients per annum per million of the population in Wales who are suffering from end-stage renal failure; if he can give any indication of a speed-up in the process; if he will indicate what his target figure is for 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The resources capable of accepting a referral level of 45 to 50 new patients per million population per annum in Wales will be available as from next month. Subsidiary renal units to be made available this year should increase referral rates to take up the capacity provided. Our aim is to ensure as soon as possible that no patient who can benefit from dialysis will be denied it through lack of facilities.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider the establishment in Wales of an independent inquiry into the treatment of end-stage renal

failure; if he will indicate what policies his Department recommends in circumstances where there is insufficient provision for patients in need; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Our strategy for Wales was set out in our replies to the hon. Gentleman on 5 December 1983, at columns 22-23, 26 January 1984, at column 706, and 21 February 1984, at column 504. Our programme for achieving this strategy is ahead of schedule. An independent inquiry is unnecessary.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied that all patients in Wales needing treatment for end-stage renal failure receive such treatment; if he is satisfied with the referral rate by general practitioners and other consultants to renal consultants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I am not satisfied that all such patients have been referred for treatment; that is why we are making resources available to ensure that referral rates are not constrained by a shortage of facilities.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider setting up in Wales a limited number of renal units to cater for the problems created by difficult kidney patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Difficult patients can dialyse at the two existing units in Cardiff and Bodelwyddan, and will be able to at the Morriston unit which will open next month. Patients who experience difficulty will also be able to dialyse under supervision in the two subsidiary renal units to be opened this year in Bangor and Carmarthen.

Housing Expenditure

Mr. Rowlands asked the Secretary of State for Wales how the figures of £107 million in housing capital expenditure in 1985-86, (Cmnd. 9428-11, paragraph 28) compares with 1984-85; what estimate has been made of capital receipts for 1985-86; how that compares with 1984-85; and what assumptions he has made in relation to housing capital expenditure in arriving at the figure of £130 million for housing in 1987-88 in table 3.16 of Cmnd. 9428-11.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The figure of £107 million, quoted in paragraph 28 of Cmnd. 9428-11, represents the provision made for 1985-86 in respect of net housing capital expenditure in Wales by local authorities and the Housing Corporation. The comparable provision made for 1984-85 was £92·5 million.

Local authority capital receipts for 1985-86 are estimated to total £78·5 million compared with the estimate of £98 million for 1984-85, quoted in paragraph 20 of Cmnd. 9143-11.

Housing is one of the services which are treated as a block for public expenditure purposes, within which my right hon. Friend has discretion to apportion the total provision as he chooses. Following each annual public expenditure review, my right hon. Friend reaches firm and detailed decisions for the forthcoming financial year. The allocation of resources for the succeeding years is indicative only at that stage and reflects the apportionment made for the first year. The assumption made about housing capital expenditure for both 1986-87 and 1987-88 is, therefore, that it will remain at roughly the same level as in 1985-86.

Local Authority Finance

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the latest figures estimated for 1984-85 for each district council in Wales of *(a)* the total capital allocation, *(b)* the total capital allocation specifically for housing, *(c)* the total probable capital expenditure outturn and *(d)* the total probable capital outturn for housing; and if he will publish similar figures for each of the five preceding years adjusted to 1984-85 prices.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The information requested is as follows:

Capital Allocations to Welsh District Authorities for All Services 1981-82 to 1984-85

Constant 1984-85 prices *£000*

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85**
Alyn and Deeside	4,115	4,395	3,968	3,206
Colwyn	3,021	4,224	3,276	2,642
Delyn	2,643	3,875	4,400	4,311
Glyndwr	1,625	2,140	2,782	1,770
Rhuddlan	2,171	2,695	2,720	2,077
Wrexham Maelor	6,727	7,087	5,611	5,689
Carmarthen	3,429	4,715	9,348	4,125
Ceredigion	3,182	4,792	5,379	3,316
Dinefwr	1,177	1,878	2,873	1,694
Llanelli	4,543	6,245	5,651	4,204
Preseli	2,341	2,952	4,884	4,054
South Pembroke	1,666	3,090	4,654	3,304
Blaenau Gwent	6,142	13,246	12,754	8,260
Islwyn	4,052	6,226	6,179	5,036
Monmouth	2,461	3,897	5,422	4,026
Newport	9,748	15,039	11,562	7,986
Torfaen	4,014	5,829	5,516	4,624
Aberconwy	2,422	2,431	2,697	1,942
Arfon	4,180	4,167	4,407	3,356
Dwyfor	1,267	1,649	3,624	2,114
Meirionnydd	1,896	1,851	5,421	2,475
Ynys Mon	2,279	3,458	6,871	2,945
Cynon Valley	3,228	3,850	5,274	4,186
Merthyr Tydfil	4,597	6,569	5,883	3,743

	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85*
Ogwr	6,245	8,620	7,771	6,016
Rhondda	6,440	7,784	14,398	8,944
Rhymney Valley	6,021	8,498	7,182	5,768
Taff Ely	7,439	11,157	10,614	5,886
Brecknock	2,036	1,752	3,188	1,635
Montgomery	1,646	1,759	3,860	1,782
Radnor	1,037	1,637	1,842	1,108
Cardiff	19,864	21,393	25,970	19,722
Vale of Glamorgan	5,928	6,267	8,145	4,566
Afan	2,639	2,722	2,801	2,309
Lliw Valley	4,066	4,997	4,658	3,782
Neath	2,525	5,730	5,030	2,799
Swansea	10,963	20,612	18,810	14,232
Total	159,775	219,228	245,425	169,634

* Allocations as at January 1985.
Note: Prior to 1981-82 there were no capital allocations for total capital expenditure.

Capital allocations to the Welsh District Authorities for Housing 1979-80 to 1984-85

Constant 1984-85 prices £000

Authority	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85*
Alyn and Deeside	2,443	3,150	2,940	3,142	3,061	2,234
Colwyn	3,299	2,668	1,878	2,562	2,601	2,089
Delyn	2,100	1,316	1,575	1,839	2,121	1,459
Glyndwr	2,585	2,260	1,166	1,729	2,456	1,521
Rhuddlan	1,283	743	992	1,392	1,245	951
Wrexham Maelor	4,076	4,099	3,768	3,955	4,015	3,746
Caermarthen	4,219	2,881	2,368	4,181	8,548	3,571
Ceredigion	3,201	3,595	2,030	3,976	4,691	2,790
Dinefwr	2,152	1,488	992	1,398	2,445	1,414
Llanelli	4,900	3,039	2,275	3,395	3,923	2,737
Preseli	2,804	1,667	2,030	1,950	3,693	2,862
South Pembroke	2,820	2,267	1,330	2,587	3,985	2,323
Blaenau Gwent	12,132	11,505	4,678	11,126	10,722	6,238
Islwyn	5,358	4,090	2,660	5,124	5,463	4,499
Monmouth	3,046	2,096	2,158	3,190	4,864	3,599
Newport	12,465	9,175	7,582	11,983	9,571	6,554
Torfaen	7,754	4,748	3,371	4,780	4,578	4,002
Aberconwy	2,254	1,908	1,656	1,868	2,101	1,635
Arfon	2,629	3,202	2,916	3,211	3,634	2,940
Dwyfor	1,096	940	898	1,224	3,176	1,800
Meirionnydd	1,981	1,207	1,190	1,410	3,438	1,352
Ynys Mon	4,795	3,577	1,598	2,703	5,510	2,350
Cynon Valley	4,840	3,202	2,835	3,095	4,528	3,090
Merthyr Tydfil	6,981	4,550	3,154	3,155	4,183	2,521
Ogwr	10,804	6,628	5,284	6,778	6,149	5,011
Rhondda	10,300	7,973	5,028	6,066	12,601	7,468
Rhymney Valley	8,495	6,300	4,258	6,793	5,725	4,412
Taff Ely	7,601	5,337	6,801	7,678	9,308	4,999
Brecknock	1,569	1,017	1,295	1,403	2,986	1,321
Montgomery	1,303	1,491	1,108	1,413	3,554	1,548
Radnor	806	842	747	1,505	1,669	976
Cardiff	21,245	14,754	12,470	14,883	18,682	12,557
Vale of Glamorgan	4,991	4,126	3,733	5,263	5,586	3,080
Afan	2,110	1,620	2,100	2,015	2,076	1,586
Lliw Valley	6,172	4,248	3,219	4,460	4,182	3,220
Neath	3,078	1,935	2,006	4,504	4,077	2,064
Swansea	8,923	8,068	7,785	11,769	11,905	9,073
Total	259,984	208,256	113,874	159,505	193,052	125,592

* Allocations as at January 1985.

Capital Expenditure by the Welsh District Authorities on All Services 1979/80 to 1984/85

Constant 1984/85 Prices £000

	Outturn					Districts Forecast
District	1979/80	1980/81	1981/82	1982/83	1983/84*	1984/85
Alyn and Deeside	2,911	3,974	3,471	5,867	4,949	5,983
Colwyn	4,743	5,677	2,388	3,890	3,782	2,665
Delyn	2,815	2,703	2,623	5,220	8,155	4,839
Glyndwr	3,223	2,535	2,092	2,365	3,211	2,812
Rhuddlan	4,274	2,622	1,463	1,774	2,400	2,049

District	Outturn 1979/80	1980/81	1981/82	1982/83	1983/84*	Districts Forecast 1984/85
Wrexham Maelor	5,877	7,467	5,757	6,470	7,980	6,724
Carmarthen	5,182	6,312	3,752	5,424	10,633	5,636
Ceredigion	3,998	5,066	3,684	4,885	8,717	5,529
Dinefwr	2,692	1,987	1,176	2,089	3,311	2,121
Llanelli	6,736	7,772	5,708	6,660	8,076	6,719
Preseli	3,696	2,341	3,404	4,908	6,687	6,676
South Pembroke	3,702	2,660	1,770	2,958	5,130	4,976
Blaenau Gwent	13,394	13,068	7,701	15,860	14,079	12,546
Islwyn	6,988	6,741	4,434	8,748	9,526	8,894
Monmouth	3,232	2,872	3,155	4,370	7,032	5,984
Newport	15,329	11,651	9,943	14,449	17,035	16,208
Torfaen	8,427	5,716	4,757	9,241	9,742	7,375
Aberconwy	2,704	4,397	2,252	2,534	3,649	3,152
Arfon	3,041	4,539	4,334	3,943	5,824	3,772
Dwyfor	2,850	2,656	1,172	1,713	3,633	2,184
Meirionnydd	2,980	2,229	1,668	2,073	5,733	3,991
Ynys Mon	5,426	4,745	3,156	4,432	8,558	3,207
Cynon Valley	5,952	3,965	3,406	4,163	6,556	4,243
Merthyr Tydfil	11,117	7,053	4,171	5,785	7,917	5,398
Ogwr	12,053	9,782	6,770	9,917	13,339	12,688
Rhondda	11,916	10,839	7,112	11,238	18,124	13,047
Rhymney Valley	10,443	9,530	5,456	7,951	12,395	8,418
Taff Ely	9,460	7,880	6,985	9,718	14,857	7,934
Brecknock	1,930	1,099	1,743	1,673	3,046	2,267
Montgomery	2,486	2,489	1,545	2,101	4,837	2,734
Radnor	928	1,055	812	2,069	2,274	1,335
Cardiff	31,667	23,184	25,052	25,858	36,507	29,170
Vale of Glamorga	9,755	6,923	5,839	6,838	12,555	7,569
Afan	3,231	2,847	1,767	3,018	2,848	2,875
Lliw Valley	7,342	5,889	4,078	8,033	5,233	4,639
Neath	3,303	2,899	2,941	5,339	6,082	3,953
Swansea	13,007	16,477	13,693	24,176	23,940	23,542
Total	248,810	221,641	171,230	247,750	328,352	253,854

* Provisional.

Capital Expenditure by the Welsh District Authorities on Housing 1979-80 to 1984-85

Constant 1984-85 Prices £000

District	Outturn 1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	*1983-84	Districts Forecast 1984-85
Alyn and Deeside	2,433	3,150	2,363	4,297	3,657	4,718
Colwyn	3,298	2,668	1,608	2,058	2,472	1,673
Delyn	2,099	1,317	1,448	1,498	2,224	1,423
Glyndwr	2,646	2,260	1,832	2,088	2,686	2,497
Rhuddlan	1,283	743	875	1,217	1,174	956
Wrexham Maelor	4,076	4,099	3,038	4,176	4,760	4,038
Carmarthen	4,219	2,881	3,110	4,525	9,287	4,749
Ceredigion	3,202	3,595	2,566	3,566	7,270	4,488
Dinefwr	2,152	1,488	935	1,656	2,698	1,628
Llanelli	4,926	3,039	2,261	2,938	4,752	3,571
Preseli	2,805	1,666	2,622	3,434	4,278	4,328
South Pembroke	2,819	2,267	1,397	2,179	3,815	3,585
Blaenau Gwent	12,133	11,505	5,846	11,431	11,297	8,746
Islwyn	5,358	4,090	2,729	5,544	7,821	7,616
Monmouth	3,046	2,097	2,293	3,846	6,274	4,472
Newport	12,465	9,176	8,160	10,891	12,208	9,624
Torfaen	7,755	4,748	4,015	7,360	7,691	6,022
Aberconwy	2,254	1,908	925	1,554	2,445	2,355
Arfon	2,630	3,202	2,964	3,043	4,414	3,446
Dwyfor	1,096	940	687	1,222	3,097	1,573
Meirionnydd	1,981	1,208	938	1,445	3,843	3,523
Ynys Mon	4,794	3,577	1,747	2,997	6,996	2,138
Cynon Valley	4,841	3,203	2,692	3,193	4,727	2,986
Merthyr Tydfil	7,227	4,720	2,922	3,349	4,756	3,474
Ogwr	10,803	6,627	5,333	6,284	9,023	9,034
Rhondda	10,300	7,974	5,849	7,891	13,589	10,782
Rhymney Valley	8,496	6,300	4,012	6,160	7,731	6,537
Taff Ely	7,601	5,337	5,386	7,257	10,086	5,909
Brecknock	1,568	1,017	1,127	1,147	2,578	1,964
Montgomery	1,302	1,491	781	1,492	970	2,291
Radnor	807	842	634	1,706	1,878	1,137
Cardiff	21,456	14,890	12,986	15,594	24,132	18,724

District	Outturn					Districts Forecast
	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	*1983-84	1984-85
Vale of Glamorgan	5,001	4,142	1,989	4,693	5,105	4,132
Afan	2,121	1,620	1,096	2,318	2,380	2,273
Lliw Valley	6,355	4,248	3,102	4,312	4,395	2,968
Neath	3,225	1,935	1,973	4,308	4,924	3,402
Swansea	8,923	8,068	7,579	11,199	12,568	11,385
Total	189,496	144,038	111,820	163,868	224,001	174,167

* Provisional

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Free School Meals

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of children receiving free school meals for each year since 1974, the proportion of children in attendance this represents, and Government expenditure on free school meals in cash and cost terms using 100 as a base for 1974.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Free pupil meals		Index of estimated expenditure* on free pupil meals in cash terms	
	Number (thousand)	Number as percentage of pupils present	Cash terms	Real terms†
1974-75	694	8·9	100	100
1975-76	728	9·2	132	105
1976-77	779	9·8	160	113
1977-78	927	11·8	219	135
1978-79	1,074	13·9	268	150
1979-80	899	11·9	258	123
1980-81	724	9·9	283	114
1981-82	856	11·9	334	123
1982-83	964	13·9	396	136
1983-84	1,075	15·9	449	147

* The gross expenditure on all meals by local education authorities has been apportioned to free pupils in the ratio of free pupil meals to total pupil meals.

† Cash terms have been converted into real terms using the GDP deflator at market prices.

Graduate Diplomas in Music

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the colleges of further education in the north-west of England which offer designated courses leading to graduate diplomas in music; how many applications from the region to provide given courses are before his Departmet; and when he will decide on the application of Mabel Fletcher college in Liverpool.

Mr. Brooke: The Royal Northern college of music in Manchester offers two designated courses leading to graduate diplomas in music. Mabel Fletcher technical college is one of two institutions which have applied for the designation of similar courses. These applications have been refused for financial reasons. The Department will shortly be replying to the Mabel Fletcher technical college's letter of 17 January on the subject.

Schools (Governing Bodies)

Mr. Tracey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to sign new articles of government for enlarged governing bodies of voluntary-aided school in the diocese of Southwark.

Mr. Dunn: New draft instruments—which, rather than articles, are the documents in question—providing for the reconstitution of governing bodies under the Education Act 1980 have been issued in respect of schools in the Roman Catholic diocese of Southwark for the formal consultation required under section 17(5) of the Education Act 1944. Drafts for schools in the Church of England diocese will issue very shortly. The date on which the final documents will be made depends on the response to these consultations.

Open University

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the level of Government grant for the Open University in the calendar year 1986.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend is considering the Open University visiting committee's report. He hopes shortly to inform the university of its firm grant for 1985 and indicated grants for 1986 and 1987.

National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education

Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future of the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education.

Sir Keith Joseph: As I announced on 31 July 1984 at column 184 the national advisory body which advises me on the planning and management of public sector higher education is to be reconstituted with effect from 1 February 1985, at the end of its current interim life.

The body will be renamed the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education, and the terms of reference and membership of the committee and board will be as follows:

COMMITTEE

Chairman

The Hon. Peter Brooke, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science

Members

Coucillor P. D. Merridale, Association of County Councils

Councillor Mrs. J. Farringdon, Association of County Councils

Councillor P. White, Association of County Councils

Councillor Mrs. N. Harrison, Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Councillor J. D. Pearman, Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Councillor B. A. Sams, Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Mr. C. J. E. Ball, Chairman of the Board

Terms of Reference

1. In the light of the resources specified for local authority higher education in England by the Secretary of State after consultation with the local authorities, and of the resources specified by him for the voluntary colleges, to consider, on the basis of recommendations from the Board, the academic provision to be made in each of the institutions within the NAB's remit.

2. To advise the Secretary of State on the appropriate use of his powers with regard to the apportionment of the advanced further education pool, the allocation of resources for capital expenditure for local authority higher education, the allocation of resources to the voluntary colleges, and the approval of advanced courses.

3. To monitor the implementation by local authorities and institutions of dispositions made by the Secretary of State in the light of this advice.

4. In formulating this advice, to contribute to a co-ordinated approach to provision, as necessary in relevant academic fields, between the local authority, voluntary, university and direct grant sectors of higher education; and between the provision in England and that in other countries of the United Kingdom.

5. To undertake or commission such studies or to seek such information as appear necessary for the determination of such advice.

6. The institution within the remit of the NAB are all the local authority maintained or assisted institutions of further education offering courses of advanced further education and the following voluntary colleges:

Newman College
Westhill College
West Sussex Institute*
Homerton College
Christ Church College
College of St. Paul and St. Mary
Chester College
Derbyshire College of Higher Education*
St. Martin's College
Trinity and All Saints' College
Bishop Grosseteste College
Liverpool Institute of Higher Education
Roehampton Institute of Higher Education
St. Mary's College
West London Institute*
De La Salle College
Westminster College
College of St. Mark and St. John
La Sainte Union College of Higher Education
King Alfred's College
College of Ripon and York St. John

* Jointly maintained institutions

BOARD AND NOMINATING BODY

Chairman

Mr. C. J. E. Ball, Appointed by Secretary of State

Members

Department of Education and Science
Mr. R. H. Bird
Mr. A. E. D. Chamier
Mr. D. M. Forrester
Mr. M. J. G. Smith
CI Mr. E. Norris
SI Mr. C. Booth

Association of County Councils
Mr. J. G. Owen
Mr. J. O. Morris
Mr. I. G. Cunningham

Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Mr. G. Hainsworth
Mr. W. H. Stubbs
Mr. R. G. Morris

Committee of Directors of Polytechnics
Dr. D. P. Bethel
Dr. R. M. W. Rickett

Association of Principals of Colleges
Mr. K. Swinhoe

Standing Conference of Principals and Directors of Colleges and Institutes of Higher Education
To be nominated

Association of Voluntary of Colleges
Rev. D. Brown
Mr. C. Alves
Professor K. Keohane

Council for National Academic Awards
Dr. E. Kerr

Business and Technician Education Council
Mr. J. E. Sellars

Confederation of British Industry
Mr. H. H. Tomlinson

Trades Union Congress
Mrs. K. Carberry

National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
Mr. F. Griffiths
Ms J. Rees

Nominated by the Secretary of State to represent industry, commerce and the professions
Professor J. Parnaby
Mr. R. D. Gill

Personal nominees of Chairman of the Board
Dr. D. C. A. Bradshaw
Mr. K. Thompson
Dr. D. Harrison

Observers

University Grants Committee
Professor Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer

Welsh Advisory Body
Professor R. W. Steele

Terms of Reference

To receive instructions from and make recommendations to the Committee in pursuit of the fulfilment of the Committee's Terms of Reference. In so doing, the Board will:

(a) establish such ad hoc groups as the Committee judges necessary to assist with aspects of this task;

(b) in formulating recommendations for the voluntary colleges, consult the Voluntary Sector Consultative Council;

(c) establish effective liaison with the university and direct grant sectors of higher education, with appropriate validating, professional and accrediting bodies and, as necessary with representatives of industry, commerce and the professions; and with those concerned with the provision of higher education in the other countries of the United Kingdom;

(d) secure advice from appropriate sources as necessary on the regional and local aspects of higher education in the local authority and voluntary sectors of higher education.

Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the future of the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers.

Sir Keith Joseph: The five-year term for which the committee was established expires this spring. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have valued the contribution to the development of policy on initial and in-service training which the committee has made through a series of important reports, including its recent advice on intakes to initial training between now and 1989. The committee has covered a wide range of issues and we judge that time is now needed for the teacher training system to assimilate the changes initiated by its advice. Accordingly, we have decided not to reconstitute the committee immediately after its final meeting at the end of April. We shall consider convening a new committee in about two years' time if the need for fresh advice is by then established.

PRIME MINISTER

EC Heads of Government

Mr. Spearing asked the Prime Minister on how many occasions, for what purposes, for what periods and at what places the European Economic Community Heads of Government working groups have met since their introduction.

The Prime Minister: The schedule of meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee on Institutions is as follows:

Dates	*Place*
28 September	Brussels
10-11 October	Brussels
24-25 October	Brussels
7-8 November	Brussels
21-22 November	Brussels
13 December	Brussels
16-17 January	Brussels
30-31 January (proposed)	Brussels
13-14 February (proposed)	Brussels
27-28 February (proposed)	Brussels
13-14 March (proposed)	Brussels

The schedule of meetings of the People's Europe Committee is:

Dates	*Place*
7 November	Brussels
23 November	Brussels
27-28 November	Brussels
17-18 December	Brussels
11 January	Brussels
21-22 January	Brussels
4-5 February (proposed)	Brussels
18-19 February (proposed)	Brussels

Purpose

The terms of reference of both these Committees were set out in the conclusions of the Fontainebleau European Council, copies of which have been deposited in the Library of the House.

Mr. Spearing asked the Prime Minister what recommendations or proposals for legislation have been made by the Heads of Government working groups of the European Economic Community; and to whom any such proposals or suggestions are made.

The Prime Minister: None. A number of ideas for the future development of the Community were contained in the Committees' interim reports, which are available in the Library of the House. The committees are to submit final reports to the European Council this year. Heads of Government will consider the reports in detail in June.

Mr. David Williamson

Mr. Spearing asked the Prime Minister if she will list the experience and qualifications of Mr. David Williamson and his duties in connection with the Heads of Government working groups of the European Economic Community, together with the amount and source of his remuneration and expenses.

The Prime Minister: Mr. Williamson is a deputy-secretary in the Cabinet Office. I have appointed him to act as United Kingdom representative on the People's Europe Committee. He receives no remuneration over and above his normal salary. Travel costs are paid from EC funds; his other expenses from the Cabinet Office budget.

ENERGY

Domestic Supplies (Disconnections)

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Energy what the figures are for each year from 1978 for fuel disconnections.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I have asked the chairmen of the Electricity Council and the British Gas Corporation to provide the information direct to the hon. Member.

DEFENCE

Defence Programme (Cost)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the annual cost of the defence programme in terms of *(a)* expenditure per head of population and *(b)* expenditure per household.

Mr. Stanley: Based on the latest provision for the defence programme in 1984-85, the information requested is as follows:

(a) expenditure per head of the population	£306
(b) expenditure per household	£860

Falkland Islands

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate of the total overall costs of the recapture, garrisoning and defending of the Falkland Islands since the Argentine invasion.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) on 29 January at columns *155-56*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Community Radio

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received a report on the trials of community radio; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The BBC is evaluating the experiment in neighbourhood radio in the greater Manchester area. As regards community radio in general, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 23 January at columns *417-18*.

Refugees (Naturalisation)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to take following Recommendation No. R (84) 21 of the Committee of Ministers to member states of the Council of Europe concerning the acquisition by refugees of the nationality of the host country; and in particular whether he will take steps to *(a)* reduce the required period of residence and *(b)* reduce the charges arising out of the procedure for naturalisation as recommended.

Mr. Waddington: We have explained to the Council of Europe the procedures governing the acquisition of British citizenship. These include, should it be necessary in a particular case, waiving the normal residence requirements where the Home Secretary has a discretion to do so. Ministers have no power to waive the fees for naturalisation in individual cases, and it would be both impractical, and unfair to other applicants, to give special treatment to all applicants who had been granted refugee status at some point in their past.

Community Service

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to extend community service to hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor It is for area probation services to find suitable work for offenders ordered to perform community service and much valuable work is already done in many types of hospital.

Prison Officers (Residential Accommodation)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current provision for prison officers to acquire the homes they at present rent from his Department.

Mr. Mellor Prison officers occupy quarters rent-free as a condition of service or, subject to permission, may live in private accommodation with the benefit of a housing allowance. A proposed change in conditions of service including provision of discount sales of quarters to occupants was not accepted on a recent ballot of members of the Prison Officers' Association, but surplus quarters may be purchased by occupants at current market value.

Departmental Administration Costs

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the total administration costs of his Department expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Brittan: The total cost of administration of the Home Office (including the prison, immigration and police technical support services) expressed in 1983-84 prices in the last five years*, was:

	£ million
1979-80	486·8
1980-81	†539·9
1981-82	584·0
1982-83	‡624·7
1983-84	658·5

* This information is taken from the annual scrutinies of departmental running costs, the outcome of the most recent of which was announced in a written answer on 22 November 1984 at columns *271-24*.

† The figure for 1980-81 is an estimate, since actual expenditure for that year was not required in that form for scrutiny purposes.

‡ This figure is based on a corrected cash figure of £596·7 million for 1982-83, in place of the forecast outturn figure of £581·7 million which was published in a written answer on 25 October 1983 at columns *76-78*.

Foreign Nationals

Mr. Normanton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which forms nationals of other European Community countries are currently given to complete or keep at the point of entry to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waddington: Greek nationals travelling on their national identity cards are issued with form IS 121. All other EC nationals receive form IS 120.

Amusement Arcades

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions he has reached from his review of the gaming law in relation to amusement arcades.

Mr. Brittan: Following the introduction of Lord Campbell of Alloway's Amusement Machines Bill in another place on 1 November 1983, my Department has engaged in consultations with a wide range of interests concerned with amusement arcades and we have reviewed the operation of the gaming laws in relation to these premises. In looking at the case for change I have considered carefully the available evidence on the extent of the problems posed by arcades and the alleged inadequacy of the present law. In particular, I have considered a submission by the amusement arcade action group.

I have concluded that there is no clear evidence of problems which would justify fresh controls over amusement arcades. I therefore have no plans at present to bring forward proposals for legislation augmenting the controls in the Gaming Act 1968.

The 1968 Act already gives local authorities a wide discretion to refuse to grant gaming permits to the occupiers of amusement arcades where they consider this appropriate. Much of the complaint about arcades has been about the location, appearance and noise associated with arcades which make the particular site in question unsuitable. These are planning considerations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has recently announced at columns *5-6* that his Department is making available advice about the application of planning controls to a number of developments including amusement centres. I hope this will prove helpful. In addition, local authorities may wish to consider whether there are particular local problems which call for other remedies already available such as byelaws under section 75 of the Public Health Act 1961.

It has been alleged that young people need to be protected against the attractions of amusement arcades.

However I have had to weigh this against the fact that many amusement arcades, particularly at seaside resorts are designed with young people in mind and have been in operation for many years without giving rise to undue criticism of this nature. It has also been suggested that the controls should be extended to cover video and other games not at present subject to the Gaming Act 1968. The controls exist, however, because of the problems which are traditionally associated with forms of gambling, where the prospect of cash prizes may encourage people to participate excessively and I am not persuaded that the law should extend in this respect to machines which do not meet this condition.

Before I could accept that there is a need for fresh legislation I would have to be persuaded that hard evidence is to hand of problems which cannot be adequately dealt with under the law at present. I do not judge that the evidence presented to me at present meets this test.

Polling Stations (Ramps)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice is given to electoral registration officers on the availability of grants for the provision of ramps to polling stations; and what publicity is given to the existence of such a scheme.

Mr. Mellor: Acting returning officers were advised in 1981 and again in 1983 that HM Treasury would be prepared to meet half the cost of purchasing a portable ramp for the disabled at a polling station if the local authority responsible for the conduct of local elections at that station was prepared to meet the other half. The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation was informed of the existence of this scheme in 1981.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Renal Dialysis

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to achieve a target of 40 new patients per annum per million of the population in Northern Ireland who are suffering from end-stage renal failure; if he can give any indication of a speed-up in the process; if he will indicate what his target figure is for 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: Specific targets will be set for developing renal services in discussion with Health and Social Services Boards. These discussions are now in progress and I shall be announcing the targets when they have been agreed. Without prejudice to the outcome of those discussions, the Eastern Health and Social Services Board intends in the near future to expand the regional dialysis services to allow for the treatment of 12 additional patients.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he is satisfied that all patients in Northern Ireland needing treatment for end-stage renal failure receive such treatment; if he is satisfied with the referral rate by general practitioners and other consultants to renal consultants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: No. I fully accept the need for improvement in the level of provision for end-stage renal failure. Following the review of services now taking place, specific targets will be set for the further development of such services. The referral by general practitioners and other consultants is, of course, a matter for clinical judgment.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider setting up a limited number of renal units in Northern Ireland to cater for the problems created by difficult kidney patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: No. It would not be feasible to set up special renal units to deal with difficult patients.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider the establishment in Northern Ireland of an independent inquiry into the treatment of end-stage renal failure; if he will indicate what policies his Department recommends in circumstances where there is insufficient provision for patients in need; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have already initiated as part of my Department's regional planning responsibilities a comprehensive review of services for kidney patients in Northern Ireland in order to establish the appropriate levels of provision in relation to the various methods of treatment for end-stage renal failure. I am satisfied that a further inquiry would serve no useful purpose. The provision of appropriate treatment to patients within the resources available is a matter for clinical judgment.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Costs

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the total administration costs of his Department expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Renton: The total cost of administration of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, expressed in millions of pounds in 1983-84 prices in the last five years was

	£ million
1979-80	378·6
1980-81	371·8
1981-82	373·1
1982-83	387·1
1983-84	376·4

The underlying cash figures for 1979-80 to 1982-83 are the same as those which produced the table at 1982-83 constant prices, which my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce) gave my hon. Friend on 23 January 1984.

European Communities

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provision for expenditure on the Heads of Government working groups is made in the current budget of the European Communities; and if there are any other sources of funding.

Mr. Rifkind:
Ad Hoc Committee on Institutions (Dooge committee)

Conference rooms are provided for this committee in the Palais d'Egmont by the Belgian Government. Travel expenses and conference services (eg typing and interpretation) are paid for by the Council or Commission from within their existing financial provisions. Delegates pay their own additional expenses. The Council, the Commission and the Irish Government each provide the services of one A-Grade officer as secretariat for the committee.

People's Europe Committee

This committee is funded in the same way as the Ad Hoc Committee on Institutions except that there is no secretariat.

Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the multilateral disarmament negotiations in which Her Majesty's Government currently participate.

Mr. Luce: We are playing a leading part in efforts at the Geneva conference on disarmament to negotiate a total ban on chemical weapons. At the Stockholm conference we seek measures to reduce tension in Europe through greater reciprocal openness about military activities. In the mutual and balanced force reductions talks in Vienna, NATO and Warsaw Pact countries are negotiating reductions in conventional forces in central Europe.

Israel (Arab Trade Boycott)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to him by management of United Kingdom-based subsidiaries of American companies whose parent companies are threatened with prosecutions in the United States of America because of the alleged compliance by the United Kingdom subsidiary with the Arab trade boycott of Israel; and what reply he has given.

Mr. Luce: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such representations.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in each of the years 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984 officials of his Department have authenticated the signatures of notaries-public on documents which purport to state that goods for export to countries participating in the Arab trade boycott of Israel are not wholly or in part of Israeli manufacture; and why this practice is permitted to continue.

Mr. Luce: The information requested is not available. When the signature and seal of a notary public is authenticated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, no record is kept of the contents of the document to which the notarial certificate is attached. The practice is a standard legal procedure, which merely confirms the validity of the signature. We reviewed that practice in 1983 and concluded that it would not be right to change our long-standing procedures.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State of the United States of America regarding the fines imposed in September 1984 in the United States of America on two United Kingdom subsidiaries of American firms for complying with the Arab trade boycott of Israel contrary to United States' legislation; and what future steps he proposes to harmonise United Kingdom legislation on this issue with the United States of America.

Mr. Luce: My right hon. and learned Friend has not discussed these fines with the United States Secretary of State, nor do we believe that United Kingdom legislation would be appropriate.

Falkland Islands (Air Service)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in establishing a civil external air service for the Falklands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We look forward to the establishment of commercial air services linking the Falklands and the outside world, after the completion in early 1986 of the new airport at Mount Pleasant.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to fix a South American city for regular onward civil flights to the Falklands.

Mr. Renton: I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport that no proposals have been received for such flights.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if a Government subsidy is to be made available for a civil external air service for the Falklands.

Mr. Renton: There are no plans for such a subsidy.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Marland asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 28 and 29 January.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made earlier today.

SCOTLAND

Households (Statistics)

Mr. Fairbairn asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many households there are in Scotland; how many people are currently on the electoral register in Scotland; and what is the total amount of revenue from rates provided by *(a)* commerce, *(b)* industry and *(c)* householders.

Mr. Ancram: Estimates of the numbers of households in Scotland are published annually by my Department in "Scottish Housing Statistics"; the 1985 issue will contain the 1984 estimate of 1·84 million. Electoral statistics are published annually by the Registrar General for Scotland; in 1984 there were some 3·957 million people on the electoral register in Scotland. Estimates of revenue from rates are published by the Scottish branch of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in "Rating Review"; in 1984-85 it is estimated that commerce will

pay rates of £430 million, industry £180 million and householders £410 million. All the publications mentioned may be found in the Library of the House.

Renal Units

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider setting up in Scotland a limited number of renal units to cater for the problems created by difficult kidney patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: I do not consider that the need for this has been made out.

End-stage Renal Failure

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to achieve a target of 40 new patients per annum per million of the population in Scotland who are suffering from end-stage renal failure; if he can give any indication of a speed-up in the process; if he will indicate what his target figure is for 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Statistics of patients being treated for end-stage renal failure in 1984 are not yet available, but I understand that these are likely to show that about 40 new patients per million of the population are now being treated annually in Scotland. There are now specific targets for the treatment of patients with this condition, but I expect that the number of new patients being treated per million of the population will continue to increase.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider the establishment in Scotland of an independent inquiry into the treatment of end-stage renal failure; if he will indicate what policies his Department recommends in circumstances where there is insufficient provision for patients in need; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: I do not consider that an independent inquiry would serve any useful purpose since we already have sufficient information about the treatment of end-stage renal failure. It is primarily for health boards to decide what provision to make for patients in their particular areas, and to allocate their resources accordingly.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is satisfied that all patients in Scotland needing treatment for end-stage renal failure receive such treatment; if he is satisfied with the referral rate by general practitioners and other consultants to renal consultants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The extent to which patients are referred for treatment by their general practitioners depends on the medical assessment of their condition and I am unable to comment on such clinical judgments. Subject to that, all patients who are referred for treatment and who would benefit from this are receiving such treatment.

Forestry Planting Grants

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the names and locations of areas of land of 10 hectares or more in Ross and Cromarty which have received approval for planting grants under the forestry grants scheme since that scheme began, giving the acreage in each case.

Mr. John MacKay: The information, covering the period from 1 October 1981 to 28 January 1985, is as follows:

Name of Estate	*Location*	*Area approved for planting (hectares)*
Auchnadarroch	by Plockton	27
Braes of Ullapool	by Ullapool	34
Corriemoillie	by Garve	777
Coulin	by Loch Carron	62
Edderton	Tain	10
Glencalvie	Tain District	96
Glencarron	by Loch Carron	164
Kildermorie	by Loch Morie	154
Knockbain	Dingwall	13
Langwell	by Strath Oykel	150
Langwell Wood	by Strath Oykel	205
Lochluichart	by Garve	36
Morangie	Alness	8
New Kelso	by Loch Carron	48
New Kelso	by Loch Carron	221
Newmore Wood	Invergordon	24
Rosehaugh	Black Isle	55
Swordale	Dingwall	31

To date, grants have been paid in respect of a total of 108 hectares of planting on these properties.

Tourism (Development)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase the funds available for financial assistance to tourist development under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969.

Mr. John MacKay: As a result of increased demand for assistance under section 4, additional funds were made available in 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Tourist Policy

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set up a standing committee for the arts, heritage and tourism to ensure that proper consideration is given to co-ordination of tourist policy in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Road Signs (Tourism)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to complete consideration of the scheme to provide road signs for tourist purposes.

Mr. Ancram: Following discussions with the Scottish Tourist Board, the introduction of a number of new road signs for tourist facilities, and the criteria for their provision, were announced in 1983.

Scottish Development Agency (Tourist Projects)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the Scottish Development Agency's service industries division's projects being considered for financial support are related to tourism.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Tourism (Expenditure)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the capital and current expenditure of each local authority in Scotland on tourism and tourist-related projects for the latest year for which figures are available in cash and per capita terms.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Bypass Signs (Borders Region)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a timetable showing when he expects to complete the erection of strung-bow trunk route bypass signs of towns and villages in the Borders region.

Mr. Ancram: It is proposed to erect strung-bow signs in the spring of this year on the A1 for the community of Ayton. Other strung-bow signs will be erected where appropriate when new bypasses are constructed.

Scottish Tourist Board

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* Her Majesty's Government's projections of the sums to be made available to enable the Scottish Tourist Board to exercise the powers of overseas promotion in the Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Scotland) Act from 1984-85 until 1987-88.

Mr. John MacKay: As was announced by my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State during the Second Reading speech on the Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Scotland) Bill, the Government are making available an additional annual allocation of £200,000, from 1984-85 to enable the Scottish Tourist Board to undertake an overseas programme.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will approve a three-year rolling programme for administration of section 4 Scottish Tourist Board grants.

Mr. John MacKay: No. The board, like other public bodies, has to conform to the rules of Government accounting.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* Her Majesty's Government's projections of the sums to be made available to the Scottish Tourist Board for the years until 1987-88 to provide it with funds to pay section 4 grants under the Development of Tourism Act 1969.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. Friend has not yet determined and sought Parliament's approval for allocations at this level of disaggregation.

Tourist Grant Assistance

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will seek to introduce a system which would, in exceptional circumstances, allow for the payment of section 4 tourist grant assistance under the Development of Tourism Act 1969 to be agreed by the Scottish Tourist Board in one financial year but paid in the following year.

Mr. John MacKay: No. In accordance with procedures laid down in Government accounting there can be no postponement of payment sought by a grantee to a subsequent financial year. In cases where a grant is approved in one financial year but the grantee seeks payment in any subsequent year, then, in accord with Government accounting, the payment must be honoured within the financial year in which the payment demand is made by the grantee.

Tourist-related Projects

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what tourist-related projects are currently planned in Scotland by the Forestry Commission, the British Waterways Board, the National Heritage memorial fund, the Scottish Sports Council and the Scottish Arts Council.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Local Authority Finance (Tourism)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* those district authorities in Scotland which have to date refused or delayed to commit their share of local authority finance to each of the area tourist boards for the forthcoming financial year.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Tourist Accommodation

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he propose to take to assist the Scottish Tourist Board to finance the additional work to be carried out in the classification and grading of tourist accommodation in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The necessary steps have already been taken. Following a re-examination of its spending priorities, the Scottish Tourist Board has decided to finance the additional work from within its existing resources.

West of Scotland Science Park

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement regarding the action of the Scottish Development Agency property division taking over the West of Scotland science park, Maryhill; and what consultation with Glasgow and Strathclyde universities took place beforehand.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *117*]: The SDA has been responsible for funding and managing the development of the West of Scotland science park since the park's inception. Following experience in running the park during its first two years of operation, and reorganisation of property activities within the agency, the agency has modified its internal arrangements for managing the science park. Representatives of the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde were informed of these changes in September 1984 and, I understand, have indicated their support for the new arrangements.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC (Trade Barriers)

9. **Mr. Peter Lilley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he is having with the new Commissioners on the breaking down of barriers to trade within the Community.

Mr. Channon: My right hon. Friend and I expect to meet members of the new Commission shortly. The removal of barriers to intra-Community trade in goods and services will be top of the agenda. Creating a genuine internal market is a high priority for the Government and one which the new Commission shares.

Manufactured Goods

13. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the United Kingdom's trade performance in manufactured goods for 1984.

Mr. Tebbit: I am principally concerned with the United Kingdom's overall trade performance, which was in slight surplus in 1984. In the manufactured goods sector, exports increased in volume by around 10 per cent. in 1984, roughly in line with world trade.

Small Firms Service

15. **Mr. Hargreaves** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to expand the small firm service.

Mr. Trippier: I have no plans for further expansion at present. The service has expanded substantially in recent years, from 58 staff in 1981 to 94 last year. Over the same period we have more than doubled the number of counsellors from 127 to 261.

25. **Mr. Cash** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many business counsellors are under contract to the small firms service.

Mr. Trippier: At 31 December 1984 there was 261 business counsellors under contract to the Department of Trade and Industry, a further 49 with the Scottish Development Agency and 44 with the Welsh Development Agency.

Japan (Telecommunications)

20. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effect of the privatisation of telecommunications in Japan on the extent of access to the Japanese market for British manufacturers.

Mr. Butcher: The liberalisation of telecommunications in Japan should provide opportunities to British companies which are capable of competing in world markets, and we are pursuing vigorously the issue of reciprocal trading in telecommunications products between Britain and Japan.

Brazil

21. **Mr. Maginnis** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total value of all exports to Brazil during the last financial year.

Mr. Butcher: United Kingdom exports to Brazil for the period April 1983 to March 1984 were worth £168·5 million.

Small Firms

22. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the help and advice provided by his Department on technological matters to small firms.

Mr. Trippier: Yes. The Department of Trade and Industry provides small firms with help and advice on a wide range of technological matters through the small firms technical enquiry service (SFTES). This service provides up to five man-days of advice and consultancy. The first day is free; firms pay 25 per cent. of the cost of the remaining four days.

Small firms can receive additional advice on micro-electronics applications, advanced manufacturing technology and biotechnology through services specialising in these topics. On these subjects the first two-man days of assistance are free. Thereafter the firm contributes 25 per cent. of the cost subject to an overall maximum cost to DTI of £2,500, including the cost of the two free days.

27. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure co-operation between the small firms service and other sources of advice for small firms.

Mr. Trippier: The small firms service actively co-operates with other organisations providing advice to small firms. There is joint publicity with some enterprise agencies and COSIRA. Extensive use is made by other support organisations of the small firms service publications. Some counselling now takes place from enterprise agency premises. I am actively encouraging such co-operation.

29. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many small firms have been established in the last three years.

Mr. Trippier: There were just under 490,000 business start-ups in the three-year period 1981 to 1983. Figures for 1984 are not yet available.

31. **Mr. Carttiss** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to receive the conclusions of the interdepartmental scrutiny of the administrative and legislative burdens placed on small firms.

Mr. Trippier: I expect to receive the scrutiny team's conclusions next month.

55. **Mr. John Browne** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is content with the amount of investment in small firms as a result of the business expansion scheme.

Mr. Trippier: I am very pleased with the figures reported so far. During 1983-84 more than 400 small companies raised over £75 million from 10,000 investors. At least £41 million of this went to very young or start-up companies.

Of course, I would like to see still more small companies and individual investors taking advantage of the scheme.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

23. **Mr. Sheerman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received on the Silbertson report on the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Channon: Since I gave an answer to questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 16 January, further representations have been received recently on both the future of the multi-fibre arrangement and on the Silberston report from companies in the textile and clothing industry, representatives of trade unions in that industry, and from one retailer. I have also had consultative meetings with interested parties about the multi-fibre arrangement which have taken into account the findings of the Silberston report.

30. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the latest position regarding the negotiation of a further multi-fibre arrangement; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The European Community will need to agree its general policy approach before July of this year, when the GATT textiles committee has to consider whether the multi-fibre arrangement should be extended, modified or discontinued. Further negotiations will then ensue, before the MFA expires in July 1986.

Before deciding the United Kingdom approach to the negotiations, I am consulting interested parties.

Local Enterprise Agencies

24. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department has seconded any civil servants to local enterprise agencies.

Mr. Trippier: My Department has seconded four civil servants to local enterprise agencies.

Basildon New Town

26. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the number of businesses which have announced their intentions of moving to Basildon new town in the last two months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My information is that one major American company which is planning to build a toy superstore in the town employing 200 people, has announced its intention recently to set up in Basildon.

Electricity (Resale)

28. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the report by the Office of Fair Trading on the resale of electricity by landlords.

Mr. Fletcher: As my hon. Friend is aware, the Office of Fair Trading is currently considering the comments which it received on the consultative document it issued last year. I look forward to seeing a copy of the office's final report and recommendations which I understand will be available in the next few months.

Business Improvement Service

32. **Mr. Michael Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries have been received by his Department about the recently launched business improvement service.

Mr. Trippier: Inquiries about business improvement services are not recorded; but there has been a good response from small firms and providers of services in the eligible areas, and, by 11 January, 185 firm applications had been received.

37. **Mr. Watts** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is taking to promote the business improvement service.

Mr. Trippier: The Department of Trade and Industry is arranging a programme of regional seminars aimed at small business men and their professional advisers, such as accountants and solicitors, and others who might benefit. I expect also to see continuing interest by local press and radio.

Buses (Legislation)

33. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has had on the effects on the Leyland Bus Co. of the proposed buses Bill.

Mr. Butcher: I have received a letter from my hon. Friend enclosing a paper produced by the trade unions at Leyland Bus. BL's 1985 corporate plan, which is now being considered, naturally takes into account the effects of prospective changes in legislation on all BL's businesses.

Manufacturing Industry (Investment)

34. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the current level of investment in manufacturing industry compares with the figure for 1979.

Mr. Channon: The latest available estimate of investment in manufacturing in 1984 is £6·1 billion at 1980 prices, including leased assets, compared with £8·2 billion in 1979.

Latin America (Exports)

35. **Mr. Beggs** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made as to whether exports to Latin America are being restricted by lack of export credit guarantees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: I have no doubt that export credit guarantees are an important factor in fostering our trade with Latin America. Therefore, I keep all markets under constant review and, as a result, ECGD has recently restored medium term cover for Brazil and for the Mexican private sector.

British Aersopace

36. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that control of British Aerospace will not pass into foreign hands when Her Majesty's Government dispose of their shares.

Mr. Tebbit: The articles of association of British Aerospace plc provide that the aggregate number of foreign-held shares in the company must not exceed 15 per cent. of the shares ordinarily eligible to be voted on a poll at general meetings of the company, and that the directors must be British citizens. The Government will retain a special share which will ensure that these provisions cannot be amended without the Government's consent.

English Industrial Estates (Small Units)

38. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many small units English Industrial Estates has completed in the last three years.

Mr. Trippier: The English Industrial Estates Corporation completed 1,741 small units, of 232 square metres or less, in the last three full financial years. This was broken down as follows: 223 in 1981-82; 870 in 1982-83 and 658 in 1983-84. In the current financial year a further 303 units had been completed by November 1984.

Citizens Band Radio

39. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many prosecutions have been brought against persons who have been the subject of citizens band radio interference investigations over the last 12 months.

Mr. Butcher: During the 12 months from 1 October 1983 to 30 September 1984, 1,260 people were prosecuted under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 for the unlicensed use of citizens band radio equipment or for non-compliance with licence conditions. The great majority of these cases arose out of investigations by the radio investigation service of interference experienced by authorised radio users.

Yorkshire (Industrial Costs)

40. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on changes in the level of industrial costs in Yorkshire over the last 12 months.

Mr. Trippier: Official data on changes in the level of industrial costs in Yorkshire over the last 12 months are not available.

Regional Assistance

41. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the implications of his revision of regional assistance in the United Kingdom for the availability of European regional development funds.

Mr. Trippier: The increase in regional area coverage and the changes to the regional development grant scheme will improve the United Kingdom's ability to take advantage of assistance from the European regional development fund.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

42. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to take further decisions on the future arrangements of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Channon: My right hon. Friend will take further decisions as soon as possible after he has received the report of the review which I announced on 21 November last.

52. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is now in a position to announce those countries to whom extra Export Credits Guarantee Department cover will be made available.

Mr. Channon: Brazil and Mexico have already been confirmed as candidates under the new scheme which I announced to the House on 19 December 1984. Decisions on the resumption of cover for other debtor countries will be released by ECGD from time to time as appropriate.

Small Firms Enterprise Week

43. **Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give details of the programme for the proposed small firms enterprise week in 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Local enterprise week 1985 will be held from 15 to 25 May. I have written to a wide range of organisations asking them to participate and have received a good response. A special theme for the week will be the importance of education and training for the development of small firms. It is too early to give a full programme of events during the week, but I expect there to be a large number of local activities to promote the help available to small firms. My Department will be co-ordinating these events regionally and will work with national and local media to ensure publicity for activities during the week.

Cars (Exports to Spain)

44. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received regarding the difficulties of exporting British manufactured cars to Spain.

Mr. Channon: During the past 12 months I have received a number of letters from Members Parliament, trade associations and manufacturers about exporting cars to Spain. I have also met representatives of the United Kingdom car industry on several occasions as part of a regular exchange of views on this subject. Agreement was reached last month between the Community and Spain on improved access to the Spanish car market after she joins the Community. The details were contained in a written answer on 19 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed).

Manufacturing Industry Output

45. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the most recent figure for output in manufacturing industry; and how this compares with the figure for the same month in 1979.

Mr. Trippier: For the three months to November 1984 the index of production for manufacturing industry is 100, based on 1980 equal to 100. This is 7 per cent. lower than the index of production for manufacturing industry in the three months to November 1979.

Assisted Area Status

46. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will seek to vary the

provisions relating to assisted area status to permit assistance to be given to areas of high unemployment that currently do not qualify.

Mr. Trippier: As the closest available approximations to self-contained labour markets covering the whole country travel-to-work areas are both the most sensible basis for a policy aimed at encouraging additional employment opportunities in areas where they are most needed and the fairest way of making nationwide comparisons of areas' relative needs for such additional jobs.

Machine Tool Industry

47. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the prospects for 1985 of the performance of the British machine tool industry.

Mr. Butcher: Machine tool sales showed encouraging signs of recovery in 1984, and the industry should benefit from increasing demand in both home and export markets this year.

Small Firms (Management Training)

48. **Mr. Andy Stewart** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to promote the development of management training in small firms.

Mr. Trippier: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on Wednesday 19 December 1984 at column 241.

"Brazil—New Opportunities" (Exhibition)

49. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has been invited to attend the conference, "Brazil—New Opportunities," on 12 February.

Mr. Channon: No.

European Regional Development Fund Aid

50. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of European regional development fund aid committed to Britain will be devoted to Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England, respectively.

Mr. Trippier: In future, the share of ERDF receipts devoted to the individual countries of the United Kingdom will depend on their ability to generate eligible projects which command suitable priority in Community terms, and cannot therefore be predicted.

Oldham Batteries

51. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions his Department has had with Oldham Batteries at Denton about assistance with development of new plant and equipment.

Mr. Butcher: To protect commercial confidentiality, the practice in my Department is not to disclose its discussions with companies.

Nuclear Electro-Magnetic Pulse

53. **Mr. Neil Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what effect a one megaton nuclear burst at a height of 300 miles overhead would have on premises and equipment in his charge.

Mr. Trippier: Unprotected electronic and electrical equipment would be susceptible to damage from nuclear electro-magnetic pulse. Other effects can be discounted.

54. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to harden vulnerable equipment in his charge against the effects of nuclear electro-magnetic pulse.

Mr. Trippier: None.

British Telecom

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table showing for 29 November 1984 the number of British Telecom shareholders, excluding the Government, holding the following amounts of shares: 200 or fewer, 201 to 300, 301 to 399, 400 to 799, 800 to 1,199, 1,200 to 1,599, 1,600 to 99,999, 100,000 to 999,999 and one million or more, or a similar readily available distribution.

Mr. Butcher: The allocation of British Telecom shares under the United Kingdom offer for sale was as follows:

Number of shares allocated	*Number of shareholders*
0 to 200	525,698
400	512,063
500	335,945
600	117,501
800	625,971
1,200	3,461
1,600	12,706
Over 1,600	8,302

These figures include allocations made to employees in their own names but do not cover shares acquired by employees under the Government's free and matching share offer, which are currently held in trust. The allottees for over 1,600 shares include 2,127 institutional and other investors who applied for shares as priority applicants in the United Kingdom offer.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether the names and addresses of British Telecom shareholders are held on computer;

(2) if he will estimate the cost of providing the information sought by the hon. Member for Yeovil on British Telecom shareholders in his question answered on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *199*; and if he will provide the basis of this cost estimate.

Mr. Butcher: The details of the original BT share allottees are in the course of being loaded on to computer by the six receiving bankers to the issue. An analysis of their addresses now could only be carried out manually from share application forms, which would clearly involve disproportionate effort and cost, given the numbers involved.

The details will be loaded and transferred on to computers held by two banks by late spring, and the data will then be updated to form a register. I am advised that a computer analysis at that time to obtain the information

sought would be likely to require a transfer of computer tapes between the banks, and a number of computer runs through the register. The cost of doing this on current shareholder numbers is estimated at well in excess of £25,000.

British Shipbuilders

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has had any discussions with British Shipbuilders about retaining its headquarters at Benton house, Newcastle, in the context of the Government's policy of privatising the warship yards and Swan Hunters.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend has had no such discussions. However, I understand that British Shipbuilders has every intention of retaining its headquarters at Benton house for the foreseeable future.

Shipbuilding Industry (Redundancies)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what statistics he has showing the numbers of those volunteering for redundancy from the shipbuilding industry in the past two years by age group.

Mr. Butcher: Statistics are not available in the form requested. However, the following table gives details, by age group, of British Shipbuilders employees who have been made redundant and have received benefit under the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme in the two years ending December 1984:

Age Group	*Numbers*
Under 40	5,448
40 to 44	1,232
45 to 49	1,371
50 to 55	1,632
55 to 59	2,339
60 to 64	2,821
Total	14,843

Space Agency

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the creation of an independent space agency for Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Radio Stations

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licences have been granted for cellular radio base stations under the Telecommunications Act 1984; and how many of these are in the vicinity of the M25 motorway.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

British Aerospace Space Freighter

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he will make at the European Space Agency Council meeting on 30 January concerning European acceptance of the British Aerospace space freighter.

Mr. Butcher: I have nothing to add to my reply to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) on 21 January at column *280*.

British Leyland

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made by British Leyland over the sale of its Bathgate plant.

Mr. Butcher: I understand from BL that it has co-operated fully in providing potential purchasers of the Bathgate plant, in particular Marshalls Tractors and JCB, with the information they need in order to come to a decision. It is as yet too early to say whether this will lead to any sale.

Electricity Boards (Revenue Collection)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the revenue collection system of the East Midlands, South-Eastern, North-Eastern and South Western area electricity boards will be published.

Mr. Fletcher: The report is published today.

The commission was asked to investigate the efficiency and costs of the boards' revenue collection systems; the service given to consumers — including in relation to revenue collection and tariffs — and the treatment of revenue collection costs in the boards' reports and accounts.

The commission finds much to commend but makes a number of suggestions for improving cost control. The commission notes that the boards expect the costs of revenue collection to be reduced in real terms during the next few years. It recommends that each board should set a quantified cost objective for revenue collection, against which performance can be measured, and that the medium term objective for each board should be the achievement of continuing cost reduction in real terms. It also recommends that there should be more detailed budgetary control by the boards themselves.

The commission draws attention to the many differences between the boards' arrangements and procedures for revenue collection and recommends a drive to identify the implement best or improved practices throughout the industry. The commission also considers that there should be greater consistency between the boards with regard to measures of performance.

The commission considers that the boards should publish more information about their revenue collection costs and about standing charges.

The commission records the boards' view that advising consumers and answering queries are an integral part of their functions and are consistent with the increasing emphasis which they place on customer care. The report notes the difficulties of quantifying customer satisfaction but expresses the hope that continuing co-operation between the boards and the consultative councils will lead to great consistency in the recording of customer complaints, which could then give a somewhat better indication of customer satisfaction. The commission broadly endorses the boards' policies of developing payment schemes, partly to help customers who have difficulty in paying their electricity bills. The commission also recommends that the boards should follow the Electricity Council's guide on investment appraisal and should conduct their appraisals in a uniform way.

Finally, the commission concludes that none of the four boards is pursuing a course of conduct which operates against the public interest. The boards will be producing their initial responses to the report in about three to four months and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy will make a statement on these at that time.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the commission for a worthwhile and useful report on a subject which is of direct interest to all electricity consumers.

Manufactured Goods (Balance of Trade)

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the latest figure for the United Kingdom's balance of trade in manufactured goods.

Mr. Channon: Trade in manufactured goods was in deficit by £0·7 billion in the fourth quarter of 1984.

Shipbuilding (Privatisation)

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the current level of capacity utilisation in those United Kingdom shipyards scheduled for privatisation.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 28 January 1985, c.*46*]: It is clear that some shipyards are more fully occupied than others. However, capacity depends on a number of factors, including present work force, availability of further labour and the availability of physical assets. There is, therefore, no precise measure and accordingly no reliable statistics.

United Medical Enterprises

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department has monitored the subsequent disposal of assets of United Medical Enterprises, formerly a subsidiary of the National Enterprise Board; what is his practice in relation to the monitoring of such sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 28 January 1985, c.*47*]: No. United MedicaL Enterprises is now a subsidiary of the London and Northern Group, and is treated by the Government on the same basis as any other private sector company.

Amateur Radio Licence

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to introduce a novice amateur radio licence.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 29 January 1985, c.*74*]: We have no plans to introduce a novice amateur radio licence at present.

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has had from the Radio Society of Great Britain in relation to the introduction of a novice amateur radio licence.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 29 January 1985, c.*74*]: The Radio Society of Great Britain, which represents the interests of United Kingdom radio amateurs, has put forward proposals for a provisional or novice licence in the past, but it has not done so in recent times because, I understand, doubts have been expressed as to whether a novice facility is in the best interests of amateur radio. We require radio amateurs to achieve a minimum standard of proficiency and there are fears that introducing a lower standard for novices would cause interference to other services. Officials in the Department's radio regulatory division (RRD) are, however, in discussion with the society about an alternative facility; a formal proposal has just been put forward and is receiving consideration.

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the amateur radio licence issuing department has been fully computerised.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 29 January 1985, c.*74*]: The amateur radio licensing process became fully computerised on 1 October 1984. At this early stage, refinements to the system are continuing.

NATIONAL FINANCE

EC Budget

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the purpose of a memorandum entry on the expenditure side of the draft EEC budget for 1985; and if it is intended that the amount of 1,315 million European currency units for agricultural expenditure mentioned in his answer on 5 December 1984 will be spent in 1985.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The purpose was to reaffirm the commitment given by the Council of Ministers in October that the inescapable agricultural overrun in 1985 would be provided for when there was a legal basis for a budget which included it.

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the EEC Council of Finance Ministers, in setting the reference framework for budget expenditure, will have recommendations on this topic from other bodies in the EEC before making a decision.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Commission has agreed to provide the necessary information to enable the Council to fix the reference framework. The Council has undertaken to invite a delegation from the European Parliament to meet it before decisions on the reference framework are taken.

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer which EEC body will be responsible for preparing background information and recommendations for the Council of Finance Ministers before it sets the reference framework for the EEC budget.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Commission is the relevant Community body.

Tax Credit Scheme

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the cost of introducing a 1972 style tax credit scheme sufficient to enable family income supplement to be eliminated and to reduce pensioner dependence on supplementary benefit by 750,000; and if he will tabulate the statistical assumptions on which this estimate is based.

Mr. Moore: The net cost of such a scheme would be in the region of £8 billion in a full year at 1984-85 levels of personal allowances and post-November 1984 benefit rates.

The levels of credit assumed in the calculations are £19 per week for a married couple with additions, on top of child benefit of £17·20 per week for the first, and £3·80 per week for each subsequent child.

The method of calculation adopted is broadly that set out on pages 302 to 305 of the minutes of evidence given before the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee on the structure of personal income taxation and income support (20-I).

EC (Agricultural Prices)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if EEC Commission proposals for agricultural prices in the light of the financial guidelines will need approval from the Council of Finance Ministers before submission to the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Commission has undertaken to draw up its proposals on agricultural prices in the light of the financial guideline. The approval of Finance Ministers is needed only if the Agriculture Council wishes to take decisions which would exceed the cost of the Commission's proposals.

On-course Betting Duty

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost to the Revenue of abolishing, halving and reducing by 1 per cent., respectively, on-course betting duty.

Mr. Hayhoe: A little under £20 million, £10 million and £5 million, respectively.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the approximate cost per million pounds raised in on-course betting duty of collecting that duty.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that it is not possible to isolate the costs of collecting this duty from those of administering the betting and gaming duties as a whole.

EC (Agricultural Expenditure)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mechanisms exist to fund the amount overspent if EEC agricultural expenditure in any year exceeds the maximum limit set.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Any unavoidable additional agricultural expenditure would be funded through a supplementary and amending budget.

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mechanisms exist under the EEC financial guideline for agricultural expenditure in excess of the maximum specified in any year to be recouped by way of reducing agricultural prices in the following year below the level at which they would otherwise have been fixed.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Article 5 of the budgetary discipline agreement states that in clawing back additional agricultural expenditure the Council shall concentrate its activity primarily on the production sectors responsible for the failure to adhere to the guideline. Price reductions would be one means of securing the necessary savings.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will now publish the latest figures available for a married man with two children earning average male annual earnings, showing the length of time, after taking into account income tax liability and national insurance contribution, necessary to pay for each of the following items: 1 lb beef sirloin, 1 lb fresh cod fillets, an 800g sliced loaf, one pint of fresh milk, 1 lb pork, 1 lb back bacon, 1 lb sugar, 1 lb butter, one dozen eggs and 14 lbs potatoes; and if he will provide comparable figures for 1970, 1980 and 1983.

Mr. Peter Rees: The information is in the table. The calculations, presented in minutes, are based on average male—over 21—weekly earnings in all occupations and all industries and services, excluding those whose pay was affected by absence, in April of each year—taken from The New Earnings Survey. For the tax computations, it has been assumed that the two children are under the age of 11. The man is taken to be not-contracted-out for national insurance contributions purposes while the income tax figure assumes no allowances other than personal allowance and child tax allowances. Account has also been taken of family allowance and, in later years, child benefit in order to permit valid comparisons. The figures for average hours worked are also drawn from The New Earnings Survey results. The price data come from information collected for the RPI.

Working Time (minutes)

	April of each year			
	1970	*1980*	*1983*	*1984*
1 lb beef sirloin	47·5	55·8	52·2	51·0
1 lb fresh cod (fillets)	23·0	27·9	23·9	23·5
800g sliced loaf (wrapped)	9·9	8·4	7·2	6·8
1 pint fresh milk	5·0	4·3	4·0	3·7
1 lb pork loin (with bone)	36·1	28·7	23·0	23·5
1 lb back bacon (smoked)	36·2	31·1	27·4	27·0
1 lb sugar	4·1	4·0	4·0	3·8
1 lb butter	18·4	19·5	17·2	15·8
1 dozen eggs (size 4)	na*	16·8	12·5	15·5
14 lb potatoes	44·1	25·0	19·8	36·8

* Eggs were graded in a different manner in 1970.

Customs and Excise (Confiscated Goods)

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the estimated value of goods confiscated by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in each of the last five years; what are the main categories of confiscated goods; and what is done with the goods once they have been confiscated.

Mr. Hayhoe: Information about goods seized over the last five years is contained in the relevant annual reports of the commissioners of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library. These show the categories of goods concerned and, where available, the value of the items seized.

Confiscated goods are, wherever possible, either sold or, in certain circumstances, restored to their previous owners on payment of restoration sums. Goods which cannot be sold or restored, such as drugs and obscene or indecent material, are destroyed.

Disabled Persons (Polling Stations)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what grants are available for the provision of ramps to polling stations to assist voters confined to wheelchairs; how much has been spent for this purpose in each of the last 10 years; and for each year how many applications for grants have been *(a)* received and *(b)* granted.

Mr. Lawson: No specific financial allocation is made to cover grants for the provision of ramps at polling stations as an aid to disabled voters. However, all acting returning officers have been formally advised by the Home Office that the Treasury is prepared to meet half of the cost of purchasing portable ramps for disabled voters at polling stations provided that the local authorities responsible for the conduct of local elections at those stations are content to meet the other half.

It is not possible, except at disproportionate cost, to produce figures for each of the last 10 years of expenditure on ramps or of the numbers of applications recieved and granted by the Treasury from acting returning officers for contributions towards such expenditure.

Nationalised Industries (External Financing Limits)

Mr. Rowlands asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will list the contribution to be made by each individual nationalised industry towards the reduction in the external financing limits for nationalised industries to minus £110 million in 1987-88 as forecast in table 5.1 of Cmnd. 9428-11.

Mr. Peter Rees: No. It has never been the practice to publish external financing limits for individual industries beyond the year ahead. Later years figures for individual industries are subject to particular uncertainties arising from possible fluctuations in trading conditions and from the nature of external finance, being the residual between large offsetting flows of revenue and costs. The publication of such figures could well be misleading.

Mr. Rowlands asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions have been made about the percentage rise in gas and electricity prices in arriving at the reduction in external financing limits for nationalised industries in 1987-88 of minus £110 million in table 5.1 of Cmnd. 9428-11.

Mr. Peter Rees: Decisions on tariffs are a matter for the industries concerned. However, the external financing figures published in table 5.1 of Cmnd. 9428-11 are consistent over the period of the public expenditure plans with price increases for gas broadly in line with the rate of inflation and for electricity slightly below the rate of inflation.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the total cost to the Exchequer of the mining strike.

Mr. Peter Rees: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 24 January at column *501*.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Churchill asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the changes in public expenditure in each year since 1978-79 to date; and what is his forecast for those years for which figures are available expressed both in constant prices and as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *67*]: The information requested is as follows:

	Percentage increase in public expenditure		*Public expenditure as a percentage of GDP*	*Planning total in real terms*
	Cash terms	*Real terms*		
1978-79	+15·8	+4·7	—	—
1979-80	+17·0	+0·1	39·5	111·8
1980-81	+20·4	+1·5	42	113·5
1981-82	+12·9	+2·7	43·5	116·6
1982-83	+8·3	+1·6	43	118·4
1983-84	+6·1	+1·6	42·5	120·3
1984-85	+6·5	+1·7	42·5	122·3
1985-86	+3·1	−1·3	41	120·7
1986-87	+3·5	−0·5	40	120·1
1987-88	+3·5	+0·2	39·5	120·4

Pay and Employment (Review)

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish a review of the evidence relating to the link between pay and employment.

Mr. Lawson: A review by Treasury officials is being published today, and I am placing a copy in the House Library.

Sterling (Exchange Rate)

Sir David Price asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in view of deteriorating position of the pound sterling against the United States dollar, he intends to initiate any further action.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have nothing to add to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement to the House on 14 and 29 January and his statement to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on 28 January.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Newcastle Computer Dispute

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action will be taken to recover amounts of benefit overpaid during the strike by computer staff at his Department's Newcastle upon Tyne office.

Mr. Newton: Beneficiaries will be invited to repay any excess amount, but in general we will not press for repayment of overpayments that arose because the Newcastle dispute which the claimant could not reasonably have been expected to prevent or realise, or which had not been accompanied by some clear understanding about subsequent adjustment.

Deaf Persons (Assistance)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will itemise the specific measures which

have been taken over the past five years to help deaf people cope with their disability and minimise the handicap arising therefrom.

Mr. Newton: A wide selection of measures has been undertaken, including significant improvements in the range and effectiveness of hearing aids, provision of central funding to help set up the new profession of hearing therapists, the development and evaluation of the Linco Bennett auditory response cradle and installation of inductive couplers in all public and motorway emergency telephone boxes. Also financial support has been given to several voluntary organisations in the deaf field, including considerable help towards the sympathetic hearing scheme, and for various technological projects helping hearing impaired people.

Flenac

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why Flenac is not available for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis; and what representations have been received since it was withdrawn.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In a review of the safety of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, the Committee on Safety of Medicines took account of about 900 reports of adverse reactions, including seven deaths, which were associated with the use of Flenac, and of other evidence on its potential risks and its benefits. The committee advised that there were no overriding clinical benefits that outweighed the risks and that, on grounds of safety, the product licence for the marketing of Flenac in the United Kingdom should not be renewed. The company appealed to the Medicines Commission which upheld the committee's advice, which we accepted. The company then decided to discontinue the sale of Flenac in the United Kingdom and withdrew it from pharmacies on 31 July 1984.

We have received seven letters concerning Flenac since it was withdrawn from the market.

Leukaemia

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the incidence of leukaemia in East Dorset during the last three years; how the figures compare with the national average for the incidence of leukaemia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is shown in the tables. Great care should be taken in trying to draw any worthwhile conclusions from these figures.

The East Dorset data are based on relatively few cancer registrations; the age structure of the population also has to be considered. Both these factors can lead to differences between the local and national figures. After adjustment for the age structure, the standardised registration ratios for leukaemia in East Dorset are 136 for males and 117 for females, compared with 100 for each sex in England and Wales as a whole. The difference for males—between 136 and 100 — is larger than would normally be expected to arise from chance variations due to the small numbers of cases in East Dorset.

Examination of the age specific rates show that eight of the nine age groups for males and five of the nine age groups for females show higher rates in East Dorset than the corresponding rates for England and Wales as a whole. The main differences for males occur in the age groups 55 to 74. It is not possible to determine whether enhanced recognition and registration of leukaemia in East Dorset, or different diagnostic terms, account for any of the excess.

Standardised Registration Ratios for Leukaemia (ICD 204-208) in East Dorset Health District 1979-81. England and Wales 1980=100.

Males	136
Females	117

Leukaemia (ICD 204-208) registrations in East Dorset Health District 1979-81, by sex and age group. Numbers and rates per 100,000 population. England and Wales 1980 rates per 100,000 population.

	Males			*Females*		
	East Dorset		*England and Wales rate*	*East Dorset*		*England and Wales rate*
Age-group	*Number*	*Rate*		*Number*	*Rate*	
0- 4	2	6·8	5·1	1	3·5	4·4
5-14	5	6·5	2·7	5	6·8	2·0
15-24	2	2·5	2·1	1	1·3	1·3
25-34	1	1·4	2·1	1	1·3	1·6
35-44	2	3·0	2·3	3	4·5	2·1
45-54	6	9·2	6·2	4	5·7	3·4
55-64	15	21·7	12·2	8	9·6	7·4
65-74	31	43·8	29·2	15	15·4	16·3
75 and over	25	64·6	61·6	27	34·2	31·6

Cardio-pulmonary Resuscitation (Training)

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied with the training of hospital medical and nursing staff in basic cardio-pulmonary resuscitation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Cardio-pulmonary resuscitation —CPR— is included in general professional training required by the medical royal colleges and faculties and the English National Board for Nurses, Midwives, and Health Visitors.

I am aware of reports that one health authority revised its training in practical techniques in CPR after an article reviewing the performance of 50 of its junior doctors. It is for health authorities with professional advice to provide such training to meet local needs of their staff.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice he intends to give to dispensing general practitioners in the period prior to the proposed implementation of a limited list on 1 April 1985 over their stocks of branded products.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 10 January 1985, at column *539*, which applies equally to dispensing doctors.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations on his limited list proposals have been carried out with the psychiatric profession.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The medical profession as a whole was consulted through the British Medical Association. In addition, the Royal College of Psychiatrists has written to me and individual psychiatrists have responded to our Chief Medical Officer's invitation to send comments on the medicines which should remain available on the National Health Service. A consultant psychiatrist, Professor Malcolm Lader, who is professor of clinical psychopharmacology at the Institute of Psychiatry of the University of London is assisting our Chief Medical Officer in his appraisal of the professional and medical advice we have received on our provisional list.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the British Medical Association to discuss the proposed limited list of prescribable drugs;

(2) what proposals he has received from the British Medical Association advocating a recommended list of cheaper drugs, to be drawn up along the lines of hospital formularies, rather than his limited list proposals; and what response he has made.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My recent meeting with the British Medical Association clearly demonstrated that its representatives shared the Government's aim of encouraging economic prescribing. The association has not, however, submitted any specific proposals of the sort mentioned by my hon. Friend at any of the meetings I have had with it or its general medical services committee over the last three years.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration he is giving to specific problems for rural dispensing doctors by his proposals for a limited list of drugs; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my replies to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris) on 5 December 1984 at column *220* and on 9 January 1985 at column *496*.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what provision he intends to make under his limited list proposals to ensure that patients terminally ill with cancer have a wider access to pain-killing drugs than aspirin or morphine; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As I have previously made clear, an adequate range of analgesics will remain available on NHS prescription.

"Don't Smoke" Day

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much public money will be spent on the funding of the national "Don't Smoke" day on 20 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Health Education Council and the Scottish Health Education Group, which are Government funded, are contributing £51,500, about half the total cost, of this year's national no-smoking day. The balance is provided by the other sponsoring organisations and a number of companies. On the evidence of past years, the event is successful in encouraging smokers to give up.

End-Stage Renal Failure

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to achieve his target of 40 new patients per annum per million of the population who are suffering from end-stage renal failure; if he can give any indication of a speed-up in the process; if he will indicate what his target figure is for 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on 20 December at columns *310-311*. No target figure has been set for 1990.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider the establishment of an independent inquiry into the treatment of end-stage renal failure; if he will indicate what policies his Department recommends in circumstances where there is insufficient provision for patients in need; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: There is already a great deal of information available about the treatment of end-stage renal failure and we do not consider that an independent inquiry would significantly add to present knowledge.

Whether or not an individual patient is accepted for treatment is a matter for the clinical judgment of the doctors involved.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that all patients needing treatment for end-stage renal failure receive such treatment; if he is satisfied with the referral rate by general practitioners and other consultants to renal consultants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: There is a need for a higher level of services for treatment of end-stage renal failure which is why their development has been identified as a priority, and targets set against which expansion can be monitored.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider setting up a limited number of renal units to cater for the problems created by difficult kidney patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is for health authorities to decide, in the light of local clinical advice, whether any special treatment facilities are required for particular categories of kidney patients.

Health Authority Statistics

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will list information and statistics known to be collected by regional health authorities but not collated centrally by his Department.

Mr. John Patten: We do not collect information about information we do not collect.

Information (Members' Requests)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* requests for information on matters within his responsibility since June 1983 from hon. Members that he has been unable to respond to.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

DHSS Statistics

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what statistics his Department has ceased to collect since June 1983.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Hospital Inpatients (Cost)

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current weekly cost of a National Health Service hospital inpatient in the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will estimate the cost in the current year.

Mr. Patten: The table shows the weekly cost of an inpatient in various types of National Health Service hospital:

Type of hospital	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Acute over 300 beds	555·38	603·05	626·15
Acute 101-300 beds	500·92	553·07	580·02
Acute 51-100 beds	433·65	466·20	496·37
Acute 1-50 beds	319·27	332·64	356·93
Mainly acute	438·62	474·60	489·72
Partly acute	363·09	407·68	423·22
Mainly long stay	288·82	310·24	313·25
Long stay	232·89	247·80	258·44
Geriatric	215·53	238·07	243·25
Pre convalescent	205·87	244·07	251·86
Convalescent	201·77	205·10	210·28
Rehabilitation	203·42	234·15	239·47
Maternity	538·79	612·78	639·87
Psychiatric mental illness	197·75	217·00	232·26
Psychiatric mental handicap	173·60	191·73	205·59
Orthopaedic	461·02	510·72	511·49
Tuberculosis and chest	506·45	421·68	502·53
Tuberculosis, chest and isolation	407·61	385·49	432·67
Children's acute	718·34	780·64	828·94
Other	511·49	575·96	603·40

We have made no estimate of the figures for the current year. These will become available when health authority accounts are submitted for 1984-85.

Low Income Families

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretay of State for Social Services if he will introduce new measures to counter hardships in low income families who are without heat or light due to fuel disconnections.

Mr. Whitney: We have no plans at present to introduce new measures to help low income families whose fuel supplies have been disconnected. The Government already provide substantial help through the social security system with the cost of fuel, including supplementary benefit heating additions on which we expect to spend some £400 million this financial year. The fuel industries have a range of schemes to help consumers pay bills in instalments and their present code of practice makes special provision for those with low incomes. People receiving supplementary benefit can be given payments to cover the cost of having their fuel supplies reconnected and, where appropriate, to have a prepayment meter installed; they may be assisted through the fuel direct scheme to retain their fuel supply and to pay their debts in instalments. Local authority social services departments also have powers to provide advice and guidance and, in exceptional circumstances, to make payments to help avoid the need to take children into care because of lack of fuel supplies.

Fuel Direct Scheme

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will make a statement on the problems experienced on the fuel direct scheme;

(2) if he will investigate the administration of the fuel direct scheme, with a view to providing a more effective programme of monitoring at both local and national level.

Mr. Whitney: Fuel direct is a scheme devised to help people receiving supplementary benefit, who are threatened with disconnection of their gas or electricity supplies, to avoid disconnection and pay their debts. In 1982, the agreement between the Department and the fuel industries on the way in which the fuel direct scheme should be operating was revised and improvements made to the scheme. The agreement is published as appendix 9 of the S Manual, a copy of which is in the Library. In general, the scheme works well and we have no plans to conduct a special investigation of the administration of fuel direct or to take special steps to improve existing monitoring of the scheme. Later this year, however, we plan to introduce a microcomputer system which will assist and improve administration of the fuel direct scheme. We are also currently considering the findings of the supplementary benefit review which had as one of its main aims the improvement of the administration of the supplementary benefit scheme in general.

Preschool Playgroups Association

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has received the report from the team of officials looking into the financial control and management of the Preschool Playgroups Association.

Mr. John Patten: Yes, and I have had constructive discussions with the Preschool Playgroups Association about the report's findings, which the association has indicated it finds very helpful. We have agreed on various measures which the association now has in train to strengthen their financial management.

Benefits

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what he estimates would be the current annual cost of raising to the long-term benefit rate the supplementary benefit payable to persons continuously unemployed for more than 12 months.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on 27 November 1984 at column 765.

Post Mortem Examinations

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to change the regulations relating to the holding of post mortems on infants who die without apparent cause.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

The Home Secretary is concerned only with post mortem examinations ordered by coroners. Whether or not a post mortem examination should be ordered in a given case is a matter within the discretion of the coroner concerned. We have no plans to recommend to my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor any amendment to the Coroners Rules 1984.

Hospitals (Ethical Committees)

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospitals have ethical committees to consider research projects before they commence.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January 1985, c. *166*]: All clinical research projects should be approved by a suitable ethical committee. The number, location and organisation of such committees is a matter for the medical profession, but we would favour a policy whereby every institution where any significant amount of clinical research is done sets up its own ethical committee.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 31 January 1985

HOME DEPARTMENT

Coal Industry Dispute

4. **Mr. Mates** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support the Government are providing for chief constables and police authorities as a result of the burden of policing in the coal dispute.

Mr. Brittan: The Government have shown the full extent of their support for the police in the unprecedented scale of our assistance with the additional costs of policing the dispute. I have already announced that for each police force area we shall meet 90 per cent. of the additional costs above the product of a penny rate and that no police authority's share of the cost will exceed the product of three quarters of a penny rate. We have also paid out advances of £128 million to help with police authorities cash flow.

29. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is considering introducing any new measures to seek to prevent intimidation.

Mr. Giles Shaw: In his review of the law on public order my right hon. and learned Friend has considered the powers of the police and the courts to deal with intimidation, but he is not yet ready to announce his conclusions. In the course of the miners' dispute the police have acted vigorously to deal with assaults and other criminal offences. For details of charges brought under section 7 of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875, which created a specific offence of intimidation, I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims).

37. **Mr. Sims** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use has been made of section 7 of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875 during the miners' dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The figures which have been regularly given in answer to questions about charges for different offences during the miners' dispute relate to the main charge brought on arrest or summons. Further charges may be added subsequently. I understand that in total 643 charges have been brought under section 7 of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875, including those charges added at a later stage. Details are as follows:

Police force area	*Number of Charges*	*For activities on picket line*	*Subsection charged*
Derbyshire	276	not available	not available
Durham	1	none	7(1)
Dyfed Powys	38	none	7(4)
Gwent	9	none	7(4)
Kent	34	none	7(4)
Nottinghamshire	174	90	7(4)
Staffordshire	6	5	7(1)—5 charges 7(1)—1 charge
Warwickshire	7	none	7(1)—3 charges 7(1) and (4)—4 charges
South Wales	23	none	7(4)
South Yorkshire	31	none	7(4)
West Yorkshire	44	none	7(1)—33 charges 7(2)—11 charges

Although a detailed breakdown for Derbyshire is not available, I understand that the majority of charges there related to activities on the picket line, and the majority of prosecutions have been brought under section 7(4).

39. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to make facilities available for the inquiry by the European Assembly into police conduct at pit heads.

52. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what co-operation his Department will be offering to the European Assembly's investigation on the policing of the miners' dispute.

75. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government concerning co-operation with the inquiry set up by the European Parliament to inquire into the policing of the miners' dispute in Britain.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer the hon. Members to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Proctor) on 18 January, at column 238.

43. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest figure for miners arrested in connection with the National Union of Mineworkers—National Coal Board dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: 8,552 of the 9,374 people arrested in connection with the miners' dispute between 13 March and 29 January inclusive were miners.

44. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the maximum sentences passed by the courts for offences for which people have been convicted in connection with the miners' dispute.

63. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sentences have been passed by the courts for the most serious offences committed during the miners' dispute.

Mr. Mellor: As at 25 January 1985, 112 defendants had been dealt with by the Crown court on charges related to the miners' strike, of whom 91 had been convicted. The offences of those convicted and the sentences passed on them are as follows:

Offence	*Numbers convicted by case*	*Sentence*
Affray	4	(1) Bound over for 18 months (2) (3) and (4) six months suspended imprisonment
Arson and conspiracy to commit criminal damage	6	(1)-(5) 2 years imprisonment (6) 2 years youth custody
Assault	1	9 months imprisonment
	1	9 months imprisonment
	3	(1) £100 fine (2) and (3) 28 days suspended imprisonment
	4	Bound over for 12 months
Assault causing actual bodily harm	1	6 months imprisonment
	1	6 months imprisonment (3 months suspended)
	1	14 days imprisonment
	2	(1) 40 days suspended imprisonment and £75 compensation (2) £75 fine and costs
	1	Bound over for 12 months
	1	Bound over for 12 months
Causing grievous bodily harm with intent	2	(1) 5 years imprisonment (2) 3 years youth custody
Criminal damage	10	(1) 3 years youth custody (2) to (4) 2½ years youth custody (5) to (10) 2½ years imprisonment
Criminal damage and arson	2	(1) 9 months imprisonment (2) 9 months youth custody
Criminal damage and causing grievous bodily harm	1	(3) 15 months imprisonment
Criminal damage (arson)	1	9 months imprisonment
Criminal damage	1	4 months imprisonment
	1	3 months suspended imprisonment
	6	Bound over for 12 months
Handling a vehicle without consent	1	£50 fine
Taking conveyance without consent	1	CSO
Reckless driving	1	6 months imprisonment
Theft	1	Bound over for 12 months and £50 fine
Unalwful assembly	16	CSO
	16	CSO
Wounding	2	12 months imprisonment (6 months suspended)
	1	6 months imprisonment
	1	CSO and bound over for 12 months
Wounding and assault	1	£250 fine or 60 days

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been lodged against the police as a result of the miners' strike; and in how many of these complaints the inquiries have been completed.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The available information is that, in the period from 13 March 1984 to 15 January 1985, 534 complaints were made against police officers relating to actions arising from the policing of the dispute and that 100 of these have been withdrawn. Information about the number of complaints in respect of which investigation has been completed could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

56. **Mr. Mark Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many custodial sentences have been passed for offences committed in the course of the miners' dispute.

Mr. Mellor: In the period 13 March to 29 January inclusive, 141 immediate custodial sentences were passed for offences committed in connection with the miners' dispute. These included one sentence of five years and one of three years for causing grievous bodily harm; and one sentence of three years and eight of two and a half years for arson.

58. **Sir Edward Gardner** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement about the policing of the miners' dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am glad to reaffirm our full support for the police in the action they are taking to maintain order and to ensure that those who wish to exercise their right to go to work are able to do so.

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been disciplined for incidents connected with the mining dispute; how many disciplinary charges are pending; and how many complaints have been made about the behaviour of police officers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: In the period from 13 March 1984 to 22 January 1985, 537 complaints were made against police officers relating to actions arising during the course of the dispute. 102 of these have been withdrawn. Most of the remainder are still under investigation. I understand that the Police Complaints Board will include in its annual report for 1984 statistics on the number of investigation reports received by them which they have identified as dealing with complaints arising from the policing of the miners' strike and on the outcome of the investigations.

Civil Defence

9. **Mr. Aspinwall** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Depaartment if he will collate centrally information on the training of civil defence volunteers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Yes. Information derived from local authorities, including that from visits made by the co-ordinator of volunteer effort in civil defence, will be collated by our officials with the assistance of the new civil defence adviser.

25. **Mr. Martin Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regulatory powers the Government will apply to ensure that civil defence grants are not misused by those local authorities opposed to civil defence.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Civil defence (Grant) Regulations 1953 (as amended) make adequate provision for this purpose.

35. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the working party on standardisation of training of civil defence volunteers heard evidence from any volunteer bodies engaged in civil defence.

54. **Mr. Neil Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence was taken by the working party on standardisation of training of civil defence volunteers.

65. **Mr. Speller** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether evidence was taken by the working party on standardisation of training of civil defence volunteers from any of the Devon emergency planning officers or from members of the Devon emergency volunteers.

77. **Mr. Bill Walker** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the working party on standardisation of training of civil defence volunteers accepted any evidence from Sir Leslie Mavor.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The working party did not call for or take evidence in any formal way. It drew primarily on the experience of its members and the views it received from people such as Sir Leslie Mavor with experience in civil defence volunteer matters.

51. **Dr. Twinn** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the civil defence publications which his Department and Easingwold will make available in 1985; and what other informative materials he has plans for thereafter.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We expect to make the following documents available during the next 12 months or so:

The Consolidated Circular of Guidance to Local Authorities on Emergency Planning;

A technical handbook designed to help local authorities identify potential communal shelters;

A publication which will include advice on protective measures;

Revised material dealing with the effects of nuclear and other weapons;

A revised version of "Civil Defence—The Basic Facts";

A revised booklet on the work of the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation;

The reports of the Home Office-Civil Defence College working party on the standardisation of training of civil defence volunteers.

In addition, we hope to have a public information film on civil defence for issue before the end of the year.

69. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil defence volunteers per 100,000 of the population will be needed to supply reasonable civil defence support.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The number necessary to fulfil their responsibilities under the Civil Defence Regulations is for individual local authorities to decide in the light of local circumstances.

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide guidance for local authorities on travel and subsistence rates for civil defence volunteers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Reasonable expenditure thus incurred is eligible for grant-aid, but the rates are a matter for individual local authorities. Nevertheless, if my hon. Friend has a particular issue in mind I would be glad to hear from him.

Crime Prevention

12. **Mr. Lightbown** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to encourage more local effort in crime prevention.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Home Office crime prevention unit has been actively encouraging and assisting a wide range of local initiatives aimed at preventing burglary, theft, autocrime and violence. This will continue. The unit is helping in the preparation of a report for local authorities and police forces giving examples of good practices. It is also revising the guidelines for local crime prevention panels; and promoting a number of regional panel conferences.

19. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how his Department plans to ensure that a higher priority is given by national and local government to crime prevention.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown) earlier today. In addition to the activities I have already referred to, we are co-operating with other central departments in giving more prominence to crime prevention nationally. The Home Office Standing Committee on Crime Prevention, which I chair myself, is considering ways of enhancing its role and influence. To stimulate public awareness, a £1·5 million television and press campaign was mounted in London and the midlands last autumn.

59. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further steps he intends to take to combat the increase in crime.

60. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to take to combat the increase in violent crime.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Chief officers of police are encouraged by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary to formulate strategies both for the prevention and investigation of crime which reflect prevailing local patterns of crime and which make best use of the resources at their disposal. Strategies for the most effective use of available resources against crime are also being developed by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. The Home Office crime prevention unit is supporting and encouraging local crime prevention activity involving the police, other relevant agencies and the public.

An effective criminal justice strategy must include an adequate range of sentencing powers which will command

confidence. In addition to measures already introduced, the Government are supporting a private Member's measure by my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) to increase to life imprisonment the maximum penalty for persons convicted of trafficking in class A drugs and intends to introduce at the next legislative opportunity a measure similarly to increase the maximum penalty for persons convicted of carrying firearms in furtherance of crime.

Prisons

14. **Mr. Maude** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement about the use of overtime in prisons.

Mr. Mellor: Overtime working by prison officers in the current year is expected to cost nearly £97 million. Prison officers are working on average about 16½ hours overtime each week. This places a severe strain on them and their families and my right hon. and learned Friend is determined to use any reasonable way which can be found of reducing it.

Television Licence Fee

20. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he plans to increase the television licence fee.

Mr. Giles Shaw: As my right hon. and learned Friend indicated in his reply to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) earlier today, he is considering an application from the BBC for increased licence fees.

33. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he as received regarding the British Broadcasting Corporation's request for an increased licence fee.

50. **Mr. John M. Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the British Broadcasting Corporation's application for an increase in its licence fee.

61. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters he has received on the subject of the cost of a television licence since the beginning of the Session.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) earlier today.

70. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next proposes to discuss the licence fee with the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present for a meeting with the BBC.

Wartime Broadcasting Service

21. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will take steps to incorporate the existing links between local authorities and their local radio stations into the wartime broadcasting service.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The purpose of the wartime broadcasting service is to ensure the survival of a basic national and regional sound broadcasting service if normal systems fail after a nuclear attack. The service will be extended to include local radio stations as appropriate and as resources permit.

Entry Clearance (Statistics)

22. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for the last 12 months, what percentage of refusals of entry clearance through the operation of the primary purpose rule was accounted for by men from the Indian subcontinent.

Mr. Waddington: This information is not available because the collection of the necessary data is confined to the Indian subcontinent.

32. **Mr. Bevan** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken to hear *(a)* an appeal from abroad against refusal of an entry clearance and *(b)* an appeal by a person in the United Kingdom against refusal to vary leave to remain; and what were the comparable waiting times in 1979.

Mr. Waddington: I understand from the appellate authorities that appeals from abroad against refusal of an entry clearance can be heard by an adjudicator by between three and nine months from the date on which the appellant's representative in the United Kingdom signifies his readiness to proceed with the appeal, depending on the centre at which the appeal is heard. Appeals against refusal of variation of leave to remain are heard on average between two to three months from the date on which the appeal is received by the appellate authorities.

During 1979 the average delay for all appeals was 14 months.

36. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for settlement on behalf of children were refused in the latest 12-month period because entry certificates had not been obtained prior to arrival in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waddington: According to the readily available information, during the 12 months ending September 1984, a total of about 190 persons claiming to be dependants, including about 110 from the Commonwealth, were refused admission to the United Kingdom at ports of entry when seeking to enter for settlement without the entry clearance required by the immigration rules. To identify the number of children within these totals would involve disproportionate cost and it is not possible to say how many of the persons concerned would have qualified for and been granted entry certificates had they applied.

71. **Mr. Terry Davis** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further representations he has received about the operation of the primary purpose rule in relation to applications for entry clearance by husbands of British citizens.

Mr. Waddington: During the last 12 months representations have been received from several sources, including right hon. and hon. Members, most of whom were writing on behalf of constituents. It is not possible, without disproportionate cost, to give precise figures.

Visiting Forces Act

23. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now take steps to gather information on the number of occasions on which visiting forces have claimed primary jurisdiction for their nationals under the terms of the Visiting Forces Act.

Mr. Mellor: No.

Police and Fire Services

24. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many, and which, metropolitan district councils have indicated an interest in controlling police and fire services within their area.

Mr. Giles Shaw: At the time of their initial response to "Streamlining the Cities" (Cmnd. 9063), six metropolitan districts (Rochdale, Wirral, Sefton, Solihull, Dudley and Wolverhampton) indicated their interest in various forms of district involvement with the police and fire services.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the cost of providing effective, fully operational headquarters for *(a)* police and *(b)* fire services for each metropolitan district area where this facility does not exist; and if he will list these costs.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Such estimates could be prepared only at disproportionate cost.

Drugs (Young Persons)

26. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is planning any further measures to prevent young people experimenting with dangerous drugs.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health has announced that the Government intend to launch a major education and prevention campaign directed at parents and young people. An advertising agency has now been asked to develop proposals for the campaign, taking into account information derived from market research commissioned by the Government.

Prevention of Terrorism

27. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the use of the prevention of terrorism legislation over the recent Christmas period will be included in the first annual review of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984.

Mr. Brittan: Yes, but Sir Cyril Philips' task is concerned with the pattern of use of the powers under the Act; he will not be reporting in relation to individual cases.

53. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further plans he has to combat terrorism.

Mr. Brittan: I would refer my hon. Friend to my statement of 22 January, at columns 864-876, in which I announced new measures to combat terrorism. The Government will continue to monitor developments closely and give all necessary support to the agencies of law and order. We shall also continue to play a full part internationally in encouraging consultation and co-operation with other Governments in this field.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what point persons who are detained under the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act are logged as being a notifiable statistic; whether persons interviewed by police officers at ports of entry, including airports, under the provisions of the Act are advised that they are being so detained; how the procedure has varied between the Prevention of Terrorism Acts 1974, 1976 and the 1984 Act; if persons who are asked to fill in a card giving their details and whereabouts whilst in Ireland are notified as being examined under the provisions of the Act; and whether there have been any changes in statistical analysis of persons detained under the provisions of the 1984 Act and of the 1974 and 1976 Acts.

Mr. Brittan: All detentions under the Prevention of Terrorism Act or the supplemental order are recorded for statistical purposes. However, a person may be examined at a port for up to 12 hours without being detained; such examinations are recorded after one hour and at that point the person is notified in writing of his position. A person may be required under the supplemental order to complete a landing or embarkation card, but that would not be recorded for statistical purposes unless he was subsequently examined for more than one hour or detained.

There were no specific provisions on the collection of statistics or advice to persons examined in the 1974, 1976 or 1984 Acts. Full statistics on the operation of the legislation have been collected and published from 1979 in a series of quarterly bulletins, following a recommendation by Lord Shackleton; statistics of those examined for more than one hour but not detained have been collected and published from 1984, following a recommendation by Lord Jellicoe.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the number of people held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act between 1 January 1983 and the present; and of these how many were detained *(a)* whilst Parliament was in recess and *(b)* while Parliament was sitting.

Mr. Brittan [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *275*]: Information on detentions under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts is given in tables 1 and 2 of the latest quarterly Home Office Statistical Bulletin, issue No. 1/85. Of the total of 394 detained in 1983 and 1984, 120 were detained while Parliament was in recess, and 274 while Parliament was sitting.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the number of people held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act from 1983 onwards together with *(a)* a breakdown of this total by country of origin, *(b)* the number of these whose period of detention was extended by his Department who were subsequently charged, *(c)* the number of these whose period of detention was extended by his Department who were subsequently released without charge and *(d)* a breakdown of the reasons for his Department's decision to extend the period of detention.

Mr. Brittan [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *275*]: The available information is given in the

following table. I consider personally applications for extensions of detention; each decision is taken on an individual basis and it would not be appropriate for me to discuss the reasons for them.

Persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts, 1983-84
Great Britain *Number*

Country of birth	*Number detained*	*of which Detention extended*	
		Charged	*Not charged*
United Kingdom			
England	37	3	4
Wales	4	—	—
Scotland	26	2	10
Northern Ireland	232	1	36
Channel Islands	1	—	—
Republic of Ireland	42	7	2
Algeria	5	—	4
Australia	3	—	1
Cyprus	2	—	—
France	1	—	—
Iran	3	—	2
Jamaica	1	—	—
Jordan	1	—	—
Libya	16	3	2
Morocco	1	—	—
Nigeria	8	2	—
Saudi Arabia	1	—	1
South Africa	1	—	—
Sudan	2	—	1
Tunisia	1	1	—
USA	3	—	2
USSR	1	1	—
Not recorded	2	—	—
TOTAL	394	20	65

Racial Attacks

28. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his assessment of the incidence of racial attacks during the last 12 months.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We are much concerned about racial attacks and racial incidents and are particularly disturbed that the total number of incidents involving Asian and black victims has increased.

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has made this problem one of the two new priority objectives for the Metropolitan police in 1985. We will continue to give every support to the police in their efforts to develop more effective ways of dealing with racial attacks.

Detention Centres

30. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to alter the regime in detention centres.

Mr. Mellor: On 24 July 1984 my right hon. and learned Friend announced a programme to establish a consistent regime for the whole detention centre system. He will be announcing shortly his plans for the implementation of the new regime.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

31. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will include instruction in the properties and effects of chemical and biological weapons on courses at the Civil Defence college, Easingwold.

Mr. Giles Shaw: These effects are dealt with in a small number of specialised courses, and appropriate reference is made to them in others.

Schools (Police Visits)

34. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on police visits to schools for educational purposes in the metropolitan area.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has our full support in all his efforts to make contact with young people, including visits to schools.

Public Warning Systems

38. **Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the public warning system will differentiate between different types of attack.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Initial public warning of an air attack of whatever form will be given by sirens and radio broadcasts without differentiation. Following an attack, radio broadcasts will provide more specific information, and, if appropriate, maroons will also be used to indicate a danger of radioactive fallout.

Auld Report

40. **Mr. Robert B. Jones** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Auld report.

46. **Dr. Hampson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a statement about the reform of the Shops Act.

48. **Sir Fergus Montgomery** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now make a statement about the Auld report on shop hours.

64. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will announce an early decision on the conclusions of the Auld report.

67. **Mr. Michael Brown** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now make a statement about the Auld report on shop hours.

72. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the reform of the Shops Act.

83. **Mr. Michael Morris** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a statement about the Auld report on shop hours.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply I gave to questions from my hon. Friends the Members for Ravensbourne (Mr. Hunt) and for Halifax (Mr. Galley) earlier today.

British Broadcasting Corporation

41. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a commission of inquiry to investigate and make recommendations on the future structure and finances of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to do so.

Hong Kong (Vietnamese Refugees)

42. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had on the implications for immigration policy in relation to Vietnamese refugees of the agreement on the future of Hong Kong.

Mr. Waddington: We have discussed the Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong with various individuals and organisations, but none of these discussions has been in the context of the agreement on the future of Hong Kong.

Police (Records)

45. **Mr. Corbett** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is satisfied that all the records held by the special branch of the Metropolitan police contain only necessary and relevant information, properly authenticated, and that there is an effective system of updating information and destroying information no longer related to the discharge of special branch functions.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis is aware of the provisions of the Home Office guidelines on the work of a special branch (issued on 19 December 1984) and my right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied that he takes all the necessary steps to ensure that they are complied with the Metropolitan police special branch, both as to the keeping of records and more generally.

Independent Local Radio

49. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has discussed with the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority the independent Broadcasting Authority's new policy on regulations for independent local radio.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Last autumn my right hon. and learned Friend discussed the regulation of independent local radio in general terms with the chairman and director-general of the IBA, and he has since written expressing his support for the approach recently outlined by the authority.

Drugs Abuse

55. **Mrs. Rumbold** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further measures the Government intend to introduce to tackle the problem of drug abuse.

Mr. Mellor: The Ministerial Group is continuing to consider ways of developing the Government's strategy. Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is providing 160 more customs officers, mainly to counter drug smuggling; my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has commissioned an advertising agency to draw up proposals for a major education and prevention campaign and is providing more resources for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation; and the Government will be supporting the Bill which my hon. Friend the Members for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) has introduced to increase to life imprisonment the maximum penalty for trafficking in class A drugs.

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what number and proportion of prison service offices are trained to handle the problem of prisoners who are drug misusers; and whether he is satisfied with their number.

Mr. Mellor: All prison officers receive a half day's training on the subject of drugs and their misuse, during the initial basic training at the Officers' Training School, Wakefield. Further training is given nationally, regionally and within establishments every year. With regard to the detection of drugs, specialist training in this area is provided for certain dog handlers and the number of such specialists is currently being increased. The Prison Service College is also preparing a video film and teaching pack on drug detection which will be issued to all establishments in 1985 for staff training purposes.

Police (Surveillance Techniques)

57. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will issue further guidelines to the special branch of the police on the use of surveillance techniques and the definition of the term subversive in the context of the recent guidelines which he has drawn up for them.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Special branch applies the definition of subversion formulated by Lord Harris of Greenwich in 1975, and quoted in paragraph 20 of the "Guidelines on the Work of a Special Branch" issued on 19 December 1984; "Subversive activities are . . . those which threaten the safety or well-being of the State, and which are intended to undermine or overthrow Parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means"—*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 February 1975, Vol. 357, c. 947. The definition is well understood by chief officers and we do not consider that any further guidance is needed on this point.

Rape

62. **Ms. Richardson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of alleged rape were reported in 1984; and how many resulted in conviction.

Mr. Mellor: Statistics concerning rape include attempted rape and aiding or abetting an offence of rape. Numbers of offences of rape recorded by the police are published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" (table 2.9 of the volume for 1983, Cmnd. 9349). In the first nine months of 1984 the police recorded 1,077 such offences. Information on convictions for rape is also published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables"—table S1.1(A), Vol. 1 for magistrates courts and table 2.1(A), Vol. 2 for the Crown court. Convictions in one year do not necessarily relate to offences recorded by the police in that year.

Prisoners (Parole)

66. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any further proposals for the exclusion of prisoners from parole, following the decision of the Court of Appeal in Findlay and Others v Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Mr. Mellor: No prisoners are excluded from parole consideration by the policy held to be lawful by the House of Lords in the case of Findlay and others. We have no further proposals at present to change our policy on parole.

Community Radio

68. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's current proposals for the development of community radio.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 23 January at column 417-18.

Police (Special Branch)

73. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he proposes to amend the guidelines issued by his Department on the work of the special branch.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to do so.

76. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards exist to ensure that special branch officers adhere to the guidelines issued by his Department.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief officer of each force is responsible for ensuring that the activities of his special branch are properly controlled and supervised, having regard to the provisions of the Home Office "Guidelines on the work of a Special Branch", issued on 19 December 1984. Special branches are also subject to inspection by Her Majesty's inspectors of constabulary in the same way as other parts of police forces.

Police Rent Allowance

74. **Mr. Eldon Griffiths** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on future arrangements for police rent allowance.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The police arbitration tribunal recommended that the existing arrangements for calculating rent allowances should remain unchanged. My right hon. and learned Friend has accepted that recommendation. Under the Police Regulations, he has to approve force maximum limits, and he has thought it right to advise police authorities of the considerations which should be taken into account before giving approval.

Thames Valley Police Force

78. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reach a conclusion on the proposed increase in the establishment of the Thames Valley police force.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has already done so. The police authority was informed on 25 January that he is prepared to approve an increase of 20 police posts in the current financial year and 30 posts with effect from 1 April 1985, provided that the police authority will find the necessary finance for these posts and its proposed civilianisation programme.

Racism (Police Training)

79. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is satisfied with the operation of racism awareness training course for the police.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Home Office sponsored an experimental series of four courses in racism awareness training for police officers. An evaluation of that training was recently published. We are satisfied that training of this kind has a contribution to make to the community and race relations courses that are currently being developed by the police.

The Home Office has also set up at Brunel university a centre for the study of community and race relations, with an emphasis on developing the training skills of police trainers in this subject.

Immigration Interviews (Tape Recording)

80. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce on an experimental basis the tape recording of immigration interviews.

Mr. Waddington: No. The outcome of a further review by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the possible use of tape recordings in interviews by entry clearance officers abroad is awaited. Until it is received no decision will be taken about the use of tape recorders in immigration interviews in this country.

Metropolitan Police

81. **Mr. John Fraser** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ask the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to defer plans for reorganising the district and area organisation of the police until the proposals have been debated in Parliament.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner's plans for reorganising the Metropolitan police will be implemented over the next two years. As my right hon. and learned Friend said on 17 January, at columns 175-76, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) he hopes, subject to the usual consultations, that it will be possible to find time before Easter to give the House an opportunity to debate the Commissioner's recent report to him on his plans and priorities for the coming year.

82. **Mr. Mikardo** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to assess *(a)* public support and *(b)* public opposition amongst the community in relation to the proposed changes in the management structure of the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has assured me that he will be consulting widely about the detailed development and implementation of his plans to restructure the force within the broad outline he has already announced. My right hon. and learned Friend has invited right hon. and hon. Members for constituencies in the Metropolitan police district to discuss with him, as police authority, any matters arising from the Commissioner's recent report to him, including the reorganisation of the force.

Young Offenders

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation amending the present statutory arrangements for the treatment of young offenders by adopting throughout England and Wales the hearing system for children in trouble currently practised in Scotland.

Mr. Mellor: No. We believe that there is a need for fuller consideration and discussion of this and other alternatives to the present system (such as the establishment of family courts with some jurisdiction over juvenile offenders, as envisaged by the Social Services Committee in its second report of last Session) before any conclusion is reached.

Prison Rules

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners on rule 43 worked in their cells on the most recent convenient date; and what types of work they were employed in.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not available centrally. Efforts are made to provide prisoners on rule 43 with work where local circumstances, including the availability of suitable work, permit. In the case of prisoners on rule 43 for their own protection this may include work in association.

Leeds Prison

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners contracted salmonella in the recent outbreak at Leeds prison; how many of these prisoners shared cells; and when salmonella was first diagnosed.

Mr. Mellor: The first prisoner at Leeds prison reported sick suffering from what proved to be salmonella poisoning on 13 October 1984. Five other cases were subsequently confirmed. All but one of these prisoners had been sharing cells at the time they became ill.

Terrorist Offences (Statistics)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners had been convicted of terrorist offences at the most recent convenient date; and how many of these were serving life sentences;

(2) how many terrorist murderers were in prison in England and Wales on the most recent convenient date; and for how long the longest serving has been detained.

Mr. Mellor: The only information which is readily available relates to prisoners who are currently in custody in England and Wales and in category A. It does not cover prisoners who have never been in category A or who have been removed from category A. As at 25 January 1985 there were 64 prisoners convicted of terrorist-type offences, of whom 34 were serving life sentences. Twenty-two prisoners were convicted of terrorist-type murders, the longest serving of whom was first received in custody in England and Wales in October 1973.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many terrorist murderers have been released from prison to date.

Mr. Mellor: The only information which is readily available on prisoners convicted of murders relating to terrorism concerns prisoners who were in custody in England and Wales in category A at the time of release. One such prisoner has been released; he was suffering from terminal cancer and died three days later.

Criminal Responsibility (Minimum Age)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the minimum age of criminal responsibility in each country of western Europe.

Mr. Mellor: There is no short or simple answer; I shall write to the hon. Member.

Police Joint Boards

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many chief constables have made known to him their views on possible breakaways from the proposed police joint boards; and how many of them are in favour of such boards.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No chief constable has indicated to my right hon. and learned Friend that he favours a change in existing force area, or in the proposed joint boards.

Zeus Security Consultants

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions he has employed Zeus Security Consultants; and for what purpose.

Mr. Brittan: None.

Public Processions

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will detail all the circumstances he takes into consideration prior to banning or approving a public procession;

(2) if he will list his powers to ban processions *(a)* within the Greater London area and *(b)* elsewhere.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has no powers to ban processions. In London that power rests with the Commissioner of Police, and elsewhere with the borough or district council. Section 3 of the Public Order Act 1936 provides that in London the Commissioner of Police for the City of London or the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis may, subject to the Home Secretary's consent, make an order banning all public processions or any class of procession but only if the believes that his powers to impose conditions on processions under section 3(1) of the Act will be insufficient to prevent serious disorder. Outside London if a chief constable similarly believes that his powers under section 3(1) will not be sufficient to prevent serious public disorder, he must apply to the borough or district council for an order banning all public processions or any class of procession: and the council may make such an order, subject to my right hon. and learned Friend's consent. In deciding whether or not to consent to a banning order the Home Secretary considers in each case the risk of serious public disorder and the resources available to the police to control it, and makes a judgment of what he believes will be in the public interest.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide such details as are readily available of each order prohibiting processions made by him under the Public Order Act 1936 in each of the past five years and to date.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The following is the information in respect of banning orders made in England and Wales under section 3(2) or section 3(3) of the Act in the past five years:

Class or classes of procession banned	*Date ban commenced*	*District(s)*	*Duration*
1979	None	—	—
1980			
All public processions other than those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	16 August	Sandwell Dudley Wolverhampton Walsall Birmingham Coventry	30 days
1981			
All public processions other than those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	5 March	Metropolitan Police District City of London	27 days
All public processions other than those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	20 March	Leicester	1 month
All public processions other than those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	21 March	Wolverhampton	14 days
All public processions other than those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	21 March	Leeds	29 days
All public processions other than those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	22 March	Barnsley Doncaster Rotherham Sheffield	7 days
All public processions except those traditionally held on 1 May to celebrate May Day and those of a religious character customarily held	25 April	Metropolitan Police District City of London	28 days
All public processions other than those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	19 June	Coventry	23 days
All public processions other than those of a religious, educational, festive or cermonial character	11 July	Metropolitan Police District City of London	
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	18 July	Oxford	11 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character	18 July	Plymouth	30 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character	24 July	Scunthorpe Great Grimsby Cleethorpes	17 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	1 August	North Bedfordshire South Bedfordshire Luton	9 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	14 August	North Bedfordshire South Bedfordshire Luton	29 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	21 August	Crawley	17 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character	21 August	Peterborough	31 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	26 August	Liverpool	43 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character	28 August	Metropolitan Police District City of London	31 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character	4 September	Northampton	25 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	19 September	Ipswich Bury St. Edmunds	9 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	26 September	Luton	9 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	3 October	Sheffield	2 days
All public processions of a political nature within the London Borough of Croydon	16 October	London Borough of Croydon	2½days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character	31 October	Oldham	7 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character, or those customarily held in remembrance of the dead	7 November	Rochdale	7 days

Class or classes of procession banned	Date ban commenced	District(s)	Duration
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	4 December	London Borough of Brent and Harrow	2½days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character	4 December	Rochdale	7 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	11 December	London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow	2½days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	19 December	Rochdale	29 days
1982			
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	23 January	Calderdale	9 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	30 January	City of Coventry	9 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	6 February	Calderdale (Halifax)	23 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	13 March	London Borough of Southwark	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	26 March	Kirklees	24 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	31 March	North Bedfordshire	9 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	9 April	London Boroughs of Hounslow, Hillingdon and Ealing	3 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character customarily held	31 July	South Bedfordshire Luton	9 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character customarily held	28 August	London Boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham	3 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character	11 September	Metropolitan Police District	1 day
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character	11 September	City of London	1 day
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character	23 October	London Boroughs of Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham	2 days
1983			
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character	22 January	London Boroughs of Hounslow and Richmond-upon-Thames	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character	29 January	London Borough of Bexley	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character customarily held	29 January	Dartford	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character	19 February	London Borough of Southwark	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character	19 February	London Boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich and Tower Hamlets	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character customarily held	23 April	Slough	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character	16 July	London Boroughs of Barking, Dagenham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets and Newham	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character customarily held	30 July	London Borough of Haringey	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive and ceremonial character customarily held	30 July	London Boroughs of Islington, Hackney, Waltham Forest, Enfield, Camden, Barnet and Tower Hamlets	2 days
1984			
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	27 January	Sheffield	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	27 January	North-East Derbyshire	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	27 January	City of Bradford	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	27 January	Chesterfield	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	27 January	Rotherham	2 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character or those in remembrance of the dead	21 April	City of Salford	7 days

Class or classes of procession banned	Date ban commenced	District(s)	Duration
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial nature customarily held	12 October	City of Bradford	2½ days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial nature customarily held	13 October	City of Leeds	1½ days
All public processions except those customarily held in connection with the annual Remembrance Day Services	2 November	London Borough of Ealing	10 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial nature customarily held	17 November	Metropolitan Police District	7 days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial nature customarily held	14 December	London Borough of Newham	2 days
1985			
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	26 January	City of Leeds	1½ days
All public processions except those of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character customarily held	26 January	City of Bradford	1½ days

Mentally Abnormal Offenders

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisifed that there are available on a national basis an adequate number of places for the detention of mentally abnormal offenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Decisions on how mentally disordered offenders should be dealt with are a matter for the courts, and the provision of hospital places for those detainable under the Mental Health Act 1983 is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. The range of facilities in the National Health Service is currently being expanded through the provision of regional secure units; and where the treatment is required under conditions of special security a place in a special hospital can be provided by my right hon. Friend. Difficulties sometimes arise, not least where there may be disagreement concerning a person's clinical condition or the suitability of a hospital placement; where this involves particular cases for which the Home Secretary has responsibilities he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services together seek to resolve them.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many London authorities or local authority organisations included in their responses to Cmnd. 9063 comments supporting the retention of a single Londonwide fire brigade; how many were opposed to the retention of a single fire brigade; and how many suggested special organisational changes for London's fire brigade when commenting on paragraph 2.19 of Cmnd. 9063.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Responses to Cmnd. 9063 indicated little support for change in the organisation of the London Fire Brigade. No London borough or local government organisation was opposed to the retention of a Londonwide brigade or suggested special organisational arrangements for its management by the joint fire board.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sums of money, both revenue and capital, will be made available to the London joint board for fire to cover the period from 1 September 1985 to 31 March 1986 to enable it to employ staff, acquire land and premises and enter into contracts; and what will be the source of those funds.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Clause 67 of the Local Government Bill would enable the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority to borrow in order to defray expenses incurred before the abolition date. The amount borrowed would be subject to a limit to be determined under subsection (2) and would have to be repaid before the end of the financial year 1986-87.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which responses to Cmnd. 9063 led him to propose the setting up of four area committees within the proposed joint board for the London Fire Brigade.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The idea of area committees originated from the Government's consideration of earlier proposals for the reorganisation of the London Fire Brigade, notably those published by the Greater London council in 1981.

Assisted Prison Visits Scheme

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long a couple must have lived together as man and wife to be eligible for assistance with the cost of fares under the assisted prison visits scheme.

Mr. Mellor: The assisted prison visits scheme is administered by the Department of Health and Social Security on behalf of the Home Office. In deciding for the purpose of processing claims under this scheme whether the couple have been "living together as man and wife", I understand that the Department of Health and Social Security applies broadly the same principles as it applies in relation to supplementary benefit claims, which are set out in the supplementary benefits handbook. Under those principles there is no fixed minimum period of cohabitation required to prove such a relationship, but where the couple have cohabited for only a few months there would have to be clear evidence that the case met the other criteria set out in the handbook.

Police Manpower

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give his estimates of the changes in police manpower at the ranks represented by *(a)* the Association of Chief Police Officers, *(b)* the Superintendents Association and *(c)* the Police Federation

which would be required if the police authority function were devolved from the metropolitan county level to each of the 36 metropolitan districts of England.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Such estimates could be prepared only at disproportionate cost.

Joint Fire Authorities

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the population of England outside the Greater London council and metropolitan areas are served by joint fire authorities.

Mr. Giles Shaw: There are no such authorities in England.

Unsentenced Prisoners, Winson Green

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why it has already taken six weeks to check the records of 23 unsentenced prisoners who were segregated or put in solitary confinement at Winson Green prison during November 1984 to ascertain whether there is any reference to his noble Friend, Lord Elton, in the records concerning their segregation or solitary confinement; and when he expects these inquiries to be completed.

Mr. Mellor: This reply also contains information pursuant to the reply of 20 December 1984, at column *291*.

The inquiries have been completed. They show that in addition to the 25 unsentenced prisoners segregated during November 1984 at Birmingham under rule 43 of the Prison Rules, one unsentenced prisoner was segregated under Prison Rule 48(2) pending adjudication and no unsentenced prisoners were awarded cellular confinement as a punishment. There is no reference to my noble Friend Lord Elton in any of the records pertaining to the prisoners' segregation. The time taken to obtain the information resulted from the need to look through the prisoners' records at Birmingham and other establishments to which some of the prisoners had been transferred.

Winson Green Prison (Prisoners' Letters)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners on remand were segregated from other prisoners or put in solitary confinement at Winson Green prison during November; and whether there is any reference to his noble Friend Lord Elton in any records concerning their segregation or solitary confinement.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 December 1984, c. *291*]: The correct figures for the prisoners segregated at Birmingham prison during November 1984 were 15 under Prison Rule 43 for their own protection and 10 under the same rule in the interests of good order and discipline.

WALES

Dairy Industry

Mr. Harvey asked the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to safeguard the interests of Welsh milk producers, in view of the non-compliance in the milk quota scheme by other European Economic Community member states.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Government have made it very clear that the supplementary levy arrangements must be applied properly by all member states. We are not prepared to see our producers disadvantaged compared with others. We are keeping a close watch on measures introduced by other member states and carefully monitoring available statistics. We are also maintaining pressure on the Commission on these points, since it has the authority to require member states to implement arrangements properly and to take any necessary action, and will certainly bring to its attention any evidence of failure to comply with the rules.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales currently receiving unemployment benefit have never been in employment; what percentage of the unemployed, and how many, in Wales are now long-term unemployed; and what is his estimate of the number in Wales aged 60 plus years who no longer figure in the unemployment total but who previously did so.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: People who have not been employed since leaving school are not entitled to unemployment benefit but may receive supplementary benefit. The number in this category in Wales in December 1984 was 21,531.

As at October 1984, 40·3 per cent. or 71,901 people in Wales had been unemployed for over one year.

The 1983 Budget provisions resulted in an estimated 9,000 men over 60 no longer having to sign on in Wales during the period April to August 1983. No estimates are available of the number currently affected although the total should be little changed since the number of men who have subsequently become eligible under the Budget provisions will have been broadly offset by those previously eligible reaching retirement age.

Regional Aid

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the average amount of time companies in Wales will now have to wait for applications for regional aid to be processed following the announcement of a moratorium on payments by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The average time taken to process applications from companies in Wales for regional development grants at the present high rate of receipts of applications is between 8-10 weeks. The four-month moratorium on payments takes effect from the date of approval of an application.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many companies in Mid-Glamorgan will be affected by the moratorium on regional aid announced by the Government; and if he will estimate the sum of money involved.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The number of companies with qualifying premises in Mid-Glamorgan eligible to receive regional development grant and thus with the potential to be affected by the four-month moratorium is 818. It is not possible to estimate the sum of money involved but for Wales as a whole it is possible that some £23 million will be subject to deferment during 1985-86.

Nuclear Attack (Effects)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what information his Department makes available to Welsh farmers as to the consequences for them of a nuclear attack in Britain.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Information for farmers is contained in a booklet, "Home Defence and the Farmer", prepared by the Agriculture Departments and published in 1958. A new edition will become available after a revision of the text, which is now in train, has been completed.

Regional Emergency Committee

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the dates of the meetings of the Welsh regional emergency committee over the last seven years; and what were the reasons for convening the committee on each occasion.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Wales emergency committee was convened on Friday 12 January 1979 and meetings were held each day (excluding Sunday 14 January) until Thursday 1 February. The reasons were industrial action by road haulage and bakery workers coinciding with a prolonged period of severe winter weather. I have already referred in my answer of 15 January 1985 at column *102* to a meeting held on 20 November 1984.

Dykes (Grants)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether the reconstruction and repair of dykes used for enclosing fields and for windbreak purposes on farms in Wales will be eligible for grant under the marginal land schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The provision, replacement or improvement of dykes are eligible for grant under the agriculture and horticulture grant scheme and agriculture and horticulture development scheme and farmers in the less favoured area may qualify for enhanced rates of grant. Grant is not available under either scheme for repair work.

Marginal Land

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that when considering, after 31 July 1985, appeals against refusal to designate land as marginal land, his Department will not, at the same time, reconsider the designation of those lands which have already been defined as marginal land.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In any reassessment of areas for less-favoured area status further consideration of land currently designated cannot be ruled out.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Trends

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretay of State for Employment what have been the trends in employment in industries and services which formerly fell within the scope of wages council, but which no longer do so.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is not available because the coverage of the wages councils that have been abolished does not correspond to industrial groups for which estimates are prepared.

Median Weekly Earnings

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the median wage and median earnings for male and female workers for a standard working week.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The latest available information on the median weekly earnings of full-time adult male and female employees, distinguishing manual and non-manual employees, is for April 1984 and is shown in table 1 of "New Earnigs Survey 1984, Part A," a copy of which is in the Library.

Abbeystead Pumping Station

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman asked the Secretary of State for Employment when the report on the explosion at Abbeystead pumping station is to be published.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I expect the report to be published on 7 February. I shall make an announcement.

Skillcentres

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what has been the number of full-time instructors by course in each of the last three years at the Castle Bromwich skillcentre, Tameside drive, Birmingham;

(2) what was the cost to public funds of *(a)* acquiring the site and *(b)* building the Castle Bromwich skillcentre, Tameside drive, Birmingham B35; and when it was completed;

(3) what, for each year since it has been open, has been the number of courses available by title, place and take-up at the Redditch skillcentre;

(4) what has been the waiting list for courses by name in each of the last three years at the Redditch skillcentre;

(5) what has been the number of full-time instructors by course in each of the last three years at Redditch skillcentre;

(6) what was the cost to public funds of *(a)* acquiring the site and *(b)* building the Redditch skillcentre; and when it was completed;

(7) what has been the total cost to public funds of equipping the Redditch skillcentre; and what has been the cost by year for any subsequent re-equipment or refurbishing of the premises;

(8) what has been the total cost to public funds of equipping the Castle Bromwich skillcentre, Tameside drive, Birmingham; and what has been the cost by year for any subsequent re-equipment or refurbishing of the premises;

(9) what, for each year since it has been open, has been the number of courses available by title, places and take-up at the Castle Bromwich skillcentre, Tameside drive, Birmingham;

(10) what has been the waiting list for courses by name in each of the last three years at the Castle Bromwich skillcentre, Tameside drive, Birmingham.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Youth Training and Employment

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many, by number and percentage, of those young people completing a youth opportunities programme or youth training scheme have transferred into immediate full-time employment at the end of the scheme, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Kidney Failure and Infertility

Mr. Ward asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the expenditure in the most recent year for which records are available on *(a)* research into kidney failure and *(b)* research into infertility.

Mr. Brooke: The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid through the Department, is the main Government agency for the promotion of medical research in the United Kingdom. The Department of Health and Social Security also supports some research through its health service research programme. I understand that expenditure on research projects relevant to kidney failure by the MRC and the DHSS in the financial year 1983-84 — including expenditure by the MRC on projects which could prove relevant to kidney failure—was £664,000 and £166,000, respectively.

As to expenditure on research into infertility, I refer my hon. Friend to my answer on 9 January, at columns *431-2*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton). It is possible that research work relevant to kidney failure and infertility is also being conducted in universities and medical schools using funds allocated for teaching and research on the advice of the University Grants Committee, but no details of such work are available. The medical charities may also be funding research in these fields.

Medical Research Council (Projects)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list, by location, the research projects currently funded by the Medical Research Council; if he will indicate the level of grant allocated to each project; and whether these projects are based on clinical or laboratory research.

Mr. Brooke: Details of research projects supported by the Medical Research Council can be found in the council's handbook for 1984-85, a copy of which is in the Library. Information on the level of grant allocated to each project and whether these projects are based on clinical or laboratory research could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Trust Corporations

Mr. Weetch asked the Attorney-General whether Her Majesty's Government will alter the Non-Contentious Probate Rules 1954 to permit trust corporations to make personal applications for grants of representation.

The Attorney-General: The non-contentious probate rules are made by the President of the Family Division with the Lord Chancellor's concurrence. The Lord Chancellor has no plans to invite the President to permit trust corporations to make personal applications for grants of representation.

Mr. Weetch asked the Attorney-General whether he will introduce legislation to amend section 23 of the Solicitors Act 1974 to permit trust corporations to make applications for grants of representation.

The Attorney-General: No.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trading Interests (Protection)

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will invoke the Protection of Trading Interests Act 1980 in respect of attempts by the United States Government to impose extra-territorially its Export Administration Act.

Mr. Channon: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to do so but would be prepared to take this course where he is satisfied that it is the most effective way of safeguarding legitimate United Kingdom interests.

Technology Transfer (Restrictions)

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will place in the Library copies of the Government's submissions to the European Community Commission concerning United States restrictions on technology transfer.

Mr. Channon: I have arranged for this to be done.

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to protect British companies from the imposition of fines or from blacklisting by the United States Government under the extra-territorial application of its Export Administration Act when those companies are innocent of any offence under United Kingdom legislation.

Mr. Channon: I will continue to urge on the United States Government the need to abandon the claim to apply the Export Administration Act, and regulations made under it, extra-territorially to companies in the United Kingdom. This claim, which the Government consider to be without foundation in international law, is an avoidable source of friction between the United States and all her allies; and must in the long term encourage United Kingdom companies to free themselves from reliance on United States technology.

Beer

Mr. Torney asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received alleging that the brewers are making excess profits on sales of beer in the south of England through charging higher wholesale prices to their outlets there; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: I have received no such representations.

ENERGY

Domestic Disconnections

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will provide details of how the Electricity and Gas Consumer Councils are monitoring the operation of the voluntary code of practice on disconnections.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The area electricity consultative councils and the regional gas consumer councils receive from the industries information on disconnections at regular intervals; and information on any specific case is available for inspection and discussion. Liaison arrangements between a particular fuel board and its respective consultative or consumer council is a matter for local agreement.

Consumers and Fuel Industries (Relationship)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will now consider seeking to introduce a statutory code of practice to govern the relationship between consumers and the fuel industries.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: No.

TRANSPORT

Buses

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will compare the safety record of long-haul bus operations before and after deregulation.

Mr. David Mitchell: Separate statistics are not available for long distance express coach services. Overall there has been a decline in bus and coach user casualty rates—all severities—from 371 per 100 million vehicle kilometres in 1979 to 314 in 1983. Similarly bus and coach vehicle accident involvement rates—all severities—fell from 502 per 100 million vehicle kilometres in 1979 to 388 in 1983.

British Rail

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Transport on what basis load factors for British Rail passenger services are determined or approved by his Department.

Mr. David Mitchell: Within the objectives my right hon. friend gave the chairman of British Rail on 24 October 1983 the board has the responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the railway, including the setting of load factor objectives. The board has developed load factor objectives for its London and south-east services which were discussed with my Department and agreed with the Central Transport Consultative Committee. We have welcomed those targets and look forward to their achievement.

Airports (Passengers)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what information he has as to the percentage increase in passenger movements in each of the past three years at London Heathrow, London Gatwick, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Cardiff and Belfast Aldergrove airports;

(2) what information he has to the total number of passengers for the past 12 months at the following airports: London Heathrow, London Gatwick, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast Aldergrove.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The information is shown in the following table:

	Percentage increase in passenger movements			*Total number of terminal passengers*
	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1984*
London Heathrow	0·0	+ 1·3	+ 8·9	29·1M
London Gatwick	+ 3·9	+11·8	+11·8	14·0M
Manchester	+ 5·7	+ 1·9	+17·0	6·0M
Glasgow	+ 6·1	+ 1·4	+12·4	2·7M
Edinburgh	+ 7·2	+ 6·1	+16·8	2·0M
Birmingham	+ 6·5	− 0·3	+ 8·5	1·5M
Cardiff	+22·6	+ 6·3	+11·0	0·4M
Belfast Aldergrove	+ 2·5	− 3·1	+13·8	1·6M

Lighthouse Keepers

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Transport from which date he expects to implement the new pay structure for lighthouse keepers that was agreed between the union and employers.

Mr. David Mitchell: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the structure on which agreement was reached in 1982 between the Northern Lighthouse Board and the Transport and General Workers Union. On 31 August 1983 I told the chairman of the board that I had no objection in principle to these restructuring proposals, but that I could accept their costs only to the extent that they could be accommodated within the then existing light-keepers' pay and allowances bill. The matter rests there, but my offer remains open.

Pesticides (Aerial Spraying)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the area of land sprayed with pesticides in thousands of hectares by *(a)* fixed-wing aircraft, *(b)* helicopters and *(c)* in total for each year since 1978.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The available information is as follows:

*Areas Sprayed with Pesticides by Aircraft in Thousands of Hectares**

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*
Fixed wing	178	205	202	161	170
Helicopters	156	145	133	111	139
Unknown	3	—	31	23	51
Total	336	350	366	295	360

* Corrected for non returns.

Comparable figures do not exist for the area treated with ground machines, but it is estimated that 5·3 million hectares of crops and grass were treated with pesticides once or more often in 1982.

Marconi RCMM

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether full tests have now been carried out on

the Marconi RCMM, remote computer maintenance and monitoring system; and if it is being considered for use throughout Britain's motorways and tunnels.

Mrs. Chalker: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to the Marconi environmental control system installed in the Holmesdale and Bell commons tunnels on the M25 to monitor visibility and pollution from exhaust fumes. The system has been tested and accepted.

A similar Marconi system has been accepted for the A1(M) Hatfield tunnel which at present is under construction.

Wider use of such systems may be considered, where appropriate, and would be the subject of specification and competitive tendering.

M25 (Warning Signals)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport why it will take three years to install improved emergency warning signals with automatic incident detection on the M25 motorway.

Mrs. Chalker: Automatic incident detection is being provided on the M25 initially within, and on the approaches to, the Holmesdale and Bell common tunnels. Thereafter, it is proposed to extend the facility to the approaches to the Dartford tunnel.

The signal installation programme is currently being reviewed.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those functions of London Regional Transport upon which he will answer parliamentary questions.

Mrs. Chalker: I will, of course, answer questions on all functions of London Regional Transport which fall within my ministerial responsibilities. In accordance with the normal practice governing ministerial responsibility for nationalised industries, this excludes matters relating to the day-to-day management of the industry. There may also be matters of commercial confidence which it would not be appropriate for me to make public.

Pavement Parking

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to provide for a system of fixed penalty fines for pavement parking; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Fixed penalty notices already apply to many pavement parking offences. There are no plans at present to extend current legislation.

Road Traffic Law (Review)

Mr. Lilley asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he can now announce his plans for a review of road traffic law.

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department and I are concerned that road traffic law should not only promote road safety and efficient traffic management, but should also be fair, easy to understand, and capable of effective enforcement. The present law, which has developed piecemeal, does not always fulfil these aims.

We propose to continue the process of reform first announced in our election manifesto of 1979 by reviewing a number of aspects of the law which are causing particular difficulties.

With the agreement of our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland we are therefore setting up a small review with these terms of reference.

"To consider what improvements might be made to the following aspects of road traffic law, particularly in respect of simplification, effectiveness and acceptability, taking account of their relationship with other aspects of road traffic law:

(a) the structure of and penalties for the offences in sections 1-3 of the Road Traffic Act 1972: causing death by reckless driving; reckless driving, and careless driving;

(b) whether the present penalty points system needs any amendment, and, in particular, whether offences which are endorseable with penalty points can be divided into "points" and "no points" offences;

(c) the structure of and penalties for offences relating to —

i. driver licensing
ii. construction and use and
iii. failure to comply with traffic signs;

(d) whether new types of penalty for traffic offences would be appropriate in place of or in addition to existing types of penalty, in particular the possible wider application of statutory driving tests for certain types of offences or in cetain circumstances.

The review will be carried out by an independent chairman, a second outside member and members from my department and from the Home Office. Dr. Peter North, principal of Jesus college, Oxford, has accepted our invitation to chair the review body, and Professor Richard Alsopp, Professor of Transport Studies, University College, London, to be the second outside member. The official members will be:

Home Office
Mr. G. L. Angel
Mr. P. Harris
Department of Transport
Mr. T. H. Hall
Mr. D. M. Smith

We hope that the review body, which will invite evidence from interested parties, will be able to report on these matters next year. The process of reform is a continuous one and we may wish to refer further matters to the review in due course.

Crash Barriers

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the order of priority and timetable of his Department for the installation of crash barriers on the next 20 dual carriageways in England and Wales.

Mrs. Chalker [*pursuant to the reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *13*]: The information requested is as follows:

	Dual Carriageway Project	*Start Date*
1.	A 406 South Woodford to Barking Relief Road, Contract 2	February 1985
2.	A 69 Team Valley Grade Separated Junction	February 1985
3.	M 27 Swathling Link	March 1985
4.	A 20 Sidcup Bypass	March 1985
5.	A 30 Longrock Bypass	April 1985
6.	A 55 Bodelwyddan Improvement Scheme	April/May 1985
7.	A 30 Exeter to Okehampton, Stage 3	August 1985
8.	A 406 South Woodford to Barking Relief Road, Contract 1	August 1985
9.	A 406 South Woodford to Barking Relief Road, Contract 3	August 1985

	Dual Carriageway Project	Start Date
10.	A 27 Havant to Chichester Bypass	September 1985
11.	A 483 Ruabon and Wynnstay Link	Late 1985
12.	A 34 Newbury to Litchfield, Stage 1	November 1985
13.	A 38 Saltash Bypass	December 1985
14.	A 406 South Woodford to Barking Relief Road, Contract 4	December 1985
15.	A 419 Blunsdon to Cricklade-Dualling	December 1985
16.	A 303 Thruxton-Amesbury	December 1985
17.	A 1 Clifton to Stannington Bridge	January 1986
18.	A 30 Okehampton Bypass	February 1986
19.	A 21 Pembury Bypass	May 1986
20.	A 55 Northop Bypass	Late 1986

SCOTLAND

Pesticides (Aerial Spraying)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount of land sprayed with pesticides using aerial spraying techniques by the Forestry Commission for each of the last five years for which information is available.

Mr. John MacKay: The following areas were sprayed out of the Forestry Commission's total productive woodland holding of some 900,000 hectares:

Year	Area (hectares)
1980	1,515
1981	249
1982	160
1983	679
1984	3,727

Dementia

Mr. Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons in Scotland suffer from dementia; whether there are any regional differences in is incidence; and whether any estimate has been made of the likely rate of increase of the malady over the next decade.

Mr. John MacKay: As statistics about the total number of persons in Scotland suffering from dementia are not kept centrally, it is not possible to say whether there are any regional differences in its incidence or to estimate whether the incidence is likely to change over the next decade.

Mr. Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what expenditure is made annually in Scotland on research into a cure for dementia.

Mr. John MacKay: Information relating to all medical research being conducted in Scotland is not available centrally. However, the Scottish Home and Health Department is currently supporting eight projects relevant to this area for which total funding of approximately £305,000 has been allocated.

NHS (Employment Statistics)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will give a breakdown as to how many new doctors, nurses and auxiliary staff have been employed by the National Health Service in Scotland since May 1979, giving separate figures for each region, year by year, to date, indicating the net increase and number for each category since May 1979.

Mr. John MacKay [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 January 1985, c. *388*]: Figures for new doctors, nurses and auxiliary staff by region are not held centrally. The whole-time equivalent numbers of staff in post in the Scottish health board areas from 1979 to 1984 are as follows, showing net increases, in numerical and percentage terms, for each category:

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984*	Change	Percentage change
Argyll and Clyde								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	297·2	290·9	301·9	305·7	313·5	291·8	−5·4	−1·8
General practitioners†	285	289	291	296	303	312	+27	+9·5
Nursing and midwifery	2,722·1	2,802·2	2,847·3	2,866·0	2,945·7	2,975·0	+252·9	+9·3
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	1,649·4	1,667·5	1,678·0	1,648·2	1,629·0	1,569·7	−79·7	−4·8
Ayrshire and Arran								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	183·5	193·1	194·9	211·5	221·8	235·3	+51·8	+28·2
General practitioners†	211	219	226	230	231	244	+33	+15·6
Nursing and midwifery	1,826·4	1,874·8	1,967·2	2,046·4	2,301·1	2,201·4	+375·0	+20·5
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	836·6	867·7	887·0	930·9	980·7	952·9	+116·3	+13·9
Borders								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	47·8	48·9	47·3	46·8	45·4	46·4	−1·4	−2·9
General practitioners†	68	69	73	74	74	74	+6·0	+8·8
Nursing and midwifery	538·7	548·6	584·7	635·8	656·5	675·0	+136·3	+25·3
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	309 ·7	327·5	355·2	354·4	348·6	341·7	+32·0	+10·3
Dumfries and Galloway								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	106·0	103·9	110·3	108·6	105·9	112·0	+6·0	+5·7

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984*	Change	Percentage change
General practitioners†	100	105	110	112	114	116	+16	+16·0
Nursing and midwifery	1,124·4	1,161·1	1,241·2	1,277·7	1,311·9	1,308·8	+184·4	+16·4
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	494·2	517·1	510·0	514·3	536·3	507·0	+12·8	+2·6
Fife								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	202·3	196·4	201·4	206·3	209·6	217·1	+14·8	+7·3
General practitioners†	188	193	195	196	202	203	+15·0	+8·0
Nursing and midwifery	2,026·0	2,096·7	2,215·4	2,338·6	2,402·8	2,427·0	+401·0	+19·8
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	734·4	768·9	824·3	849·8	851·1	832·1	+97·7	+13·3
Forth Valley								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	180·8	177·4	181·6	194·9	195·6	190·1	+9·3	+5·1
General practitioners†	160	169	173	174	181	188	+28	+17·5
Nursing and midwifery	1,820·0	1,922·5	1,942·2	2,015·4	2,117·4	2,138·4	+318·4	+17·5
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	1,073·3	1,115·1	1,154·8	1,155·3	1,136·3	1,096·6	+23·3	+2·2
Grampian								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	478·6	486·2	484·2	481·2	474·0	488·7	+10·1	+2·1
General practitioners†	301	300	310	314	322	320	+19	+6·3
Nursing and midwifery	3,675·8	3,787·0	3,972·7	4,036·1	4,129·2	4,178·2	+502·4	+13·7
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	1,369·2	1,453·1	1,580·0	1,572·3	1,537·4	1,555·5	+186·3	+13·6
Greater Glasgow								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	1,714·0	1,707·4	1,715·6	1,765·8	1,788·0	1,760·6	+46·6	+2·7
General practitioners†	634	627	641	646	667	684	+50	+7·9
Nursing and midwifery	9,657·8	10,224·1	1,106·9	11,390·1	11,294·9	11,328·8	+1,671·0	+17·3
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	4,441·0	4,753·3	4,811·5	4,466·0	4,154·8	4,060·0	−381·0	−8·6
Highland								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	165·8	165·0	172·6	167·8	162·5	162·0	−3·8	−2·3
General practitioners†	157	165	173	177	178	180	+23	+14·6
Nursing and midwifery	1,557·2	1,635·4	1,736·4	1,681·8	1,700·2	1,691·1	+133·9	+8·6
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	553·4	547·2	574·4	562·1	568·6	558·4	+5·0	+0·9
Lanarkshire								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	380·0	370·1	371·2	386·3	407·6	419·3	+39·3	+10·3
General practitioners†	276	287	296	295	301	307	+31	+11·2
Nursing and midwifery	3,447·4	3,510·4	3,664·8	3,678·9	3,924·1	3,912·5	+465·1	+13·6
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	1,345·3	1,449·5	1,474·9	1,479·2	1,392·5	1,324·9	−20·4	−1·5
Lothian								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	1,027·5	1,061·4	1,041·2	1,074·5	1,076·4	1,076·9	+49·4	+4·8
General practitioners†	496	513	529	540	551	558	+62	+12·5
Nursing and midwifery	6,136·4	6,397·5	6,620·3	6,924·4	7,107·6	7,007·9	+871·5	+14·2
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	2,475·4	2,513·1	2,600·5	2,657·8	2,598·6	2,492·9	+17·5	+0·7
Orkney								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	5·1	4·8	4·9	4·7	4·9	4·2	−0·9	−17·6
General practitioners†	22	21	21	21	22	22	—	—
Nursing and midwifery	115·8	114·1	129·1	141·5	146·8	150·6	+34·8	+30·1
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	43·3	49·7	54·8	50·4	46·9	40·0	−3·3	−7·6
Shetland								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	6·0	6·2	7·0	8·0	8·1	9·0	+3·0	+50·0
General practitioners†	17	19	19	18	19	19	+2	+11·8
Nursing and midwifery	125·4	135·1	133·1	138·1	156·6	166·2	+40·8	+32·5

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984*	Change	Percentage change
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	42·5	42·7	48·8	46·3	42·2	42·0	−0·5	−1·2
Tayside								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	537·4	538·1	549·2	529·3	520·4	528·2	−9·2	−1·7
General practitioners†	255	255	265	272	266	283	+28	+11·0
Nursing and midwifery	3,780·4	4,004·4	4,167·0	4,289·8	4,198·0	4,268·5	+488·1	+12·9
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	1,715·7	1,900·7	1,856·7	1,794·7	1,735·5	1,692·3	−23·4	−1·4
Western Isles								
Medical staff in the hospital and community services	11·9	11·9	11·9	11·5	11·5	11·5	−0·4	−3·4
General practitioners†	20	25	25	27	29	31	+11	+55·0
Nursing and midwifery	202·1	203·7	195·8	210·0	211·6	225·6	+23·5	+11·6
Nursing auxiliary/assistant	52·2	59·2	58·8	57·1	52·6	54·5	+2·3	+4·4

* All 1984 figures are provisional.
† Numbers.

Note:
Staff employed by the Common Services Agency are not included.

Scottish Special Housing Association

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will set out the Scottish Special Housing Association's income to its housing revenue account, under the heading deficit subsidy, rents and other income, for each of the years from 1978-79 to the present;

(2) if he will set out the Scottish Special Housing Association's expenditure from its housing revenue account, under the headings, loan charges, repairs-maintenance, management and other, for each of the years from 1978-79 to 1984-85; and what is the estimated expenditure under these headings in 1985-86;

(3) if he will set out the Scottish Special Housing Association's capital spending as broken down between new build, modernisation and any other relevant items for each of the years from 1979-80 to the present;

(4) if he will set out for the Scottish Special Housing Association expenditure from the housing revenue account on repairs-maintenance and management per house for each of the years from 1978-79 to 1984-85 and the estimated expenditure under these headings in 1985-86.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 January 1985, c. *517*]: The information requested is as follows. Most of the figures for the years concerned are contained in the annual reports of the Scottish Special Housing Association.

SSHA Housing Revenue Account: Income

£ million

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Deficit subsidy	29·5	31·1	30·6	26·6	25·2	23·0	23·0
Rents	23·3	26·5	33·5	42·2	51·8	56·9	60·0
Other income	0·5	0·5	1·1	2·7	3·0	2·9	1·9

SSHA Housing Revenue Account: Expenditure

£ million

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	*1984-85	*1985-86
Loan charges	33·6	35·7	40·4	45·9	50·8	54·8	58·0	61·4
Repairs/maintenance†	15·5	16·8	14·7	18·5	21·5	18·8	18·8	18·2
Management etc.‡	3·3	4·0	4·9	5·0	5·2	6·6	5·7	6·4
Other	1·0	1·2	4·6	0·9	1·9	1·7	2·0	2·4

* Estimate.
† Includes modernisation up to 1980-81.
‡ Includes rent rebate administration up to 1982-83.

SSHA Capital Expenditure

£ million

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	*1984-85
New build	24·6	31·9	24·1	18·7	10·2	16·8
Modernisation	22·6	14·9	20·7	40·7	41·8	47·3
Other	0·1	—	—	0·5	0·3	1·4

* Estimate.
Figures up to 1982-83 are on an income and expenditure basis; thereafter they are on a receipts and payments basis.

SSHA Housing Revenue Account: Cost per House

	1978-79 £	1979-80 £	1980-81 £	1981-82 £	1982-83 £	1983-84 £	*1984-85 £	1985-86 £
Repairs/maintenance	171·8	182·2	158·3	199·4	233·5	206·7	213·9	212·0
Management†	34·3	41·1	50·5	52·2	52·4	72·7	64·9	75·6

* Estimate.

† Excludes rent rebate management costs up to and excluding 1982-83, to be more consistent with later figures which include management costs of unified housing benefit.

Fishing Vessels

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the number and types of fishing vessels acquired by fishermen in the years 1979 to 1983 with financial assistance of the Highlands and Islands Development Board and *(b)* the yards where these vessels were built.

Mr. John MacKay [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 January 1985, c. *179*]: This information is set out in the following table:

New Vessels

Type	Number	Boatyard
1979		
Shellfish	3	Orcantic Ltd., Orkney
Shellfish	1	J. I. Hourston, Orkney
Shellfish	2	J. M. McCaughey, Wick
1980		
Shellfish	1	Cardiff Boatbuilding Co. Ltd.
Shellfish	1	J. Henderson & Sons, Mallaig
Shellfish	1	Bryce Waterhouse Marine, Worcester
Shellfish	1	J. I. Hourston, Orkney
Shellfish	1	Tamar Boat Enterprise, Plymouth
1981		
Shellfish	1	J. I. Hourston, Orkney
Shellfish	1	Strollamus Boatyard, Skye
Shellfish	1	Bryce Waterhouse Marine, Worcester
1982		
Shellfish	2	J. McCaughey, Wick
Shellfish	1	Stornoway Boatbuilding Co.
Shellfish	1	Hull Steel Craft
Shellfish	1	A. & J. Polson Boatbuilding, Wick
Shellfish	1	Bryce Waterhouse Marine, Worcester
Shellfish	1	P. Matheson Boatbuilders, Scarfskerry, Caithness
Shellfish	1	J. Henderson & Sons, Mallaig
Shellfish	1	J. I. Hourston, Orkney
1983		
Shellfish	1	Bryce Waterhouse Marine, Worcester
Shellfish	1	J. I. Hourston, Orkney
Shellfish	1	J. McCaughey, Wick
Whitefish	2	Forbes Boatbuilders, Fraserburgh
Whitefish	1	Miller Boatbuilders, St. Monans
Whitefish	1	Jones Boatbuilders, Buckie
Whitefish	1	Cambeltown Shipyard
Whitefish	1	Cygnus Marine Ltd., Cornwall

Second-Hand Vessels

Year	Number
1979	29
1980	17
1981	41
1982	54
1983	48

Details of the type of secondhand vessels assisted and the boatyards where the vessels were built are not available.

Teachers (Salaries)

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the request by Scottish teachers for an independent review of their salaries.

Mr. Younger [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *399*.]: At their request I had a joint meeting with both sides of the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education (SJNC(SE)) on 28 January and explained my position in greater detail. After a full discussion, the management side indicated that it would be prepared to undertake a review within the statutory framework of the SJNC(SE), embracing both pay and conditions of service, on the lines which I had previously suggested. I asked the teachers' side to give further careful consideration to this possibility. I emphasised that I remained ready to consider any package of proposals resulting from such a review on its merits and within the framework of the Government's plans for public expenditure in Scotland.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Community Institutions

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to ensure that Parliament is consulted before Her Majesty's Government suggest, or agree provisionally, any changes in the powers, responsibilities and relationships of existing European Economic Community institutions.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Ad Hoc Committee on Institutional Questions (Dooge Committee) is considering a number of ideas concerning the Community's institutions, including those in "Europe—The Future" (copies of which are available in the Library of the House). Member states are not however committed by the Dooge Committee. The final report of the committee will be considered by Heads of Government at the June European Council. Parliament will have an opportunity to consider any proposals for institutional change arising out of that report.

Islamic Terrorist Squads

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has evidence that Islamic terrorist squads supported by Iran are prepared to launch attacks on personal and property targets in the United Kingdom or elsewhere in European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Renton: There have been a number of terrorist attacks in western Europe against Iranians who were formerly senior officials in the pre-revolutionary Government. We are naturally always on the look-out for evidence of plans for any terrorist attacks.

European Council

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what article of the treaty of Rome the Heads of Governments of the European Communities constituted the European Council; and under what article they established permanent working groups.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The European Council was set up by Heads of Government to provide general political impetus to the Community. It was not set up as such by the Treaty of Rome. However, when the European Council acts in matters within the scope of the European Communities, it does so in its capacity as the Council of Ministers within the meaning of the treaties (article 2 of the Merger Treaty).

The two committees set up by the Fontainbleu European Council are ad hoc groups composed of personal representatives of Heads of Government. They are due to complete their work by March 1985.

Amnesty International

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Amnesty International is in receipt of public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Amnesty International is not in receipt of public funds.

British Refugee Council (Report)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his meeting with the Asia Committee of the British Refugee Council on 22 January on its report, "Behind Barbed Wire".

Mr. Luce: Members of the Asia Committee of the British Refugee Council called on me on 22 January. We had a wide-ranging discussion about the question of Vietnamese refugees, in particular matters relating to those refugees who are currently in Hong Kong awaiting resettlement, and ways in which this problem might be resolved.

Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *310*, what studies are available to him on unilateral nuclear disarmament measures which display the necessary balance and depth, referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Walthamstow; and if he will list the authors in each case.

Mr. Luce: Alternative approaches to nuclear disarmament have been the subject of numerous studies and commentaries, which it would not be possible to list except at disproportionate cost.

For our part, we believe that the best way to achieve nuclear disarmament is through balanced and verifiable multilateral and bilateral agreements.

Falkland Islands (Prospecting)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have received from the Government of Argentina concerning the decision to grant a prospecting licence in the Falkland Islands to the First Land Oil and Gas Corporation.

Mr. Renton: None: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 17 January, at column 210. We have now set out our position on Falklands oil exploration in a letter from our permanent representative in New York to the United Nations Secretary-General. This has been circulated as a United Nations General Assembly document, copies of which are being placed in the Library of the House.

Non-prolefiration Treaty Review Conference

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards the current applications by Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth to obtain observer status at the 1985 non-proliferation treaty (NPT) review conference.

Mr. Luce: Rule 44 of the draft rules of procedure agreed by the preparatory committee for the conference would permit such organisations to attend meetings of the plenary and of the main committees as observers, and to receive the documents of the conference.

Diplomatic Relations

Mr. Mark Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the states with which the United Kingdom now has diplomatic relations.

Mr. Renton: The United Kingdom has diplomatic relations with the following states:

The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.
The Democratic Popular Republic of Algeria.
The People's Republic of Angola.
Antigua and Barbuda.
The Commonwealth of Australia.
The Republic of Austria.
The Commonwealth of the Bahamas.
The State of Bahrain.
The People's Republic of Bangladesh.
Barbados.
The Kingdom of Belgium.
Belize.
The People's Republic of Benin.
The Republic of Bolivia.
The Republic of Botswana.
The Federative Republic of Brazil.
The State of Brunei.
The People's Republic of Bulgaria.
Burkina.
The Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma.
The Republic of Burundi.
The United Republic of Cameroon.
Canada.
The Republic of Cape Verde.
The Central African Republic.
The Republic of Chad.
The Republic of Chile.
The People's Republic of China.
The Republic of Columbia.
The Federal and Islamic Republic of the Comoros.
The People's Republic of the Congo.
The Republic of Costa Rica.
The Republic of Cuba.

The Republic of Cyprus.
The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.
The Kingdom of Denmark.
The Republic of Djibouti.
The Commonwealth of Dominica.
The Dominican Republic.
The Republic of Ecuador.
The Arab Republic of Egypt.
The Republic of El Salvador.
The Republic of Equatorial Guinea.
Socialist Ethiopia.
Fiji.
The Republic of Finland.
The French Republic.
The Gabonese Republic.
The Republic of the Gambia.
The Federal Republic of Germany.
The German Democratic Republic.
The Republic of Ghana.
The Hellenic Republic.
Grenada.
The People's Revolutionary Republic of Guinea.
The Republic of Guinea-Bissau.
The Republic of Guyana.
The Republic of Haiti.
The Holy See.
The Republic of Honduras.
The Hungarian People's Republic.
The Republic of Iceland.
The Republic of India.
The Republic of Indonesia.
The Islamic Republic of Iran.
The Republic of Iraq.
The Republic of Ireland.
The State of Israel.
The Italian Republic.
The Republic of the Ivory Coast.
Jamaica.
Japan.
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
The Republic of Kenya.
Republic of Kiribati.
The Republic of Korea.
The State of Kuwait.
The Lao People's Democratic Republic.
The Lebanese Republic.
The Kingdom of Lesotho.
The Republic of Liberia.
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.
The Democratic Republic of Madagascar.
Malawi.
Malaysia.
The Republic of Maldives.
The Republic of Mali.
The Republic of Malta.
The Islamic Republic of Mauritania.
Mauritius.
The United Mexican States.
The Mongolian People's Republic.
The Kingdom of Morocco.
The People's Republic of Mozambique.
The Republic of Nauru.
The Kingdom of Nepal.
The Kingdom of the Netherlands.
New Zealand.
The Republic of Nicaragua.
The Republic of Niger.
The Federal Republic of Nigeria.
The Kingdom of Norway.
The Sultanate of Oman.
The Islamic Republic of Pakistan.
The Republic of Panama.
The Independent State of Papua New Guinea.
The Republic of Paraguay.
The Republic of Peru.
The Republic of the Philippines.
The Polish People's Republic.
The Portuguese Republic.
The State of Qatar.
The Socialist Republic of Romania.
The Republic of Rwanda.
The Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis.
Saint Lucia.
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.
The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe.
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
The Republic of Senegal.
The Republic of Seychelles.
The Republic of Sierra Leone.
The Republic of Singapore.
Solomon Islands.
The Somali Democratic Republic.
The Republic of South Africa.
The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
Spain.
The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.
The Democratic Republic of Sudan.
The Republic of Suriname.
The Kingdom of Swaziland.
The Kingdom of Sweden.
The Swiss Confederation.
The Syrian Arab Republic.
The United Republic of Tanzania.
The Kingdom of Thailand.
The Republic of Togo.
The Kingdom of Tonga.
The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.
The Tunisian Republic.
The Republic of Turkey.
Tuvalu.
The Republic of Uganda.
The United Arab Emirates.
The United States of America.
The Oriental Republic of Uruguay.
The Republic of Vanuatu.
The Republic of Venezuela.
The Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
The Independent State of Western Samoa.
The Yemen Arab Republic (North).
The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South).
The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.
The Republic of Zaire.
Zambia.
Zimbabwe.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Andrew Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The usual written forecast was deposited in the House earlier today. At present four meetings of the Council of Ministers are planned for February.

The Internal Market and Consumer Affairs Council is due to meet on 11 February to discuss product liability; the draft directive on the co-ordination of laws relating to self-employed commercial agents; the draft directive on doorstep selling; the draft directive on the right of establishment of architects; the draft 20th VAT directive on compensation for German farmers as agreed at Fontainebleau; and the proposal for tax reliefs for international travellers, for small private consignments and for fuel in tanks of commercial vehicles.

The Economic and Finance Council is expected to meet on 11 February to discuss the financial framework for measures to be financed from the guidance section of the European agricultural guarantee and guidance fund (FEOGA) over the years 1985-89.

The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 18-19 February to prepare the Community position for negotiations with Spain and Portugal. It will continue its

discussions of the new own resources decision and the financing of the 1985 budget; and of the 1985 food aid programme. Ministers may also consider a draft negotiating mandate for the second EC-Yugoslavia financial Protocol and may give further consideration to the question of integrated Mediterranean programmes (IMPS).

The Agricultural Council is expected to meet on 25-26 February to consider the Commission's price proposals for 1985; the reform of the wine regime, including structural measures; proposals on obligatory distillation and special measures for Greece in the light of the Dublin European Council conclusions; apd agricultural structures which involve aids for investment in agricultural holdings, measures for forestry and the protection of the environment. The administration of the milk supplementary levy may also be discussed.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

EC (Agricultural Expenditure)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what parts of EEC expenditure on agriculture do not come under the heading of market support expenditure; and what are the annual amounts spent on them.

Mr. MacGregor: In addition to expenditure on market support from the guarantee Section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, payments for structural measures are made from the guidance section of the fund. There are also certain other items of agricultural expenditure such as Community contributions to animal health measures and agricultural research. Expenditure in 1984 is provisionally estimated at 650 mecu from the guidance section and 70 mecu for the other agricultural measures.

EC (Agricultural Prices)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the EEC Commission, in drawing up its proposals for agricultural prices in the light of the financial guideline, will estimate the quantity of agricultural production likely to be achieved; and if it will make at the same time proposals for preventing the total cost of agricultural support exceeding the maximum laid down in the financial guideline.

Mr. MacGregor: The Commission have yet to table its proposals for the 1985 price fixing and I cannot anticipate its judgment on how it will implement its undertaking to draw up its proposals in the light of the financial guideline.

EC Regulation (Conservation)

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) which member states have publicly indicated their support for the proposal from the United Kingdom Government for amendments to the proposed Agricultural Structures Regulation COM(83) 559, in favour of conservation; and what conditions have been attached to this support;

(2) which member states have indicated their opposition to the proposal from the United Kingdom Government for amendments to the proposed Agricultural Structures Regulation, COM (83) 559, in favour of conservation; and on what grounds such opposition has been raised.

Mr. Jopling: The United Kingdom's initiative has so far attracted neither outright opposition nor clear support. I believe this reflects the fact that we are among the leaders in recognising the importance of encouraging environmentally sound farming practices.

I shall continue to press our case at the next Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting on 25-26 February.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what monitoring activities are presently carried out on a regular basis by his Department of pesticide residues in food; and what resources have been devoted to these activities on an annual basis for the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. MacGregor: The working party on pesticide residues which reports to the interdepartmental steering group on food surveillance, the advisory committee on pesticides and the veterinary products committee continuously monitors both home-produced and imported food for residues of pesticides. A report of its activities for the period 1977 to 1981 was published in 1982—the Ninth Report of the Steering Group on Food Surveillance, London, HMSO—and I expect a further comprehensive report of the more recent work proposed and co-ordinated by the working party to be published later this year. This will present inter alia the results of a three-year survey of residues of pesticides on United Kingdom and imported fruit and vegetables and of post-harvest fungicide treatments of cereals in store.

The estimated expenditure for the financial year April 1984 to March 1985 is £505,000, and the expenditure for the year April 1983 to March 1984 was £449,000.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make available in the Library the pesticide usage survey report, produced by his Department, for the latest available dates.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes. A copy has now been placed in the Library.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information is available, through his Department, of regional pesticide usage in agriculture in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: Pesticide usage surveys are designed to derive national figures on pesticide usage. Some of the reports give indications of differences in usage in different parts of the country which were surveyed. Copies of recent reports are being made available in the House Library.

Development and Research (Expenditure)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the annual expenditure devoted to development and research by his Department and the Agricultural Research Council, respectively, for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will indicate for each year the percentage of resources devoted to crop protection.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is as follows:

Expenditure on Research and Development in Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

	MAFF In-House £ million	AFRC (MAFF) (Vote) £ million	AFRC (Science) (Vote) £ million	Other Contractors £ million	Total R & D £ million	Crop Protection per cent.
1979-80	31·0	30·4	27·1	4·8	93·3	11·0
1980-81	40·1	37·4	34·0	5·5	117·0	11·4
1981-82	50·0	44·3	37·5	7·2	139·0	13·0
1982-83	58·9	48·6	38·7	9·2	155·4	12·0
1983-84	39·3	51·3	40·8	9·3	160·7	11·0

SOURCES
(i) MAFF Annual Reports on Research and Development.
(ii) Annual Reports of the Agricultural and Food Research Council.

Pests and Diseases (Control)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is aware of any experiments presently being conducted in the United Kingdom relating to measures designed for integrated control of pests and diseases in agriculture.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes. Amongst experiments presently being conducted in the United Kingdom are projects at the glasshouse crops research institute, Rothamsted experimental station, East Malling research station and at ADAS laboratories.

Herbicide 2,4,5-T

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the total amount of the herbicide 2,4,5-T used in Britain in each of the last five years in which records have been kept.

Mr. MacGregor: The most recent survey of total amounts of the herbicide 2,4,5-T used in the United Kingdom relates to the calendar year 1979. Full details were published in the December 1980 report of the advisory committee on pesticides, a copy of which is in the Library.

A survey of pesticide usage in agriculture and horticulture—including herbicides such as 2,4,5-T—is in progress. The results will be published in due course.

EC (Food Exports)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why he has adopted the practice of placing details of European Economic Community food exports to the Soviet Union in the Library instead of in the *Official Report*; and if he will reconsider this decision.

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend is under a misapprehension. I answered his question on this matter on 14 January, at column 28, and published the information in the *Official Report*.

ENVIRONMENT

Regional Emergency Committee

84. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if regional emergency committees will meet between 26 February and 16 March.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are plans to hold meetings of the regional emergency committees between 26 February and 16 March.

Birds of Prey

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what charges were brought and what convictions were secured against registered breeders of birds of prey in 1984.

Mr. Waldegrave: No central record of the number of offences is available. Details of possible offences or irregularities which come to the Department's attention are referred to the police or other enforcement agencies. At least a dozen cases have, or will, come to court where the Department has provided information.

Rents Acts

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce in the current Session of Parliament legislation to amend the Rent Acts in relation to registered rents.

Mr. Gow: We introduced various measures to stimulate the provision of private rented accommodation in the Housing Act 1980. My right hon. Friend is considering what further steps could be taken to encourage landlords to meet the demand for homes to rent. However, he has no plans to introduce legislation on this subject in the current Session.

Thames Water Authority

Mr. Bendall asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that the external financing limit of the Thames water authority for the forthcoming financial year is set at such a level that the whole of the increase in revenues from the increase in financial target for the period is retained by the authority for use for the benefit of the customers of the authority.

Mr. Macfarlane: No. The Government's policy for all water authorities is that they should earn a reasonable return on their assets. External financing limits are then set having regard to investment needs.

Local Authorities (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the system of setting local authority permitted capital expenditure limits.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced arrangements for local authority capital expenditure in 1985-86 in a statement to the House on 18 December 1984, at columns 164-65. In doing so, he said that he would be consulting the local authority associations about possible changes to the system for the longer term. Those discussions are now in train.

London Planning Commission

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) on 16 November 1984, *Official Report*, column 378, what range of information, and on which topics, will be collected and analysed by the London Planning Commission in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I expect the London Planning Commission to be concerned with those topics upon which

my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will issue strategic guidance to help the London boroughs to prepare their unitary development plans. Such matters might include population trends and land for housing, provision for major industrial and commercial development, minerals planning and open space. The range of information to be considered will be commensurate with the commission's role.

GLC (Research Library's Database)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times his Department has used the Greater London council research library's Acompline online database; and what arrangements will be made to ensure that its users continue to receive this service in the event of the Greater London council's abolition.

Sir George Young: I shall answer this question shortly.

GLC (Housing Improvement Areas)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the London boroughs containing Greater London council housing improvement areas are designated authorities under the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Waldegrave: The following London boroughs, which are designated authorities for 1985-86 under the Rates Act 1984, also contain Greater London council housing action areas: Brent, Islington, Lambeth and Southwark.

Docklands (Public Investment)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much public investment in infrastructural works in Docklands had already taken place when the London Docklands Development Corporation became operational.

Sir George Young: This information was not collected for the UDC area prior to the formation of the London Docklands Development Corporation in July 1981. The Docklands joint committee did, however, carry out a number of infrastructure projects between 1974 and early 1981 in what is now the LDDC area, such as the consolidation of large areas of Surrey and London docks and the draining of Beckton marshes.

Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what meetings have taken place between civil servants in his Department and officers of London boroughs to co-ordinate requests under section 5(2) of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984; what boroughs were involved; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I shall answer this question shortly.

Housing Revenue Accounts

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what were his reasons for setting the 1984-85 grant-related expenditure in respect of rate fund contributions to the housing revenue account to zero for those authorities found to have notional surpluses on their housing revenue accounts.

Mr. Waldegrave: Following strong representations from authorities when block grant was introduced in 1981-82, the then Secretary of State decided that it was not right to assume in the distribution of block grant for 1982-83 that authorities with the potential to make a surplus on their housing revenue accounts would actually make those surpluses and transfer them to the general rate fund. The same decision has been made in each subsequent settlement.

Voluntary Agencies (Support)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the deadline for responses to his consultation paper on support for the voluntary sector in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: While there is no set closing date for comments on this consultation paper, which was issued by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, anyone still wishing to offer comments should do so as soon as possible.

Rates (Cambridge University Study)

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on 7 March 1984, *Official Report*, column 605, on what date he received the report of the study commissioned by his Department from the University of Cambridge into the effect of rate levels upon employment; and when he expects to publish the report.

Mr. Waldegrave: The report of the Cambridge team was received in the Department of the Environment on Thursday 24 January 1985. It will be considered by the interdepartmental steering group for the project. Decisions on publication will then be taken in the normal way.

Public Building

Mr. Fisher asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many permanent new buildings were started in the public sector during the last six months of 1984; and how this compares with the last six months of 1979.

Sir George Young: The information as requested is not available. The values of new orders received by contractors for public building and civil engineering work in Great Britain at 1980 prices were £1,770 million and £1,950 million respectively for the five months July to November 1979 and 1984. December information is not yet available for 1984.

"A Better Future for the Uplands"

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he can now respond to the Countryside Commission's report, "A Better Future for the Uplands."

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government have given careful consideration to the report and I have today sent the following letter to the chairman, Sir Derek Barber, which sets out the Government's views.

Dear Sir Derek

A BETTER FUTURE FOR THE UPLANDS

I must congratulate you first of all on an admirable report

—comprehensive, well researched, attractively produced, pertinent, and readable. I appreciate too the efforts you have made to command the co-operation and participation of all concerned with the wellbeing of the uplands. So my thanks to all those who made a contribution to the exercise.

The report has another salient virtue—it is focussed and practical. It shows concern for overall strategy, but recognises that we do not live in a world of ideal and immediate solutions.

In one sense, the timing of your report could not have been better. Change is in the air and that is clearly the moment to press forward with proposals and recommendations. But, in the shorter term, it poses a dilemma. We are considering a number of rural and agricultural measures but at this stage the exact outcome of various policy initiatives is still unclear. Many of the decisions to be taken could have considerable relevance for the uplands and conversely many of your proposals have implications for other rural areas.

Against this fluctuating background, what I propose to do at this stage is to respond to as many of your specific recommendations as present circumstances will allow, giving at the same time a broad indication of the government's overall thinking and attitudes on the issues before us. What I do not propose to do is to rehearse once again at length the facts, figures and conflicting arguments. This means that our response is not comprehensive nd has inevitably something of an interim flavour. This, however, has certain advantages. None of us—government, local authorities, the statutory agencies, the voluntary organsations—has ever been under any illusion that the future of the uplands could be settled by a single, once-for-all, package of decisions. With so many complex factors involved, progress cannot be other than evolutionary, taking account of new problems and new opportunities. The subject will continue to preoccupy us all. One thing is certain: thanks to your report, future decisions will be taken in the light of a thorough and up to date assessment of the issues.

We are certainly in agreement on the broad policy objectives, as set out in your first recommendation (paragraph 139). Sustaining vigorous upland communities and improving their quality of life economically and socially, while protecting and enhancing the wildlife, landscape and historic heritage of the uplands and ensuring accessibility to as many as possible, has our wholehearted commitment. I endorse them entirely. Whatever the faults and failures of the past, future decisions on the uplands must represent a careful reconciliation of social, economic and evironmental factors. Lopsided progress in one direction only, at the expense of other objectives, will not be acceptable.

Rural Development

Turning to specific matters, I will comment first on the subject of rural development. This is, of course, a broad concept which impinges on a variety of policies, and with which many different agencies are necessarily involved. The same objectives apply in England and in Wales: but the mechanisms differ. In England the Development Commission's Rural Development Areas, designated by using a mixture of social and economic criteria, have an important role. Rural Development Areas are given priority assistance by the Commission and most of the uplands are within them.

The Commission intends to establish within these areas Rural Development Programmes which will provide a more comprehensive and better co-ordinated approach to the full range of problems facing deprived rural areas than was in fact offered by the Action Plans which they will replace. These programmes — and the consultative procedures which produce them — will be of major importance in the task of attaining a proper balance of social, economic, environmental and recreational measures in the uplands. Developments in agriculture and in the use of farm resources for non-agricultural purposes will be a vital element here and, with this in mind, ADAS will play a full part in the Rural Development Programme process. At the same time, there is no intention that Rural Development Programmes should replace structure and local plans drawn up by local authorities and other bodies.

In Wales, where 40 per cent. of the uplands of the two countries are found, the Secretary of State for Wales plays a central co-ordinating role in the stimulation of rural development, in the light of the extensive nature of his ministerial responsibilities—the economy, agriculture, the environment, planning, transport, housing and many other matters. He encourages active cooperation between the various organisations in the field.

A leading role is also played by two bodies—the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) and Mid Wales Development (MWD). Both bodies offer a wide range of measures to foster suitable projects in upland areas—factory sites, including workshops specifically designed for craft industries, grants for the conversion of redundant buildings and business advice for new and existing firms. WDA, in addition, offers throughout Wales a useful package of investment schemes, including special rural loans. With its interest in social as well as economic needs, MWD can also help with the provision of housing, shopping, cultural, leisure and social facilities, tourist developments and transport. Both bodies are continually seeking to develop new initiatives which will benefit the rural economy.

On the question of finance, I do not think it would be wise to earmark certain proportions of the funds of the development and tourist agencies for uplands work. That, I believe, would be too inflexible. I consider therefore that it must remain the task of the individual organisation to assess the competing needs and priorities and to allocate its funds accordingly. I would not wish to alter this arrangement. It is an indication of the priority we give to their work that the general level of funding for the development and tourist agencies has been shielded from reductions in public expenditure.

Furthermore funding activities of the Manpower Services Commission in upland areas are perhaps not as fully appreciated as they might be. Their Community Programme is already making a valuable contribution, with £2¼ million already committed to projects in upland areas since its introduction in October 1982. This and the Voluntary Projects Programme, recently extended to March 1986, could provide funds for further work in the uplands, although it must be admitted that competition for the available resources is intense.

Agriculture

A healthy and profitable agricultural sector is undoubtedly vital to the maintenance of the upland economy and the conservation of the upland landscape. The government accepts that a case exists for looking more closely at some aspects of the way in which support is given to upland farming and we have already adopted the principle that enhanced rates of capital grants should be used to encourage agricultural development sympathetic to the environment. To this end, the farm capital grant schemes now provide for a higher rate of grant for hedges and shelter belts as well as for walls and dykes built of traditional local materials rather than fencing. This is another step towards achieving a closer integration of conservation and agricultural policies; it is intended to develop the concept further.

In addition, the government is pressing in Brussels for an amendment to the draft EC structures regulation designed to enable member states to encourage, in environmentally sensitive areas, farming practices consonant with conservation of the environment. It is in any event our intention to introduce further measures to help conservation in the UK.

Small or part-time farmers can clearly play a positive role in the economy of rural communities in the uplands. The European

Community's new measures to improve agricultural structures are likely to change the conditions of eligibility for capital grants to the advantage of such farmers, although it has not yet been decided precisely how the new Structures Regulation will be implemented in the United Kingdom. We recognise that the Countryside Commission is in a position to contribute to the formulation of farm structures policy and in due course we shall be seeking your advice, as well as that of other relevant statutory agencies, on the implementation in the UK of the new structural measures.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances represent a major part of hill farming net incomes and so are an important factor in maintaining farming communities in these areas. This year support is being extended for the first time to the newly designated less favoured areas though at lower rates than the originally designated hill areas.

Diversification

The government agrees with the Commission that there is considerable potential for business diversification by farmers in some areas and that socio-economic advice provided by ADAS has an important role in developing this.

ADAS operates a three-tier service in this field. Regional Socio-Economic Advisers are backed up by approximately 70 Special Interest Advisers stationed at divisional and area offices. The majority of front line advisers can also draw on a wealth of experience which enables them to give advice on many socio-economic matters, for example, regarding family farms and links with other organisations with rural interests. This expertise is readily available and farmers can draw on it heavily as and when they need it. But it is vital in this type of work to go at the pace the farming industry both wants and can assimilate at any one time. Accordingly, the supply and demand situation concerning this sort of advice is being kept under constant review. The recent review of ADAS stressed the role of conservation and socio-economic advice.

ADAS is encouraging the trend towards diversification in line with the duty placed upon the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the Wildlife and Countryside Act (Section 41). Current and future initiatives include enterprise groups in Wales, involvement with the Development Commission over Rural Development Programmes, meetings and seminars with both county and district local authorities, and finally a series of ADAS-organised meetings on diversification being held in England and Wales this winter and involving farmers, landlords, local authorities, the tourist boards and COSIRA.

I note your criticism of our decision not to implement the provisions in the LFA Directive which allows grant to be paid to farmers for small-scale tourist and craft enterprises. The conditions attached to these provisions, together with stringent restrictions on the amount of expenditure on tourism and craft projects eligible for aid, have so limited the scope of the measure that the government has not considered it worthwhile. However, as the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced on 11 December, when the new capital grants schemes are introduced in 1985 to implement the new EC farm structure policy, it is the government's intention to introduce further measures to encourage farmers to diversify into non-farming enterprises—aids to tourist and craft enterprises being obvious candidates.

Conservation of the Countryside

Conservation of the countryside is an objective to which this government is wholeheartedly committed. A whole series of decisions since 1979 have reflected the high priority which we attach to it. Most recently, our decision to step up the funding of both the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council, at a time when retrenchment is the order of the day, provides further evidence of our determination to maintain the pace of achievement in this area. The Wildlife and Countryside Act marked a significant advance and we are pledged to the closing of the three-month SSSI loophole. We have also sought to ensure that agricultural policies, particularly on farm capital grants, take proper account of the requirements of conservation, and when the grant schemes were amended both in 1983 and 1984, we grasped the opportunity to make modifications in the interests of conservation. I believe that our record in this area is first-class and we intend to build further on what has already been achieved.

We recognise that livestocking practices in the uplands might conflict with conservation objectives in certain circumstances, but there is no evidence of a general problem of overstocking, against which there are in any case already powerful safeguards. The statutory rules provide that HLCAs are not payable on animals in excess of the numbers the land can carry without overgrazing. ADAS look into any cases of localised overstocking and will recommend reductions in payments where appropriate. More generally, there are overall financial and numerical limits of £60 and 6 sheep per hectare in severely disadvantaged areas and £45 and 9 sheep in disadvantaged areas.

Conservation of moorland presents particular problems because much of it depends on agricultural use for its upkeep. We did, of course, in December 1984 withdraw grant aid for land reclamation throughout Great Britain. I am not, however, convinced that the further measures you propose—which we have considered most carefully—would necessarily be more effective than the existing procedure. On the one hand, while blanket withdrawals of grant would be unfair to the individual farmer, land improvement which would be beneficial to conservation would also be excluded. In particular, withdrawal of drainage and the range of land improvement grants from section 43 areas would be an unnecessarily severe step which would deny aid to very many farmers who need these grants to sustain the viability of their farms and who are able to carry out these operations without harm to the landscape. Nevertheless I believe it would be a mistake to regard the matter as closed. I therefore propose, with your assistance, to keep the subject under review in the light of futher experience with the working of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. This process will be helped, I believe, by the review of Section 43 maps which I understand you are putting in hand at our suggestion.

I also have little doubt that local planning authorities would not welcome the extra burden on their resources implied by your proposals to amend planning controls on farming and forestry. In reaching these conclusions, I have been influenced—and impressed — by Dr. Brotherton's figures for the grant notification arrangements in National Parks in the first six months following implementation of Section 41; out of 2,757 cases, only 6 had not been resolved locally. The second six months gives similar results.

We have given the most careful consideration to the related suggestion that the exemption currently given to certain farm buildings and farm and forest roads under the General Development Order should be withdrawn throughout the LFAs. We are not, however, convinced that the scale of the landscape problems arising from construction of new farm buildings and roads is sufficient to warrant what would amount to a considerable extension of planning control when we strive to avoid such extensions unless there is very clear justification for them.

I can, however, report a modest but significant step forward which we intend to take immediately. We accept that in National Parks there is a case for a system of improved control over the siting and design of farm building and farm and forest roads, provided this can be done without undue cost for local authorities and disruption for the farming community. I have therefore decided to issue a consultation paper proposing that a new LASDO be made covering the design and siting of all farm buildings and farm and forest roads in *all* National Parks. This will enable the arguments for and against to be exhaustively examined. A change in this direction was recommended, as you will know, by the 1974 report of the National Parks Policies Review Committee. No action was taken because the National Parks Authorities had no power to make discretionary grants to meet the additional costs incurred in meeting more stringent design standards. They now have such a power, thanks to Section 44 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act which this government included to allow change of the kind we now contemplate to operate fairly. As with conservation areas and listed buildings, we do not believe that there should be an automatic right to compensation if conditions on siting or construction details are imposed, but we do believe that discretionary grants under Section 44 should be available. Steps would need to be taken to avoid duplication of work in cases where grant is claimed; but this requires administrative rather than legislative action.

Forestry

We cannot accept that a case has yet been made that planning controls should be introduced over forestry. Timber production

has both balance of payments and, to some extent, strategic implications and contributes to the social fabric of the uplands. Ways of reconciling forestry, conservation and amenity must, however, be seen to be effective if public support for forestry is to continue.

Forestry Commission planting policies have been criticised in some quarters as insensitive, but the consultation procedures for forestry grants and felling permissions introduced some years ago, and only recently revised, have shown that acceptable solutions to land-use problems in this area can be found by a relatively informal approach. A key role in this process is performed by the Regional Advisory Committees composed of members with expertise in agriculture, planning and environment as well as forestry matters. To meet the concern that the Committee's proceedings are not as open as the equivalent planning process, the Forestry Commission is currently looking at ways of achieving greater public accountability.

Woodlands

We share your concern for native woodlands in the uplands and support the provision of advice and encouragement for woodland management in the interests of timber, conservation and shelter. Such advice and encouragement are already provided by ADAS, the Forestry Commission, numerous County Councils and private consultants in regard to farm woodlands and a Forestry Commission working group has recently reviewed the state of broadleaves in Britain as a whole. The Commission will be making recommendations to Ministers in due course and some of these will be relevant to the uplands. The government are also considering the extent to which farm woodlands might be encouraged as a means of diversifying the farm business.

As regards the possible inclusion of enclosed broadleaf woodlands in the HLCA calculations, present Community legislation does not provide for land which is not part of the forage area to be included in the calculation of a farm's financial ceiling for the HLCA payments. However, once the new Agricultural Structures regulation is adopted, the government will consider whether there is any scope for certain areas of woodland to be taken into account.

Minerals

We have repeatedly made it clear that consideration of environmental impact must be an integral part of the planning process both when structure and local plans are being drawn up and when specific applications are being considered. In sensitive areas, all possible alternatives, and measures to minimise harmful effects, need to be looked at even more carefully than elsewhere. But bearing in mind the trend of diversification away from agriculture and the simple geological fact that certain types and qualities of minerals are concentrated in the uplands, I am inclined to the view that your report possibly underplays the benefits and importance (not least to employment) of their extraction in suitable — and carefully controlled — circumstances. The gains cannot be lightly dismissed and it should never be forgotten that they have been achieved for a generation within a planning system that has provided a whole battery of safeguards. It is the government's continuing commitment that applications for new mineral workings and extensions to existing workings should be subject to the most rigorous examination, especially in national parks.

Public Access

Your report contained several recommendations about the important issue of public access in the uplands. We appreciate the concern both about the need for access and the problems which can be associated with increasing numbers of visitors in the uplands. We believe that the best way to handle both concerns is by leaving them in the hands of the National Park Authorities and the local authorities on the basis of their existing powers. In this context the Secretary of State for Wales and I were pleased to be able to announce an increase in the level of National Park supplementary grant for 1985-86 somewhat in excess of the rate of inflation.

Many aspects of access to the countryside are, of course, currently being examined in a research study sponsored by the Countryside Commission and the Sports Council and due to be completed this year. We will look again at access policies when we have the Countryside Commission's review based on the findings of the study. You recommend that existing access arrangements on Forestry Commission forest lands be protected when sold to the private sector. This raises legal problems and a voluntary code of practice by the private sector might be a more sensible solution. The research may help here, too.

As regards the outstanding recommendations of the Royal Commission on Common Land, the government has already made it clear that it favours further legislation in due course. We welcomed the Countryside Commission's initiative a year ago in establishing a Common Land Forum to discuss and agree recommendations for such further legislation and we look forward to receiving the Commission's recommendations based on the Forum's conclusions.

Housing

You argue in favour of higher Housing Investment Programme allocations for district councils with large rural areas in order to meet the special housing needs of the uplands. I think it can reasonably be argued that, by and large, the system already reflects, and caters for, those special needs, within, of course, the usual limitations imposed by the need for public expenditure restraint. There are two main components in the Housing Investment Programme system in England. One is an objective assessment of housing needs (the Generalised Needs Index) based on specific indicators like stock conditions; the other is the Local Discretionary Element under which the particular circumstances of individual local authorities are taken into account and reflected in allocations. If an authority argues that it has a special need in relation to housing in upland areas, this would be taken into account. In Wales, the methodology is slightly different, but the principle is the same. It is a cardinal feature of both systems that once the broad allocations are made, it is for the local authorities themselves to decide how they are used. The consultations on Rural Development Programmes could provide an obvious opportunity to discuss at local level the housing needs of such areas.

As a contribution towards the needs of young workers setting up home for the first time, the Development Commission and the Housing Corporation are currently engaged in a pilot project to provide up to 100 dwellings in rural areas on shared ownership terms. The Commission is contributing £5,000 towards each unit. 85 have been approved so far and some of these will be in upland areas. A modified follow-up scheme has been recently announced and its results will be carefully monitored. It is hoped local authorities will benefit from the experience gained and follow the lead given.

Health and Social Service

The government believes that the organisation of health and personal social services is best determined in the light of local circumstances and local needs. It accepts that people living in remote areas have a need equal with those in urban centres for advice and information on health, social service and social security matters.

Education

The concern felt about village school closures is very natural, but the objective for education in rural areas must be as far as possible to provide children with the same educational opportunities as pupils of their own age in towns and cities. This inevitably involves local education authorities in a selective programme of closures to secure the best use of available resources and to avoid, wherever possible, the diminished opportunities that can occur in schools that are too small. The new Education Support Grants being introduced in 1985 have been offered to six authorities for pilot projects aimed at improving the education experience in small schools. The Secretary of State for Education and Science in England and the Secretary of State for Wales, as appropriate, consider all proposeals for school closures on their individual merits; an important factor in their decision is the difficulty of the journey that would be involved for pupils travelling to alternative schools.

Transport

Particular attention is paid to rural services in the recently published White Paper *Buses* (Cmnd 9300), which expresses the Government's concern at the decline of bus services in sparsely populated areas. I cannot do better than quote paragraph 3.11 of the White Paper:

> "The Government proposes supplementary measures to help county councils to modernise and improve rural

transport services and will be monitoring their effects in the context of deregulation. First, innovation must be encouraged. A new grant will be created to encourage new transport schemes for communities in rural areas. In England, the grant will be for up to £1 million a year, administered by the Development Commission. Similar arrangements will be made for Scotland and Wales. Second, competitive tendering will help authorities to achieve much better value for money for the service they decide to support. But the full benefits of tendering will not be felt immediately. So, third, the Government will make available additional help to maintain vital rural services in this transitional period. This will take the form of a special grant available for 4 years and paid direct to operators of eligible services in rural areas. The total value of the grant will be up to £20m in the first full year reducing by even steps in subsequent years."

Of the unconventional services available, post buses have already proved themselves of value in providing transport in upland areas of Scotland and may have great potential in England and Wales. The proposal made in the White Paper to permit more widespread operation of shared taxi and hire car services could also make a substantial contribution to transport services in the uplands.

Policy Coordination

It is worth mentioning that at local level the development plan process provides a ready made framework for a comprehensive and integrated approach to rural land use, including that in the uplands. The plan making process includes extensive consultation with Government Departments, agencies and other bodies and public participation is an important aspect.

In Wales a wide range of Ministerial responsibilities including Agriculture, Economic Development, the Environment, Planning, Transport and Housing, among others, rests with my colleague the Secretary of State for Wales. He encourages the agencies to work together and with local authorities in collaborative ventures and is well placed to ensure that policies are effectively coordinated.

Here at the centre I and my colleagues keep our policies in step. When government policy affects so many aspects of life, however, it is a continuing and difficult task to establish the right balance. When circumstances change quickly, perhaps accelerated by technological advances, contradictions and inconsistencies may arise. These must be corrected but without overreaction—the effect of which would produce a constant seesaw in government policy. I can assure you that our efforts in the uplands will be to achieve a sensible balance and a sensible solution to the problems which you have identified and in particular we shall be aiming to integrate our conservation and agricultural policies.

I agree, therefore, that policy towards the uplands needs careful coordination and a clear sense of our objectives so that we do not lose these vulnerable landscapes and their supporting populations through a lack of perception of their overriding needs. We are aware of the different objectives and we shall measure our policies against them. Nevertheless it is important that policy in the uplands should fit within a national framework. It would be unrealistic to expect that the future of our uplands could be settled in isolation. I think it is also unrealistic to expect the Less Favoured Areas directive to deal with all the problems of rural development (as you recommend in paragraph 190). Rural conditions vary considerably within the United Kingdom, even more so throughout the EEC. What we can do is to attempt to harmonise the measures we make available and leave it to the local authorities and other agencies at the local level to implement them according to local needs as they perceive them. This is consistent with the best traditions of democracy and decentralised decision making.

The question of parliamentary scrutiny is of course a matter for the appropriate Select Committees but nonetheless I assume they would find it necessary to relate policies towards the uplands to the national context.

On the question of flexibility in the operation of policies, I would hope that it would be possible to give sympathetic consideration to the sort of joint official projects you have in mind. Perhaps it would be best to look at these case by case.

Conclusion

The report *A Better Future for the Uplands* identifies very clearly the main issues facing the uplands of England and Wales and provides an invaluable guide to the thinking of the Commission and the other organisations involved. As this letter indicates, it has already influenced Government thinking on these problems and it will undoubtedly continue to do so.

It is, in a word, a milestone, but a milestone on a road which stretches far ahead. This letter, as I have already emphasised, is by no means the end of the story as far as policies for the uplands are concerned. At the same time, I very much hope that what I have said, and the decisions I have indicated, make it abundantly clear that the government's approach to these problems is positive and constructive. There are a number of key themes in policies for the uplands and I have touched on them throughout this letter. We accept the need for a prosperous agricultural industry which can and does make a major contribution to a thriving rural sector and the conservation of the countryside. We welcome the increasing awareness of the importance of conservation, and the extent to which the voluntary principle is accepted. National policies must set the framework but within that there is considerable scope for local initiative and contributions from non-governmental bodies.

Indeed, if there is one theme which I would particularly like to emphasise in conclusion, it is that a brighter future for the uplands will be achieved, not by government decisions alone, but by the strenuous and purposeful exertions of the many different organisations and individuals involved, working to mutually agreed objectives. I believe that this cooperative approach, already strongly in evidence, will accomplish a great deal and we shall play our full part in it.

I am copying this letter to the Chairmen of the Development Board for Rural Wales, the Development Commission, the English Tourist Board, and the Wales Tourist Board."

WILLIAM WALDEGRAVE

PRIME MINISTER

Markyate, Hertfordshire

Q28. **Mr. Robert B. Jones** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Markyate, Hertfordshire.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Coal Industry Dispute

Q69. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Prime Minister if she will now consider the representation of the Welsh Churches organisations supported by the south Wales National Union of Mineworkers and the National Union of Mineworkers nationally, to attempt to prepare a basis for immediate negotiations with the National Coal Board to resolve the mining dispute.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy met the leaders of both the British Council of Churches and the Council of Churches for Wales last week. I share the concern expressed by the Churches about the damage this pointless dispute is inflicting on the mining industry and its communities. Like them, I also wish for a swift, constructive settlement. But any settlement must offer the industry a viable future.

Capital Funds

Mr. Wigley asked the Prime Minister if she will now take steps to control the movement of capital funds out of the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: No.

Engagements

Mr. Boyes asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

Mr. Yeo asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 31 January.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Regional Development Grants (Wales)

Mr. Anderson asked the Prime Minister why she has transferred to the Welsh Office responsibility for the administration of all regional development grants in Wales.

The Prime Minister: Regional development grants, in the form introduced by the Co-operative Development Agency and Industrial Development Act 1984, will, for the future, be most sensibly administered together with regional selective assistance. Both forms of assistance are on a project basis and normally linked to jobs. A consistent approach towards projects in receipt of both forms of assistance is needed. Therefore, the payment of regional development grants in Wales has, since 29 November 1984, been the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales, who was already responsible for payments under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. Similar arrangements have been made in Scotland.

Milk Production

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister what is the Government's reason for providing compensation to dairy farmers for reducing the amount of over-production of milk.

The Prime Minister: The purpose of the outgoers scheme is to obtain quota for reallocation to those producers who are most disadvantaged by the introduction of milk quotas, in particular small producers and exceptional hardship cases. To make this possible, payments are offered to farmers who are willing to give up milk production and surrender their quotas.

Agriculture (Competitiveness)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister whether it is the Government's policy to make agriculture fully competitive with imports from all sources.

The Prime Minister: Price levels for agricultural products in the United Kingdom are largely determined by the mechanisms of the common agricultural policy. It is Government policy to help the industry remain competitive.

Agriculture (Hills and Marginal Areas)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister what are the reasons for the Government's support for agriculture in the hills and other marginal areas.

The Prime Minister: This support makes a major contribution to the rural economy, to the maintenance of the environment and to our competitive relations with other European Community member countries.

Water Industry (Privatisation)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Prime Minister if she will consider proposals for the privatisation of the water industry.

The Prime Minister: The Government would welcome new ideas on privatisation. However, the water authorities are natural monopolies for many of their functions and we need to be particularly careful when considering replacing a public monopoly by a private one. Because of the environmental and public health responsibilities, any proposal to privatise them would also raise issues of regulation. There are 30 private water companies which are concerned only with water supply and which are mainly regulated by statute.

Falkland Islands (Oil Drilling Rights)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister what representations Her Majesty's Government have received with regard to the granting of a licence to Firstland Oil plc for drilling rights on the Falklands.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister whether any conditions regarding the use of the use of profits arising as a result of onshore oil exploration in the Falklands were imposed in the licence granted to Firstland Oil plc.

The Prime Minister: In accordance with the Falkland Islands Mining (Mineral Oil) Regulations 1964, the licence provides for royalties to be paid to the Falkland Islands Government on any oil or gas extracted. It also provides that an annual rent will be paid to the Falkland Islands Government.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her discussions with Mr. Perez de Cuellar on 23 January about the Falkland Islands.

The Prime Minister: Details of my discussions with Mr. Perez de Cuellar must remain confidential.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she is satisfied with the steps taken to encourage re-investment of profits in the Falklands.

The Prime Minister: Yes. The aim of the Falkland Islands Development Corporation is to encourage investment in the development and diversification of the local economy, including reinvestment of funds generated in the Islands. We hope that the opening of a branch of Standard Chartered bank in Stanley in January 1984 will assist the same objective.

VE Day (40th Anniversary)

Mr. Winnick asked the Prime Minister if any steps are to be taken by the British embassy in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to mark the 40th anniversary of the end of the war against Nazi Germany; whether it is intended to mark the occasion in Moscow jointly with representatives of the Soviet authorities; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Our embassy in Moscow, together with those of our partners and allies, is continuing to monitor closely Soviet preparations for the commemoration of the end of the last war in Europe. If, in due course, the Soviet Union were formally to invite the United Kingdom to participate in the commemorative events in Moscow the invitation would be studied carefully and a reply given after consultation with our allies.

Mr. Winnick asked the Prime Minister if the Government intend to invite representatives of the United States of America, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and France to a gathering in the United Kingdom to mark the 40th anniversary of the end of the war against Nazi Germany; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) on 15 January at column 180 and to the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) on 17 January at column 505. I expect both our wartime and our present allies to be represented.

Zeus Security Consultants

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister which Government Departments have placed contracts in the past year with Zeus Security Consultants.

The Prime Minister: Information of this kind is not held centrally, but I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State, Treasury, on 28 January at column 17.

Chile

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister why the United Kingdom abstained on resolutions at the United Nations General Assembly criticising the human rights situation in Chile in 1982 and 1983; and if she will place copies of those resolutions in the Library.

The Prime Minister: In 1982 we voted in the third committee in favour of the Chile resolution. We later abstained in the plenary because we believed the resolution to have been unbalanced by a subsequent amendment. We stressed in our explanation of vote that this abstention did not reflect any lessening in our concerns over the human rights situation in Chile. In 1983 we again abstained because we judged the Chile resolution lacked balance but in our explanation of vote repeated our concern over human rights. The resolutions and our explanation of vote are already in the Library of the House.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister why the United Kingdom abstained on the 1981 resolution at the Commission of Human Rights criticising human rights in Chile; and if she will place a copy of the resolution in the Library.

The Prime Minister: We abstained because we judged the resolution unbalanced. In a separate paragraph vote we supported the renewal of the mandate of the special rapporteur for Chile. Both the resolution and our explanation of vote are already in the Library of the House.

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Prime Minister, pursuant to her reply about the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on 13 December, *Official Report*, column *1204*, if she will publish in the *Official Report* her letter on this matter to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, dated 23 January.

The Prime Minister: Yes. The letter is as follows:

"Thank you for your letter of 27 December about the reply I gave to Tony Lloyd in the House on 13 December about the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act. I am grateful for this opportunity to clarify the position.

Where a local authority is satisfied of an individual disabled person's need for one of the services listed in Section 2 of the Act, it has a duty to make arrangements to meet that need. In that sense this part of the Act is certainly mandatory. However, it is for the local authority itself to assess need and to detemine how it should best be met. To that extent there is also an element of discretion.

You can rest assured that it was not my intention in any way to question the statutory duties imposed by the Act on local authorities, nor to indicate any change in the advice given to successive Ministers for the Disabled on this point. I am sorry if the wording of my reply suggested otherwise."

VJ Day (40th Anniversary)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Prime Minister what official arrangements are being made to mark the 40th anniversary of victory over Japan day; and whether, among other organisations, the National Federation of Far Eastern Prisoners of War Clubs and Associations and the Burma Star Association are being fully consulted about the arrangements.

The Prime Minister: I said in the House on 17 January at column 504, that we shall remember both VE day and VJ day in our commemoration. The format is being considered and we shall make an announcement in due course. We are already aware of the views of a range of associations. As our planning progresses we shall consult further with relevant associations through the good offices of the Royal British Legion.

Flight Lieut. Richard Thomas

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister why Flight Lieut. Richard Thomas was on loan to the Chilean air force; and whether any other military personnel have been on loan to the Chilean military since January 1982.

The Prime Minister: Flight Lieut. Thomas was on loan to the Chilean air force to assist with flying training on Hunter aircraft. No more than two British military personnel have been on loan to Chile at any one time since January 1982; all have been RAF instructors.

Chile (Uranium Supplies)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she has offered to supply, or authorised the supply of, enriched uranium to the Chilean Government; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of

State for Energy in a written answer on 6 December 1982 at column *344* to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). Deliveries under the contract referred to in this reply were completed in early 1984. No further requests for the supply of enriched uranium have been received from the Chilean Government.

We are aware that the Chilean Government are considering refurbishment of a research reactor not currently in commission. If they were to offer the United Kingdom a contract for fuel supply we would consider an export licence application in the light of the policy set out in the answer that I gave to the hon. Member on 28 January at columns 24-25.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to the transfer of enriched uranium to Chile.

The Prime Minister: Any transfer of enriched uranium to Chile would be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but the Government's general policy on the transfer of enriched uranium to Chile falls within the guidelines set out in the answer that I gave to the hon. Member on 28 January at columns 24-25.

DEFENCE

Merchant Marine (Research Projects and Studies)

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the research projects and studies on merchant marine issues which are currently under commission by his Department, their purpose, the organisations which are carrying out the work, and the costs.

Mr. Stanley: The Ministry of Defence and the Department of Transport are undertaking a joint study into the future availability of merchant shipping for defence purposes. As part of that study the Department of Transport has commissioned SEA Group consultants to forecast future trends of availability in certain categories of merchant shipping. The cost of the consultants' study is a matter for the Department of Transport. There are no other research projects or studies currently under commission to outside bodies or consultants.

Type 22 Frigate

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will define the expression "other relevant factors", as used in his answer of Friday 18 January, that are to be taken into account before the decision is made as to the placement of the two type 22 warships; and what is the weight that is being given to social and commercial factors, respectively, in coming to a decision.

Mr. Lee: I have nothing to add to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 28 January at column 21.

MCV 80 Project

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the MCV 80 project.

Mr. Butler: I am happy to say that progress on this important project continues to be very satisfactory. Main development of the MCV 80 infantry section vehicle was successfully completed towards the end of last year and the prime contractor, GKN Sankey, is pressing ahead with the development of variant vehicles for the infantry command, repair and recovery, and artillery observation roles. Following the decisions on competitive procurement arrangements, which were announced on 23 January last year, at column 400, by my predecessor, my hon. Friend the member for Chertsey and Walton (Mr. Pattie), tenders have been invited from GKN Sankey and from three other potential manufacturers, and a contract has been placed for long lead items for initial production.

Greenham Common

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Defence if nuclear biological and chemical defence equipment is stored on the United States air force base at Greenham common

Mr. Stanley: As far as offensive equipment is concerned *(a)* Greenham common is a base for ground-launched cruise missiles; *(b)* there are no stocks of chemical weapons at United States bases in Great Britain; *(c)* there is no question of biological weapons being held at Greenham common because the United Kingdom and the USA observe the 1972 biological weapons convention which bans the development, possession and stockpiling of biological weapons.

As far as defensive NBC protective equipment is concerned, I cannot for security reasons indicate at which specific locations such equipment is held.

RAF Chilwell

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the date on which the memorandum of understanding between his Department and the United States authorities regarding RAF Chilwell was signed.

Mr. Lee: RAF Chilwell was formally made available to the United States Air Force on 9 May 1984 under the terms agreed in an exchange of letters.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the use to be made of facilities at Chilwell by the United States air force will include support for the 501st Tactical Missile Wing.

Mr. Lee: The vehicles stored by the United States air force are general support vehicles, such as fuel bowsers and tractors; none is earmaked for use by the 501st Tactical Missile Wing.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian jobs will be created as a result of the acquisiton by the United States air force of facilities at RAF Chilwell.

Mr. Lee: It is too early to say.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether vehicles stationed at RAF Chilwell by the United States air force will be required to take part in dispersal exercises.

Mr. Lee: No.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many United States personnel will be stationed at RAF Chilwell; and whether there will be any personnel accommodated in the area.

Mr. Lee: There are no plans to station American personnel at RAF Chilwell, and therefore no plans to provide housing for them in the area.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether RAF Chilwell will host United States air force personnel and equipment in 1985.

Mr. Lee: General support vehicles are already stored at RAF Chilwell. They are at present maintained periodically by visiting USAF personnel from other bases.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement compatible with the interests of national security regarding the function of RAF Chilwell.

Mr. Lee: The facilities at RAF Chilwell are to be made available to the USAF for the storage of general support vehicles such as fuel bowsers and tractors.

Army Road Block, Westdown Camp

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the army road blocks in the vicinity of Westdown camp, near Tilshead, on 11 December 1984; how many cars were stopped; on whose authority; with what results; and why cars of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament members were not allowed to proceed.

Mr. Lee: A number of roads on the Salisbury plain training area were closed on 11 December, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant byelaws, while military exercises took place. Traffic control points were also set up on some public roads, in liaison with the civil police, in order to control the flow of military exercise traffic crossing roads at designated points. No records were kept of cars which were affected by these measures.

RNAD Broughton Moor

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there have been any changes in the operational arrangements for RNAD Broughton Moor.

Mr. Lee: No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the operational role of RNAD Broughton Moor.

Mr. Lee: The store and issue of ammunition for use by NATO maritime forces.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any increase in the last 12 months in the number of persons employed at RNAD Broughton Moor.

Mr. Lee: No.

Falklands Campaign (Captured Weapons)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use by Her Majesty's forces of 35 mm Oerlikon guns captured from Argentina during the Falklands campaign.

Mr. Stanley: Twin 35 mm Oerlikon guns with their associated Skyguard fire control system, captured during the Falklands campaign, will enter service with the Royal Auxiliary Air Force in a squadron due to form at RAF Waddington on 1 April 1985.

WINTEX '85

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence which North Atlantic Treaty Organisation commands will be involved in the WINTEX '85 exercise.

Mr. Stanley: All major NATO commands, major subordinate commands and principal subordinate commands will take part in the exercise.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Exceptional Heating Allowance

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has now approved an exceptional heating allowance to persons in receipt of supplementary benefits to ameliorate the effects of the severe weather in Northern Ireland; what criteria are used to determine when such an allowance is paid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: I shall reply to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Remanded Persons

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average period of remand without bail in each of the following cases involving accomplice witness's evidence or *(a)* persons convicted, *(b)* persons acquitted and *(c)* persons who were released as a result of such evidence being retracted; and how these figures compared with those for persons charged with scheduled offences on the basis of evidence other than accomplice evidence.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *71*]: Information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at dispoportionate cost.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Prescriptions

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the latest estimate of the number of prescription items per capita in the United States of America, Italy, West Germany, France, Spain, New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Although not official figures, recent commercial surveys suggest that the number of prescription items per capita in these countries is as follows:

	Number
Italy	11·3
West Germany	11·2
France	10·0
Spain	9·6
New Zealand	8·5
Australia	7·7
United Kingdom	6·6

No reliable figures are available for the United States of America.

This is a carefully selected list, as there are also developed countries with lower prescribing levels than the United Kingdom. These statistics are not very useful or relevant to current policy issues as prescribing figures for

different countries can be influenced by many factors, in particular the vastly different eligibility rules and public subsidy arrngements within the various national health and insurance systems.

In those countries with apparently higher prescribing levels than in the United Kingdom, their Governments are taking steps to reduce this expenditure.

In the United Kingdom the medical profession itself accepts that current levels could be reduced and agreed some time ago to co-operate with the Government in encouraging more rational and economic prescribing.

Whooping Cough Vaccine

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether any children whose death has been officially recorded as a cot death had been known to be in receipt of whooping cough vaccine 48 hours beforehand.

Mr. John Patten: Since 1964 there have been 13 yellow card reports of sudden infant deaths where combined diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine had been given during the previous 48 hours. The receipt of a report does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between the vaccination and the sudden infant death.

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many High Court writs have been received by his Department served by, or on behalf of, those suffering brain damage as a result of whooping cough vaccine.

Mr. John Patten: There have been eight such cases.

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he intends amending the whooping cough advice pamphlet issued by the Health Education Council in the light of the recently published statistic that one in 20,411 vaccinated against the disease has suffered brain damage and not one in 100,000 as at present stated in the pamphlet.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans to ask the Health Education Council to revise its leaflet. I would refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) on 31 July 1984 at columns *243-44*. We are not aware of data since then which invalidate that advice.

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made in discovering an alternative whooping cough vaccine for which the necessary research funds have been provided.

Mr. John Patten: Research on the development of an alternative whooping cough vaccine at the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research, Porton Down, is making good progrees. Arrangements for the production of the vaccine for clinical trials are now under discussion as the next stage of development.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the process of consultation preceding the drawing up of his final limited list, he will take account of those cases where a branded product is cheaper than its stated generic alternative.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make inquiries of the pharmaceutical companies and wholesale and retail pharmacies about possible stock losses associated with the introduction of a limited list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate has been made of the additional administrative costs of policing and monitoring the new limited list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Arrangements already exist to monitor general practitioners' prescribing and we do not expect oversight of the operation of the limited list to add significantly to the administrative costs.

Contraception

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost to the National Health Service of birth control pills; and whether he has any plans to make all patients pay for them.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The available information identifies only the estimated ingredient cost of oral contraceptives prescribed by general practitioners. In England in 1983 this was £15·6 million.

We have no plans to make patients pay for family planning services.

Vaccine Damage (Compensation)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applications for financial compensation under the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 were refused on the grounds that the person concerned was under 80 per cent. disabled.

Mr. John Patten: Up to 4 January 1985, the latest date for which figures are available, disablement was less than 80 per cent. in the following unsuccessful applications for a vaccine damage payment: 14 where the cause of such disablement was accepted as resulting from vaccination; 226 where the cause of such disablement was not accepted as resulting from vaccination; and 315 where the disablement was so substantially less than 80 per cent. that the cause was not investigated.

Operating Theatres

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the present staffing organisation of operating theatres in the light of the working of the Lewin report; if he is satisfied that there is a proper career structure for all of the non-medical professions involved in operating theatre work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are not aware of any general problems arising from either the organisation or staffing of operating theatres following the recommendations of the Lewin report which were commended to health authorities in 1972 after detailed consultation. One of the major concerns of the report was that there should be a proper career structure for the non-medical professions involved in this work. If my hon. Friend is concerned about the implementation of some particular recommendation perhaps he will write to me.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applications he has now had for grants under the central fund initiative for drug misuse; how many grants have been made; and for how much money.

Mr. John Patten: Applications received to date total 194. Of these, 90 have been approved, with a total value of £6·7 million.

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people inside and outside the community service section of his Department have some responsibility for dealing with the problems of drug misuse; and what are their grades.

Mr. John Patten: A substantial number of administrative and professional staff at all levels have some responsibility for dealing with the problems of drug misuse as part of their wider responsibilities.

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in the community service section of his Department are responsible for dealing solely with the problems of drug misuse; and what are their grades.

Mr. John Patten: The following staff in administrative grades of the community services division deal with the problems of drug misuse as the major part of their responsibilities. A wide variety of staff in other professional and administrative grades have some responsibility for the subject.

Principles	2
HEOD	1
HEO	3
EO	3
CO	2
CA	1

Homeless Persons

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total number of individuals afforded temporary board and lodging in each of the 23 resettlement units in England, Scotland and Wales provided directly or indirectly by his Department during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and, in the case of the Camberwell resettlement unit, what were the comparable figures for the three previous years.

Mr. Whitney: Figures are not collected in the form requested. The table shows the number of individuals admitted during the latest four-week period for which figures are available. It should be noted that an individual who used more than one unit during the four-week period was recorded as an individual in each unit visited. Comparative figures for Camberwell are available only for 1983. In the four-week period ending 22 November 1983, 751 individuals were accommodated at Camberwell.

Resettlement Unit	*Number of individuals accommodated during four-week period ending 20 November 1984*
Alvaston	118
Brighton	110
Crown Quay Lodge	42
Fazakerly	121
Glasgow	132
Leeds	183
Leicester	169
Newbury	142
Plawsworth	138
Southampton	110
South Wales	78
Walkden	70
West Midlands	144
Winterbourne	121
Wood House	142
London Units	
Bridge House	147
Camberwell	568
Camden	87
Cedars Lodge	127
Lancelot Andrewes House	414
Pound Lodge	124
Spur House	205
West End House	453

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total number of persons referred to the Camberwell resettlement unit during the two months ended 31 December 1984 and 31 March 1984, respectively, from each of the following sources: *(a)* local authority housing or social services departments *(b)* mental hospitals in the Greater London and Home Counties areas, *(c)* mental handicap hospitals in the Greater London and Home Counties areas, *(d)* general hospitals in the Greater London and Home Counties areas, *(e)* probation and aftercare offices and *(f)* supplementary benefit local offices.

Mr. Whitney: The information is not collected in the form requested, but the table may be of help.

Source of referral to Camberwell Resettlement Unit	*In the four weeks ending 18 December 1984*	*In the four weeks ending 13 March 1984*
Hospitals	3	10
Local Authorities	2	9
Police/Probation Service	6	14
Voluntary Organisations	6	8
Other Resettlement Units	1	7
DHSS Local Offices	23	25
Self Referrals	1,867	2,237
TOTALS	1,908	2,310

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many women were in each reception centre or settlement unit on the latest available date; what their ages were; how long each had been in residence; and what was the number in each institute who fell within section 2 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977;

(2) how many of the 600 homeless single persons in reception centres on the night of 30 November 1984 falling within section 2 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 were women; and what were their ages and disabilities.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that figures for the night of 30 November 1984 are not available. However, on the night of 31 December 1984 Camden resettlement unit accommodated 35 women and Cedars Lodge resettlement

unit, 17 women. Of the six women who would fall to be considered within section 2 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 by virtue of being over 60 years of age, all were resident at Camden. Information is not collected on how many women would fall to be considered within the other categories under section 2 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, nor is information held centrally on disabilities. The tables show the age range and lengths of stay of the 52 women in the two women's resettlement units on the night of 31 December 1984.

1. Camden Resettlement Unit (35 women)

Age	Lengths of stay as at 31 December 1984				
	Under 1 week	*1 to 13 weeks*	*13 to 26 weeks*	*26 to 52 weeks*	*Over 1 year*
Under 20 years	1	5	—	—	1
20 to 29 years	1	5	2	—	1
30 to 39 years	1	3	—	—	—
40 to 59 years	2	2	3	2	—
60 to 64 years	—	2	1	—	—
65 years and over	1	—	1	1	—

2. Cedars Lodge Resettlement Unit (17 women)

Age	Lengths of stay as at 31 December 1984				
	Under 1 week	*1 to 13 weeks*	*13 to 26 weeks*	*26 to 52 weeks*	*Over 1 year*
Under 20 years	—	—	—	—	—
20 to 29 years	1	2	1	—	—
30 to 39 years	—	1	1	—	—
40 to 59 years	—	3	6	2	—
60 to 64 years	—	—	—	—	—
65 years and over	—	—	—	—	—

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total cost, in the last year for which figures are available, of meeting the rent of those homeless single people staying in private hostels, lodging homes, hotels, and so on; what was the number of individuals so housed; if there is a list of approved private hostels, lodging houses and similar establishments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that separate records are not kept in respect of people who enter board and lodging accommodation because they are homeless. The estimated expenditure on total supplementary benefit payments to all claimants in ordinary board and lodging accommodation, excluding residential care and nursing homes, in 1983 was £270 million. This figure is provisional and is based on caseload and average benefit payments at December 1983.

There is no central list of approved board and lodging establishments, but individual local authorities maintain their own records.

Source: Annual Statistical Inquiry.

Fuel Direct Scheme

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from the citizens' advice bureaux regarding problems with the fuel direct scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: In November 1983 the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux sent copies of its report "Poverty and Paying for Fuel: the CAB Experience" to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Energy and for Social Services, following which further representations were sent to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy in December 1984. Also in December 1984 the Greater London Citizens Advice Bureaux Service sent copies of its report "Cold Comfort for the Poor" to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, as well as to my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and to myself. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) on 30 January, at column *228*, concerning the administration of the fuel direct scheme.

Kidney Failure and Infertility

Mr. Ward asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the expenditure in the most recent year for which records are available on *(a)* treatment of kidney failure and *(b)* treatment of infertility.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect centrally the specific information requested.

Benefits

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his reply of 19 December 1984, *Official Report*, column *219*, if he will place in the Library copies of any recent evidence of the reasons for increases in the number of supplementary benefit claimants living in board and lodging accommodation.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to our consultative document, "Supplementary Benefit Board and Lodging Payments", containing the proposals which we have referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee, copies of which are in the Vote Office.

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many people of working age claimed supplementary benefit for 12 months and more in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the West Midlands and *(c)* the Walsall borough area in May 1979; and if he will give the latest figures for the three groups and the percentage difference in each case;

(2) how many people aged 45 years and over received supplementary benefit for 12 months and more in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the West Midlands and *(c)* the Walsall borough area in 1979; and if he will give the latest figures for the three groups and the percentage difference in each case.

Mr. Whitney: The information requested is not immediately available. I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people of working age claimed supplementary benefit in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the West Midlands area and *(c)* the Walsall borough area in May 1979; and if he will give the latest figures for the three groups and the percentage difference in each case.

Mr. Whitney: The information is as follows:

(thousands)

	May 1979	*July 1984*	*Percentage increase*
United Kingdom	1,355	3,400	151
Midlands area*	204	560	175
Local Offices situated in Walsall	6·5	20·6	222

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action at local offices.

* Figures are for whole midlands area, since the West Midland social security region no longer exists.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what temporary closures of accident and emergency departments have occurred in the north-west in the last year, naming each hospital and the period of closure in each case; how this compares with each of the previous five years; and how it compares with national experience in this respect in each of these years.

Mr. John Patten: Such information is not collected centrally.

National Health Service

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether, when replying to parliamentary questions about the National Health Service by suggesting that right hon. and hon. Members contact a health authority directly, he will make it his practice at the same time to ask the chairman of the health authority concerned to reply to such inquiries within a maximum of one week.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We take every opportunity to impress on health authority chairmen the need to deal speedily and thoroughly with all inquiries from right hon. and hon. Members. We know that they take this duty very seriously. Since there is reason to believe that some hon. Members decide not to make the contacts we suggest, it would not make sense to impose a uniform process and timetable on all chairmen in relation to all replies suggesting direct contact.

Heating Allowances

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the average heating payment for severe weather on the last occasion such payments were made; how many so far have applied in 1985 for this payment; and what steps have been taken to publicise the matter in the areas where such applications can be made.

Mr. Whitney: The last occasion in which single payments were made towards heating costs in a period of exceptionally severe weather was in 1982, when the average payment was about £13. Information is not available centrally to estimate how many people have claimed payments so far this year. In areas in which the Chief Adjudication Officer has decided to advise local adjudication officers that the "exceptionally severe weather" condition in the regulations has been satisfied, local social security offices have instructions to display posters and provide leaflets explaining how and when to claim. Local authority social services departments and housing benefit offices, advice bureaux and public libraries have been asked to display posters and leaflets. The Department has also briefed the local media in the areas concerned.

Hospitals (Admissions)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons, and in particular babies and elderly people, have been refused admission to hospital for essential care in each of the last five years; how many have died as a result; and if he will give details by area, the condition of patients requiring treatment, the reasons for refusal of admission, and any other relevant circumstance.

Mr. John Patten: Such information is not collected centrally. I understand that, as far as Greater London is concerned, some of the information for which the hon. Member is asking is contained in a report about the emergency bed service which has been prepared for the South-East Thames regional health authority which manages that service. The hon. Member may like to contact the authority to obtain further information.

Premature Births

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many premature babies have been born each year in the last five years; how many received specialist care in hospital; how many after birth were turned away from specialist care each year; of those turned away, how many subsequently died or developed handicaps; and if he will name the hospitals concerned in each case.

Mr. John Patten: Full details of the number of premature babies are not collected centrally, but the numbers of low birthweight (2,500 grams or less) live-born babies in England in the five years ending 1983 are shown in the table. These will include the majority of premature live births, but will also include some full-term low birthweight babies. The information available to us does not distinguish accurately between premature and other babies who received specialist care in hospital. The remaining information requested is not available centrally.

Low Birthweight Babies, Live Born, England

Year	*000's*
1979	40·7
1980	42·5
1981	40·8
1982	40·4
1983	40·2

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will amend regulation 19 of the Social Security Act 1975, together with any other relevant legislation, so as to provide that workers who take seasonal jobs do not lose their entitlement to unemployment benefit after three successive years of such employment.

Mr. Whitney: I assume the hon. Member is referring to regulation 19 of the Social Security (Unemployment Sickness and Invalidity Benefit) Regulations 1975 as amended. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 29 January at column *162*.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons in Wales were debarred, during 1984, from receiving unemployment insurance benefit; and how this compares with figures for each of the five preceding years.

Mr. Whitney: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of the nature of the material relating to claimants obtained by local officers of his Department from police criminal records and the vehicle

licensing office; and what are the reasons for the compilation and retention of such records by his Department.

Mr. Newton Local officers do not obtain information about claimants to benefit from police criminal records, and I refer the hon. [redacted]er to my reply to him on 28 January at column *65*. On occasions, during an investigation into suspected benefit fraud it may be necessary for details of the keepership of a vehicle to be obtained from the vehicle licensing centre.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the arrangements for liaison between local offices of his Department and the police in relation to claimants suspected of fraud; and if he will initiate discussions to ensure that no unnecessary material is retained by his Department.

Mr. Newton: The majority of suspected benefit fraud cases are investigated by local office staff without police assistance. There will be occasions, however, depending on the nature of the fraud, when it will be necessary for an investigating officer to seek the help of the police. There is no regular system for such liaison and no unnecessary material is obtained.

NHS (General Managers)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all the general manager posts at regional, district and unit level for which he has vetted applicants, and also posts on family practitioner committees, indicating in each case those posts where he declined to approve the person initially chosen.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our guidance circular requires health authorities to allow Ministers the opportunity to express their views on all proposals for regional and district general manager appointments before formal decisions are taken. No unit general manager appointments have yet been made, but they are primarily the responsibility of the regional health authorities. Information on individual candidates is, and should remain, confidential.

There have been no such appointments for the family practitioner committees.

Long-stay Patients (Dental Examinations)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer on 14 January, *Official Report*, column *69*, about dental examination for patients in long-stay hospitals, in what form the departmental guidance has been published; and to whom it has been sent.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The departmental guidance on the hopsital dental service was issued as a health memorandum, HM(67)61, originally to regional hospital boards, hospital management committees, and boards of governors, the responsible health authorities at that time. A copy of the memorandum is in the Library.

West Midlands Regional Health Authority

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many members of the West Midlands regional health authority will sit on the steering committee which will guide the review by outside consultants of the functions and working of the regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This has not yet been decided.

Hypothermia

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons have died of hypothermia, or where extreme cold was a factor associated with death, in each week since the start of winter; and how these figures compare with the same period in the previous five years.

Mr. John Patten: This information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ophthalmic Services

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost saving to the National Health Service if the full assessed charge is payable by patients who require lenses over six dioptres cylindrical power, or over 10 dioptres spherical and over four dioptres cylindrical power, or lenticular.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *63*]: The cost saving to the NHS if the full assessed charge were to be paid by all patients who require such lenses has been estimated as £1·75 million. However, a large proportion of these patients would qualify for full or partial remission of charges on income grounds so the actual savings are likely to be very much less.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many spectacles, on an annual basis, are prescribed in the categories: with one or more lens over six dioptres cylindrical power, over 10 dioptres spherical and over four dioptres cylindrical power, or lenticular;

(2) what percentage of the total number of annual prescriptions is represented by the categories defined as complex in amended regulations proposed by the Government;

(3) how many cases involving complex lenses, as defined in the Government's planned amendments to the general ophthalmic service, are dealt with *(a)* by the hospital eye service and *(b)* the general ophthalmic service, on an annual basis.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *63*]: The total number of prescriptions issued for complex lenses is not available and the number dealt with by hospital eye services is not available centrally.

The latest available figures — 1983 — indicate that some 50,000 pairs of spectacles containing complex lenses as defined in the proposed regulations were dispensed annually in Great Britain under the general ophthalmic services. The estimated number dispensed within the proposed prescription categories is as follows:

over 6 dioptres cylindrical power	4,000
over 10 dioptres spherical and over 4 dioptres cylindrical power	5,000
in lenticular form	41,000

50,000 pairs of spectacles represent 1 per cent. of the total number of annual prescriptions dispensed under the general ophthalmic services.

Abortion

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many abortions were performed on residents and non-residents at up to 12 weeks gestation, 13 to 20 weeks gestation, 20 to 23 weeks gestation and 24 weeks and over for each year since 1968; on what grounds these were performed; what ages the women were; and how many were performed in the National Health Service and how many were performed in other approved places, respectively.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *61*]: The available information is shown in the tables.

Number of legal abortions by gestation: residents and non-residents, statutory grounds, age of women and category of premises, 1968-1983
England and Wales

Year		Gestation (weeks)									
		All		Under 13		13-19		20-23		24 and over	
		Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents
1968	(27 April-31 December 1968)										
	Total	22,332	1,309	13,503	821	7,584	416	572	48	127	4
	Statutory grounds	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	1	1,146	21	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	2	15,928	972	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	3	949	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	4	905	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	5	15	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	6	44	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	2 with 4	399	23	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	3 with others	2,946	282	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	543	10	292		216		24		8	
	16-19	3,285	190	1,946		1,312		125		27	
	20-24	6,105	448	4,117		2,097		184		28	
	25-29	3,989	293	2,622		1,412		113		16	
	30-34	3,483	175	2,278		1,199		68		22	
	35-39	2,868	114	1,813		1,035		52		22	
	40-44	1,318	54	783		505		38		10	
	45 and over	150	3	93		52		3		1	
	Not stated	591	22	380		172		13		2	
	NHS	14,492	68	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	Other	7,840	1,241	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1969	Total	49,829	4,990	32,196	3,052	15,629	1,626	998	228	174	21
	Statutory grounds										
	1	1,842	99	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	2	35,969	3,896	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	3	2,281	13	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	4	1,107	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	5	14	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	6	31	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	2 with 4	742	86	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	3 with others	7,843	885	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	1,174	57	700		441		53		8	
	16-19	8,059	876	5,314		3,198		271		35	
	20-24	12,914	1,679	9,530		4,457		368		47	
	25-29	9,001	937	6,589		2,959		183		35	
	30-34	7,981	660	5,693		2,632		122		31	
	35-39	6,373	459	4,548		2,061		108		18	
	40-44	2,875	203	1,934		1,003		73		13	
	45 and over	276	20	156		112		16		5	
	Not stated	1,176	99	784		392		32		3	
	NHS	33,562	166	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	Other	16,267	4,824	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1970	Total	75,962	10,603	52,495	7,565	20,204	2,648	796	126	157	14
	Statutory grounds										
	1	2,163	172	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	2	57,021	9,115	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	3	3,486	38	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	4	1,225	23	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	5	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	6	35	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number of legal abortions by gestation: residents and non-residents, statutory grounds, age of women and category of premises, 1968-1983
England and Wales

Year		Gestation (weeks)									
		All		Under 13		13-19		20-23		24 and over	
		Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents
	2 with 4	823	83	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	3 with others	11,199	1,171	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	1,732	90	1,088		615		43	3	4	1
	16-19	13,518	1,690	10,102		4,550		174	35	24	3
	20-24	19,838	3,356	16,393		5,926		205	41	31	5
	25-29	13,751	2,120	11,102		4,103		131	22	33	1
	30-34	11,901	1,619	9,588		3,357		96	9	27	1
	35-39	9,141	1,066	7,256		2,516		69	9	19	3
	40-44	4,107	437	3,101		1,206		58	4	15	—
	45 and over	394	46	296		130		7	—	1	—
	Not stated	1,580	179	1,134		449		13	3	3	—
	NHS	47,370	308	—	—	—	—	686	14	137	3
	Other	28,592	10,295	—	—	—	—	110	112	20	11
1971	Total	94,570	32,207	70,447	24,931	20,583	6,580	733	288	114	25
	Statutory grounds										
	1	1,882	657	1,323	—	444	—	28	—	9	—
	2	71,443	25,394	53,925	—	15,091	—	520	—	72	—
	3	4,140	80	2,879	—	1,060	—	22	—	7	—
	4	1,327	48	810	—	428	—	26	—	5	—
	5	10	—	3	—	1	—	3	—	3	—
	6	10	2	8	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
	2 with 4	910	198	610	—	238	—	21	—	2	—
	3 with others	14,848	5,828	10,889	—	3,320	—	112	—	16	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	2,296	322	1,661		826		39	14	2	—
	16-19	18,176	4,696	15,994		6,156		168	77	20	5
	20-24	24,465	9,782	25,720		7,505		191	84	31	7
	25-29	17,292	6,361	18,218		4,653		125	41	18	4
	30-34	14,203	5,378	15,364		3,584		81	27	21	3
	35-39	11,023	3,616	11,562		2,601		63	25	10	3
	40-44	4,869	1,430	4,780		1,291		43	13	9	—
	45 and over	451	140	415		145		8	3	1	1
	Not stated	1,795	482	1,664		402		15	4	2	2
	NHS	53,455	251	36,824	—	14,019	—	581	19	92	2
	Other	41,115	31,956	33,623	—	6,564	—	152	269	22	23
1972	Total	108,565	51,319	84,472	41,234	20,794	9,242	709	327	137	33
	Statutory grounds										
	1	1,711	2,169	1,284	—	350	—	20	—	8	—
	2	82,988	37,680	64,639	—	15,917	—	542	—	100	—
	3	4,171	192	3,190	—	840	—	21	—	7	—
	4	1,126	48	757	—	295	—	33	—	2	—
	5	10	—	1	—	3	—	1	—	3	—
	6	14	1	7	—	4	—	—	—	1	—
	2 with 4	887	281	646	—	200	—	14	—	—	—
	3 with others	17,658	10,948	13,948	—	3,185	—	78	—	16	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	2,804	516	1,898	346	774	153	43	10	9	3
	16-19	21,786	7,264	15,827	5,158	5,338	1,962	206	85	26	9
	20-24	26,908	15,604	20,810	12,164	5,339	3,201	171	111	35	7
	25-29	20,796	10,367	16,621	8,508	3,525	1,696	120	52	25	4
	30-34	16,076	8,402	13,143	7,228	2,461	1,039	72	32	19	4
	35-39	12,242	5,917	10,035	5,117	1,879	724	48	16	13	4
	40-44	5,590	2,426	4,400	2,076	1,020	312	32	14	6	1
	45 and over	474	221	345	176	113	39	4	3	—	—
	Not stated	1,889	602	1,393	461	345	116	13	4	4	1
	NHS	56,861	225	42,597	—	11,944	—	484	—	97	—
	Other	51,704	51,094	41,875	—	8,850	—	225	—	40	—
1973	Total	110,568	56,581	88,224	43,078	18,513	12,028	833	611	142	59
	Statutory grounds										

Number of legal abortions by gestation: residents and non-residents, statutory grounds, age of women and category of premises, 1968-1983

England and Wales

Year		Gestation (weeks)									
		All		Under 13		13-19		20-23		24 and over	
		Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents
	1	1,228	4,043	940	—	210	—	22	—	10	—
	2	84,890	41,156	67,602	—	14,416	—	631	—	100	—
	3	3,520	152	2,732	—	652	—	19	—	1	—
	4	1,115	76	735	—	300	—	31	—	8	—
	5	7	—	2	—	1	—	3	—	1	—
	6	10	2	7	—	2	—	—	—	1	—
	2 with 4	904	315	675	—	183	—	18	—	4	—
	3 with others	18,894	10,837	15,531	—	2,749	—	109	—	17	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,090	570	2,068	329	812	209	67	17	12	4
	16-19	23,480	8,358	17,511	5,496	5,223	2,598	248	142	25	15
	20-24	26,728	17,481	21,128	12,845	4,735	4,185	191	227	43	18
	25-29	21,365	11,756	17,483	9,238	3,125	2,242	137	94	33	12
	30-34	15,981	8,642	13,527	7,131	1,966	1,285	83	70	15	4
	35-39	12,161	6,221	10,295	5,181	1,485	926	48	29	4	1
	40-44	5,445	2,634	4,484	2,180	781	395	32	20	8	5
	45 and over	525	211	407	159	88	44	10	3	—	—
	Not stated	1,793	708	1,321	519	298	144	17	9	2	—
	NHS	55,456	181	42,305	—	10,637	—	487	—	91	—
	Other	55,112	56,400	45,919	—	7,876	—	346	—	51	—
1974	Total	109,445	53,495	87,963	38,834	17,361	12,583	775	734	128	71
	Statutory grounds										
	1 (with other)	1,061	3,095	830	—	160	—	20	—	10	—
	2	88,130	42,996	70,809	—	14,031	—	618	—	89	—
	3 (with other except 1)	18,559	7,143	15,136	—	2,789	—	91	—	15	—
	4 (with 2)	1,686	261	1,183	—	381	—	44	—	13	—
	5 and 6	9	—	5	—	—	—	2	—	1	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,335	613	2,298	327	848	227	65	32	10	4
	16-19	24,197	8,917	18,140	5,442	5,175	3,069	239	199	32	20
	20-24	26,561	16,647	21,139	11,714	4,440	4,279	192	236	34	20
	25-29	20,913	10,943	17,321	8,300	2,813	2,231	132	124	23	15
	30-34	15,490	7,606	13,204	6,106	1,773	1,268	58	66	11	7
	35-39	11,646	5,479	9,967	4,464	1,288	861	39	37	6	—
	40-44	5,149	2,424	4,255	1,883	700	449	28	24	6	3
	45 and over	502	201	393	154	76	38	8	3	3	—
	Not stated	1,652	665	1,246	444	248	161	14	13	3	2
	NHS	56,076	244	43,053	—	10,330	—	466	—	93	—
	Other	53,369	53,251	44,910	—	7,031	—	309	—	35	—
1975	Total	106,224	33,478	84,643	23,301	16,814	8,453	847	778	124	53
	Statutory grounds										
	1 (with other)	1,068	1,565	792	—	181	—	15	—	10	—
	2	87,368	28,858	69,556	—	13,965	—	691	—	87	—
	3 (with other except 1)	16,208	2,890	13,270	—	2,278	—	77	—	13	—
	4 (with 2)	1,572	165	1,023	—	388	—	62	—	13	—
	5 and 6	8	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	1	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,570	436	2,436	183	889	200	63	40	5	1
	16-19	24,122	6,065	17,791	3,396	5,265	2,261	289	224	26	18
	20-24	25,065	10,900	19,794	7,492	4,220	2,847	198	265	32	13
	25-29	20,259	7,158	16,635	5,358	2,731	1,506	122	109	28	10
	30-34	15,047	4,314	12,782	3,360	1,662	777	55	67	15	5
	35-39	10,933	2,918	9,402	2,320	1,088	479	50	40	7	1
	40-44	4,905	1,120	4,103	819	582	249	39	20	5	1
	45 and over	471	102	352	68	92	22	11	5	3	1
	Not stated	1,852	465	1,348	305	285	112	20	8	3	3
	NHS	50,941	206	38,680	—	9,378	—	396	—	75	—
	Other	55,283	33,272	45,963	—	7,436	—	451	—	49	—
1976	Total	101,912	27,761	82,105	18,383	15,272	7,675	811	904	164	54
	Statutory grounds										

Number of legal abortions by gestation: residents and non-residents, statutory grounds, age of women and category of premises, 1968-1983
England and Wales

Year		Gestation (weeks)									
		All		Under 13		13-19		20-23		24 and over	
		Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents
	1 (with other)	949	—	730	—	155	—	14	—	7	—
	2	85,031	—	68,329	—	12,987	—	679	—	119	—
	3 (with other except 1)	14,606	—	12,154	—	1,856	—	55	—	11	—
	4 (with 2)	1,316	—	886	—	272	—	61	—	27	—
	5 and 6	10	—	6	—	2	—	2	—	—	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,425	410	2,355	162	845	195	70	40	9	2
	16-19	23,963	4,954	17,948	2,530	4,972	1,990	265	276	43	15
	20-24	23,612	9,009	18,649	5,818	3,884	2,635	215	309	35	18
	25-29	19,323	6,196	16,094	4,498	2,424	1,387	124	143	32	11
	30-34	14,589	3,573	12,599	2,710	1,422	705	49	61	16	4
	35-39	10,216	2,259	8,881	1,704	932	452	41	39	13	3
	40-44	4,520	889	3,848	626	460	216	29	23	10	—
	45 and over	483	77	371	47	90	20	3	4	1	—
	Not stated	1,786	394	1,360	288	243	75	15	9	5	1
	NHS	50,569	—	39,160	—	8,577	—	358	—	92	—
	Other	51,343	—	42,945	—	6,695	—	453	—	72	—
1977	Total	102,677	30,327	82,731	19,948	15,199	8,307	912	980	183	93
	Statutory grounds										
	1 (with other)	840	—	658	—	128	—	9	—	6	—
	2	85,518	—	68,918	—	12,837	—	698	—	132	—
	3 (with other except 1)	14,834	—	12,206	—	1,931	—	89	—	21	—
	4 (with 2)	1,474	—	943	—	302	—	116	—	23	—
	5 and 6	11	—	6	—	1	—	2	—	1	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,624	443	2,444	165	937	201	70	59	10	4
	16-19	24,592	5,174	18,419	2,615	5,048	2,044	287	293	44	29
	20-24	24,026	10,012	19,078	6,430	3,832	2,917	226	326	56	29
	25-29	18,270	6,721	15,186	4,790	2,301	1,553	143	138	28	16
	30-34	15,190	4,146	13,115	3,142	1,433	779	78	84	19	8
	35-39	10,153	2,390	8,841	1,796	904	501	40	38	12	2
	40-44	4,638	993	3,957	707	471	218	37	28	6	1
	45 and over	529	102	422	71	60	23	11	3	6	2
	Not stated	1,655	346	1,269	232	213	71	20	11	2	2
	NHS	52,330	—	41,007	—	8,718	—	412	—	97	—
	Other	50,147	—	41,724	—	6,481	—	500	—	86	—
1978	Total	111,851	29,707	89,712	19,936	16,727	7,765	1,249	1,013	261	98
	Statutory grounds										
	1 (with other)	679	—	505	—	126	—	9	—	7	—
	2	92,949	—	74,706	—	14,042	—	891	—	180	—
	3 (with other except 1)	15,855	—	13,098	—	1,986	—	126	—	28	—
	4 (with 2)	2,356	—	1,400	—	571	—	220	—	43	—
	5 and 6	12		3	—	2	—	3	—	3	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,298	426	2,295	136	766	224	73	46	20	4
	16-19	26,363	4,621	19,558	2,370	5,504	1,805	390	286	73	27
	20-24	26,693	9,903	21,041	6,491	4,375	2,730	324	336	67	32
	25-29	19,812	6,510	16,297	4,714	2,525	1,442	199	154	38	18
	30-34	17,285	4,322	14,877	3,308	1,716	830	102	90	29	6
	35-39	11,153	2,474	9,726	1,891	970	430	68	48	20	4
	40-44	4,918	972	4,136	710	551	190	61	32	8	4
	45 and over	492	128	382	75	79	38	12	12	—	1
	Not stated	1,837	351	1,400	241	241	76	20	9	6	2
	NHS	55,040	—	42,690	—	9,169	—	571	—	134	—
	Other	56,811	—	47,022	—	7,558	—	678	—	127	—
1979	Total	120,611	29,135	96,016	19,933	18,622	7,313	1,486	967	281	157
	Statutory grounds										
	1 (with other)	592	—	451	—	87	—	11	—	9	—
	2	102,100	—	81,437	—	15,875	—	1,153	—	204	—
	3 (with other except 1)	15,755	—	12,857	—	2,142	—	103	—	20	—

Number of legal abortions by gestation: residents and non-residents, statutory grounds, age of women and category of premises, 1968-1983

England and Wales

Year		All		Gestation (weeks) Under 13		13-19		20-23		24 and over	
		Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents
	4 (with 2)	2,151	—	1,269	—	512	—	218	—	44	—
	5 and 6	13	—	2	—	6	—	1	—	4	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,534	322	2,401	116	866	140	89	45	11	6
	16-19	29,192	4,782	21,327	2,574	6,274	1,741	517	288	91	43
	20-24	29,647	9,703	23,121	6,415	5,021	2,655	409	334	89	60
	25-29	20,655	6,275	17,006	4,572	2,729	1,356	198	155	37	25
	30-34	18,348	4,276	15,776	3,355	1,805	725	128	86	19	11
	35-39	12,012	2,406	10,435	1,909	1,088	408	67	31	21	5
	40-44	4,965	882	4,196	667	527	167	57	18	7	4
	45 and over	519	87	406	54	76	23	9	6	3	—
	Not stated	1,739	402	1,348	271	236	98	12	4	3	1
	NHS	55,558	—	42,939	—	9,481	—	535	—	120	—
	Other	65,053	—	53,077	—	9,141	—	951	—	161	—
1980	Total	128,927	31,976	102,367	21,085	20,106	8,579	1,853	1,187	381	232
	Statutory grounds										
	1 (with other)	680	22	528	—	107	—	8	—	5	—
	2	110,294	30,197	87,731	—	17,323	—	1,444	—	280	—
	3 (with 2)	16,046	1,618	13,072	—	2,224	—	137	—	30	—
	4 (with 2 and/or 3)	1,900	139	1,035	—	452	—	263	—	62	—
	5 and 6	7	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	4	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,650	493	2,453	162	898	222	116	62	27	20
	16-19	31,878	5,242	22,991	2,575	7,127	2,073	671	370	120	78
	20-24	33,014	10,662	25,813	6,921	5,523	2,985	477	409	108	71
	25-29	22,042	6,978	18,083	4,948	2,854	1,618	271	185	61	30
	30-34	19,419	4,575	16,744	3,440	1,900	894	138	91	34	23
	35-39	12,730	2,781	11,088	2,148	1,130	511	97	36	20	2
	40-44	5,307	1,028	4,492	754	546	217	68	26	9	5
	45 and over	547	136	444	85	83	35	10	8	1	3
	Not stated	340	81	259	52	45	24	5	—	1	—
	NHS	60,594	224	46,897	—	10,237	—	704	—	159	—
	Other	68,333	31,752	55,470	—	9,869	—	1,149	—	222	—
1981	Total	128,581	33,899	108,472	23,688	17,379	8,258	1,480	1,621	235	183
	Statutory grounds										
	1 (with other)	752	38	615	—	110	—	11	1	5	—
	2	108,100	31,150	91,358	—	14,591	—	1,129	1,589	164	175
	3 (with or without 2)	17,897	2,515	15,435	—	2,238	—	84	26	14	7
	4 (with any except 1)	1,818	196	1,059	—	434	—	253	5	52	1
	5 and 6	14	—	5	—	6	—	3	—	—	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,531	418	2,589	144	790	187	101	76	18	9
	16-19	31,393	5,230	24,570	2,675	5,939	1,981	532	481	87	67
	20-24	34,270	11,130	28,707	7,616	4,853	2,842	406	573	59	52
	25-29	21,918	7,491	19,118	5,707	2,448	1,492	169	235	23	26
	30-34	18,718	5,246	16,795	4,131	1,641	934	121	137	21	17
	35-39	12,797	3,047	11,551	2,433	1,041	532	82	62	13	7
	40-44	4,835	1,076	4,204	798	524	231	55	41	9	3
	45 and over	564	148	466	97	82	34	10	15	2	2
	Not stated	555	113	472	87	61	25	4	1	3	—
	NHS	61,103	173	51,591	—	8,191	—	517	—	77	—
	Other	67,478	33,726	56,881	—	9,188	—	963	1,621	158	183
1982	Total	128,553	34,492	110,148	24,063	16,638	8,427	1,490	1,726	198	264
	Statutory grounds										
	1 (with other)	655	19	530	—	133	—	10	—	2	—
	2	110,216	32,370	94,811	—	14,073	—	1,119	1,675	149	259
	3 (with or without 2)	15,665	1,861	13,695	—	1,880	—	75	36	3	2
	4 (with any except 1)	2,006	241	1,108	—	570	—	284	15	41	2
	5 or 6	11	1	4	—	2	—	2	—	3	1

Number of legal abortions by gestation: residents and non-residents, statutory grounds, age of women and category of premises, 1968-1983

England and Wales

Year		All		Gestation (weeks) Under 13		13-19		20-23		24 and over	
		Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents	Residents	Non-residents
	Age of women										
	15 and under	3,852	491	2,909	168	821	209	108	99	12	15
	16-19	31,349	534	24,848	2,706	5,889	1,997	532	549	76	91
	20-24	35,024	10,853	29,848	7,434	4,687	2,786	412	547	56	82
	25-29	22,154	7,602	19,797	5,691	2,156	1,611	170	258	20	40
	30-34	17,593	5,328	15,976	4,216	1,491	945	97	147	15	19
	35-39	13,202	3,504	12,033	2,838	1,038	586	107	70	11	8
	40-44	4,579	1,174	4,061	883	453	246	56	37	5	7
	45 and over	522	148	445	96	66	37	8	14	3	1
	Not stated	278	47	231	31	37	10	9	5	—	1
	NHS	62,409	123	54,489	—	7,326	—	484	—	54	—
	Other	66,144	34,369	55,659	—	9,312	—	1,006	1,726	144	264
1983	Total	127,375	34,786	108,861	24,414	16,671	8,240	1,510	1,850	238	267
	Statutory grounds							20 and over			
	1 (with other)	538	11	457	—	56	—	21	—	—	—
	2	108,806	32,758	93,238	—	14,190	—	1,305	—	—	—
	3 (with or without 2)	16,007	1,794	14,122	—	1,786	—	86	—	—	—
	4 (with any except 1)	2,019	222	1,042	—	637	—	335	—	—	—
	5 or 6	5	1	2	—	2	—	1	—	—	—
	Age of women										
	15 and under	4,087	479	3,054	151	911	216	10	93	19	18
	16-19	31,231	5,281	24,810	2,759	5,788	1,874	536	559	83	86
	20-24	35,014	10,844	29,695	7,339	4,806	2,804	423	617	64	80
	25-29	22,157	7,661	19,621	5,791	2,302	1,539	179	289	41	42
	30-34	16,903	5,382	15,412	4,280	1,354	933	107	142	16	25
	35-39	13,071	3,729	11,935	3,027	1,009	594	98	95	9	9
	40-44	4,383	1,277	3,874	984	446	243	55	43	4	6
	45 and over	443	120	386	77	44	30	10	12	2	1
	Not stated	86	13	74	6	11	7	1	—	—	—
	NHS	62,609	208	54,585	—	7,432	—	458	—	76	—
	Other	64,766	34,578	54,276	—	9,239	—	1,052	—	162	—

Footnotes to tables

A. Statutory grounds as listed in Schedule 2 of the Abortion Regulations 1968:
1. Risk to life of woman.
2. Risk of injury to physical or mental health of woman.
2. Risk of injury to physical or mental health of existing child(ren).
4. Substantial risk of child being born abnormal.
5. In emergency—to save life of woman.
6. In emergency—to prevent grave permanent injury to physical or mental health of woman.

B. From 1968 to 1980 gestation is calculated as the number of completed weeks between last menstral period and date of operation. In March 1981 a new notification form was introduced which seeks a direct statement of gestation and the basis on which it is derived.

C. Not stated gestation is included in All gestation.

D. Abortions to non-residents are assumed to have been performed in approved places.

Dash in table indicate "not available".

THE ARTS

South Bank Board

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts when he expects the Arts Council to announce the composition of the South Bank board.

Mr. Waldegrave: The date of any announcement will depend on the progress of the necessary legislation through Parliament.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Best asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people presently pay no income tax; and how many of these are (i) employed, (ii) unemployed and (iii) self-employed.

Mr. Moore: It is estimated that, in 1984-85, about 10 million married couples or single people aged 16 or over will not be liable to income tax. Of these, about 1¼ million will have spent the major part of the financial year in employment, 400,000 in self-employment and 1 million in unemployment. The remainder are retired or otherwise not economically active.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the reduction of the

number of persons paying income tax if the income tax revenue was reduced by £1 billion, £2 billion, £3 billion, £4 billion, £5 billion, £7·5 billion and £10 billion, respectively, estimated as a result of raising tax thresholds.

Mr. Moore: Over the stated range of costs of direct revenue changes above indexation, each £1 billion reduction in the yield of income tax in a full year at 1985-86 levels of income would lead to a reduction of about 450,000 in the number of taxpayers. This assumes that uniform percentage increases are applied to the main personal allowances (including age allowance) and counts earning wives separately from their husbands.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what currently would be the loss of revenue resulting from a reduction in the higher rates of income tax to a maximum of 50 and 40 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Moore: The latest estimates are as follows:

Maximum rate of income tax per cent.	*Direct revenue cost in a full year at 1985-86 levels of income £ million*
50	320
40	970

These estimates are in relation to the yield assuming indexation of 1984-85 allowances and thresholds by 4·6 per cent. under the rules set out in the Finance Act 1980. It is also assumed that the thresholds for each remaining tax rate would remain at their indexed levels.

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate for each financial year since 1979-80, the costs of raising *(a)* the tax threshold and *(b)* the tax bands above the rate of inflation;

(2) if he will estimate the loss to the Exchequer in each year since 1979-80 resulting from the abolition of the higher rate bands for income tax;

(3) if he will estimate the costs to the Exchequer each year since 1979-80 of the reduction in the basic rate of taxation from 33 per cent. to 30 per cent.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Economic Competitiveness

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's estimate of the correlation between changes in the international competitiveness of the United Kingdom economy and changes in the pound sterling exchange rate.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The relationship between international price and cost competitiveness and the nominal exchange rate is complex, difficult to quantify reliably, and in the shorter term often highly erratic. However a Treasury working paper "Her Majesty's Treasury Macroeconomic Model: Supplement to the 1982 Technical Manual" (a copy of which is in the House of Common's Library) describes a model simulation of the effects of hypothetical changes in sterling's exchange rate index on wage cost competitiveness, and may be of interest to the hon. Member.

Friendly Societies

Mr. Freeman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will estimate the number of friendly societies that have closed as a result of the changes in tax exemption limits contained in the Finance Act 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The long-term decline in the number of friendly societies and number of branches continued in 1984. It is not possible to distinguish any effect of the tax and related statutory changes in 1984, which were favourable for some societies and adverse for others. None of the societies which went out of existence in 1984 told the Registry of Friendly Societies that the tax changes were the reason for it.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing at current prices for each year since 1980-81 *(a)* total revenue and total estimated revenue from value added tax and *(b)* total expenditure and total estimated expenditure on wages, salaries and pensions in the public sector.

Mr. Peter Rees: The following table shows receipts and expenditure by general Government (central Government and local authorities).

	Total receipts*	*of which VAT*	*Total* expenditure*	*of which wages, salaries and pensions*
	£ billion	*£ billion*	*£ billion*	*£ billion*
1980-81	95·1	10·1	108·4	31·6
1981-82	111·7	13·1	120·2	34·9
1982-83	121·7	14·7	132·5	37·4
1983-84	128·8	16·4	139·9	40·1

* *Source:* Section 2, Financial Statistics, National Accounts basis.

Mr. Gorst asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of submissions that have been received by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on the draft legislation for the collection of value added tax; and what proportion of those comments are in favour of the draft proposals.

Mr. Hayhoe: As at 28 January, 101 submissions had been received. As might be expected with a wide-ranging set of proposals, it is impossible to categorise the submissions simply as being in favour or not in favour of the proposals. Only 24 submissions deal with the proposals as a whole. These comprehensive submissions indicate a general acceptance of most of the proposals, but, together with a number of other submissions which have concentrated on a limited number of the proposals, have expressed some reservations or criticisms including certain points of principle in relation to particular clauses. All views expressed in response to the consultative document will be very carefully considered before final decisions are taken on the contents of the 1985 Finance Bill.

Earnings and Taxation

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the percentage of earnings absorbed by income tax and employees' social security contributions at different levels of earnings in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the United States of America and Japan, respectively,

using the most recently available figures, and in the manner of his Answer to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North on 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *198-200*.

Mr. Moore: The information requested, for selected levels of employment income and family responsibilities, is as follows:

Percentage of earnings absorbed by income tax and social security contributions

Earnings per annum	*£3,000*	*£5,000*	*£9,000*	*£12,000*	*£16,000*	*£20,000*	*£30,000*	*£50,000*
Single Person								
United Kingdom	19	27	32	34	34	34	38·5	46
France	13	15	23	26	29	31	35	41
Germany	23	28	34	39	39	42	46	50
United States of America	7 (7)	11(12)	16(17)	18(20)	20(23)	24(28)	28(34)	31(40)
Japan	10(10)	13(14)	15(17)	16(19)	17(21)	17(23)	19(26)	24(33)
Married couple								
United Kingdom	9	20	28	31	31	32	37	44·5
France	13	14	17	19	20	23	27	32
Germany	17	23	28	30	28	30	34	41
United States of America	7 (7)	7 (7)	12(12)	14(15)	16(17)	18(20)	22(25)	27(33)
Japan	10(10)	10(11)	13(15)	14(17)	16(19)	16(21)	18(25)	19(26)
Married couple with two dependent children								
United Kingdom	0	6	21	25	27	28	34	43
France	0	2	9	11	13	15	21	27
Germany	1	11	21	26	23	26	31	39
United States of America	7 (7)	7 (7)	10(10)	12(12)	14(15)	16(18)	21(23)	26(31)
Japan	10(10)	10(10)	10(11)	12(13)	14(16)	14(18)	16(22)	21(30)

Notes

1. The figures shown relate to income of 1984 (1984-85 in the case of the United Kingdom).
2. Conversions were made at the exchange rates prevailing on 23 January 1985. They may not fully reflect differences in purchasing power between sterling and the other currencies.
3. In addition to personal allowances, the tables take into account employment income reliefs and other standard reliefs (including income tax relief for social security contributions given in certain of the countries).
4. The income of the married couple is assumed to be wholly income of the husband.
5. The percentages given for a married couple with two dependent children reflect the tax and social security contributions due less any child benefit payable in respect of the children.
6. It is assumed that the United Kingdom employee is contracted-in to the state pension scheme.
7. The figures in brackets for the United States of America and Japan include local income taxes at typical rates.

Inland Revenue (Forms P11D)

Mr. Thurnham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many completed P11D forms have been submitted to the Inland Revenue for each of the last five years.

Mr. Moore: Estimates are as follows:

	Thousands
1979-80	500
1980-81	850
1981-82	1,100
1982-83	1,350
1983-84	1,600

Public Sector Staff

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people were working in the National Health Service, local government, the Civil Service and nationalised industries in 1984; what was the total public expenditure on these services for the year; and if he will publish these numbers and costs both as a total and broken down between the four sectors mentioned;

(2) what is *(a)* the total number of civil servants employed in the United Kingdom in central Government Departments, and staff employed in local government in 1984, *(b)* the percentage of total population and total work force these figures represent, *(c)* the value of the total salaries paid to these two groups for the year and *(d)* the percentage of gross domestic product these salaries represent; and if he will give any information he may have as to equivalent figures in France, West Germany, the United States of America and Japan.

Mr. Peter Rees: Numbers employed (thousands) in the public sector at mid-1984 were as follows:

	Number
Central Government:	
HM Forces	326
NHS	1,242
Civil Service (Great Britain)	630
Other	132
Local authorities	2,884
Public corporations:	
Nationalised industries	1,416
Other	195
Total	6,825

Figures of population, working population, and gross domestic product are published in the *Monthly Digest of Statistics*. Public expenditure figures for 1984-85 are published in detail in Cmnd. 9428—"The Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 to 1987-88". Estimates of the 1984-85 salary bill for the Civil Service was published in the 1983-84 memorandum by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on he Estimates. These documents are all available in House of Commons Library.

The qualifications attached to the use of employment data was explained in a written answer to the hon. Member

for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) on 13 February 1984, at columns 64-66. That answer also indicated the difficulties in making international comparisons.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Greenway asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were in work in 1955 and in each succeeding fifth year to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Rees: Figures for the employed labour force in the years requested are shown on page 99 of *Economic Trends, Annual Supplement 1985*.

EC (Budget Contributions)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total net payment by the United Kingdom to the European Economic Community in 1984; and what is the expected figure in 1985.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Government's latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net payments to the European Community institutions in the financial years 1984-85 and 1985-86 were recently published in the public expenditure White Paper, Cmnd, 9428. The calendar year is not an accounting period for purposes of United Kingdom expenditure and annual figures for United Kingdom payments by calendar year are available, only in arrears. Figures for 1984 will be available in due course when the December financial returns have been finalised.

Capital Transfer Tax

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to the Exchequer since 1980-81 of the alteration in the rates of capital transfer tax.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Investment Income Surcharge

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* his latest estimate of the costs to the Exchequer of the abolition of the investment income surcharge in 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

"Official Report"

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further progress has been made in the printing of the bound volumes of the *Official Report* for the year 1984; and when it is anticipated that these volumes will be brought up to date.

Mr. Hayhoe: Volume 52 of the *Official Report* covering the period from 16 to 27 January 1984 was published on 21 December 1984. Volume 43, the 1982-83 Sessional Index, is expected to be published during the week of 4 February. Volume 53 is now with the binders and Volumes 54 to 56 are in the final stages of production.

It is hoped that the backlog will be substantially reduced, if not eradicated, by the end of the next summer recess, and I am advised that the House authorities expect a regular production cycle of five months to be achieved by the end of 1985.

EC (Expenditure)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the proportion of the European Economic Community budget devoted to *(a)* agriculture, *(b)* regional development, *(c)* transport, *(d)* social fund, *(e)* energy, *(f)* science and technology, *(g)* industry and *(h)* research and investment for each year since 1972.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January 1985, c. *160*] Information for 1972 and the breakdown between transport, energy, science and technology, industry and research and investment are not readily available. The following table shows the percentage share for the major sectors of the Community's budgets between 1973 and 1984.

Percentage Shares by sector of the European Communities Budgets 1973-1984

	1973 per cent.	*1974 per cent.*	*1975 per cent.*	*1976 per cent.*	*1977 per cent.*	*1978 per cent.*	*1979 per cent.*	*1980 per cent.*	*1981 per cent.*	*1982 per cent.*	*1983 per cent.*	*1984 per cent.*
Agriculture	81	73	73	73	76	74	74	76	68	64	69	70
Regional development	—	—	2	4	4	4	4	4	9	13	7	5
Social Fund	6	6	6	5	2	5	4	3	4	5	7	5
Transport, energy, science and technology, industry, research and investment	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
Other (including Administration, Aid, Own Resources refunds)	12	19	17	16	16	15	16	15	17	16	14	17

Source; Figures for 1973 to 1983 derived from the Court of Auditors report.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 1 February 1985

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Cars (Parking Offences)

Dr. Marek asked the Prime Minister if she will instruct drivers of ministerial cars not to commit parking offences.

The Prime Minister: Under existing instructions, drivers of official cars are already required to do all they can to avoid breaching parking regulations.

Mr. Vic Norris

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Prime Minister if any Government Department or agency has at any time employed Mr. Vic Norris or his firm, Contingency Services; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Information of this kind is not held centrally.

Private Investigation Agencies

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Prime Minister if it is the policy of the Government to employ private agencies for the purposes of any confidential investigations or covert inquiries; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: There is no policy on the use of private agencies for confidential investigations, nor are any central records kept of the use of such agencies.

Research Budget

Mr. Steel asked the Prime Minister what representations she has received from the scientific community about the relative proportions of the research budget taken by defence and non-defence research, respectively; what information she has about how these relative proportions compare with the position in other Western countries; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received no such representations.

Information about the broad pattern of Government research and development expenditure and a comparison of the relative proportions spent on defence and civil research in six major OECD countries is to be found in the 1984 annual review of Government funded R and D.

The Government's plans for defence and civil R and D expenditure have been set out in Cmnd. 9428, and these plans will be reviewed in the normal way during the course of this year's public expenditure survey.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nazi Germany (Victims)

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonealth Affairs if any event is to be held by the wartime allies, the Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic to commemorate those Germans who suffered, and in many cases were executed, during Nazi rule for their resistance to the dictatorship and at the same time to commemorate all Germans who were the racial and political victims of Nazi rule.

Mr. Renton: I understand that Chancellor Kohl intends to speak at a commemoration of the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, organised by the Central Jewish Council, on 21 April. But I know of no plan by any of the wartime allies for any international commemoration of the tragic events referred to by the hon. Member.

EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Costs

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the total cost of administration of his Department, expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The total cost of administration of the constituent parts of the Department expressed in 1983-84 prices in the last five years was as follows:

£ million

1983-84 prices	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Department of Employment	234·3	255·6	299·0	316·3	338·1
Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service	15·3	15·1	12·4	12·6	12·8
Manpower Services Commission	335·7	337·1	330·4	338·3	346·0
Health and Safety Commission	70·4	75·9	73·0	75·0	78·0
Total for the Department of Employment Group	655·7	683·7	714·8	742·2	774·9

This information is taken from the annual scrutinies of Departmental running costs.

Low pay (Definition)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the official definition of low pay; and how many male and female workers, respectively, are within this definition.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There is no official definition of low pay.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Evans asked the Secretary of State for Employment what action he intends to take in order to ensure that young people's representatives are able to

participate as members of the area manpower boards which are responsible for the local oversight of the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Matters relating to the compostion of area manpower boards will be considered as part of a review of boards which is currently being undertaken by the manpower Services Commission.

Mrs Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what alternative programmes or traineeships to those which will be terminated resulting from the closure of the 29 skillcentres he intends to initiate within the framework of the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are currently considering the proposals endorsed by the Manpower Services Commission for the development of the skillcentre training agency. These proposals will not affect the Government's offer of a place on the youth training scheme to all those who are eligible.

Young people following courses under the scheme in skillcentres due to close by 1 April 1986 will be offered alternative training places, where necessary, to complete their training.

"Working Children"

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what action he intends to take arising from the findings of the publication entitled "Working Children" by the low pay unit.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am asking the Health and Safety Commission to assess the implications of the report in respect of its responsibilities. I am satisfied that in general the Health and Safety Executive and the Wages Inspectorate have adequate powers and enforce the law where breaches come to their attention.

Youth Training and Employment

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many, by number and percentage, of those young people completing a youth opportunities programme or youth training scheme have transferred into immediate full-time employment at the end of the scheme, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 31 January 1985, c. 259]: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The table is based on sample surveys conducted under both the youth opportunites programme and the youth training scheme and relates, by and large, to young people who left schemes in or around June of each year. The figures show the percentage of young people responding who were in full-time employment at the time of the surveys.

	Percentage in full-time employment
Youth opportunities programme	
1979	58
1980	40
1981	47
1982	44
1983	49
Youth training scheme	
1984	56

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Animals (School Premises)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he takes to ensure that secondary schools adhere to the guidelines issued by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals on the care of animals on school premises.

Mr. Dunn: The Department has published advice on the care and maintenance of living animals in schools in its booklets "Safety in Practical Subjects" and "Safety in Science Laboratories" and has drawn attention in these booklets to other sources of advice to schools. It is for local education authorities and individual primary and secondary schools to ensure that suitable procedures for the care of animals are followed.

West Indian Pupils

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what resources he plans to make available for the purpose of improving education provision for West Indian school pupils to enable them to acquire higher standard GCE and CSE level results.

Mr. Dunn: The achievement of school pupils of West Indian origin is among the subjects under review by the committee of inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups.

I understand that the committee has held its last meeting and intends to submit its report to my right hon. Friend after some final editorial work. The Government will want to consider whether action is needed in the light of the committee's findings.

Nursery Teachers (Training)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provisions he will make for specialist nursery training methods for teachers of four-year-old children attending primary schools; and what steps he will take to monitor the progress of such pupils in comparison with older classmates.

Mr. Dunn: The new criteria for the assessment of initial teacher training courses, issued by my right hon. Friend with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales in April 1984, require that in future the approach to teaching methods in courses should differentiate according to the age group which the student intends to teach—whether primary or secondary—and that within primary special emphasis should be given to particular age ranges such as 3 to 8. In 1983 the Department invited institutions with training expertise in the 3 to 8 age group to develop specialist work on the nursery years within their courses. HMI is in the process of visiting those institutions and discussing their plans with them. Qualified teachers have the opportunity to augment their initial training by taking one of a number of one-term, in-service courses specialising in nursery teaching.

In the course of visits to primary schools HMI looks specifically at provision for the under-fives and, through its reports, which are now published, and the courses which it runs for teachers it makes known to those responsible its views on best practice.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Northern Ireland

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of deaths which have occurred in Great Britain from 1 January 1969 to the latest available date in each year connected with present civil unrest in Northern Ireland; and how many of those deaths were caused by action taken by the police and each of the known terrorist or paramilitary groups.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The available information for England and Wales is shown in the following table. The table covers offences of homicide which have been attributed on the evidence available to acts of terrorism connected with Northern Ireland, but the coverage may not be complete. For information for Scotland, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on 28 January 1985 at column 17.

Victims of offences currently recorded as homicide attributed to acts of terrorism connected with Northern Ireland by year of recording.

England and Wales	*Number of persons*
1972	7
1973	1
1974	43
1975	11
1976	2
1977	—
1978	—
1979	1
1980	—
1981	3
1982	11
1983	6
1984	*5

*Provisional

Television Licence Fee

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received regarding the proposed increase in the level of the television licence fee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) on 31 January at columns *397-98*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drugs Misuse

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new steps the Government intend to take to tackle the problems arising from drug abuse.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rombold) on 31 January at columns *243-44*.

Coaches (Speeding)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought regarding alleged offences of speeding by coaches since May 1984; what has been the average of fine since that date; and how this compares with the average level in the 12 months preceding the increase in maximum penalties in May 1984.

Mr. Mellor: The available information relates to total proceedings for speed limit offences for all vehicles and average amounts of fines imposed at magistrates' courts for the offence categories shown in table 5 of "Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables, 1983", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. No reliable information is available for specific types of vehicles. Information for 1984 is not yet available.

Styal Prison

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he has any proposals to end the use of Her Majesty's prison, Styal, for youth custody prisoners; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what policy is followed for the accommodation of youth custody prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Styal.

Mr. Mellor: Separate living accommodation is provided at Her Majesty's prison and youth custody centre, Styal, for those sentenced to youth custody and to imprisonment: the facilities of the establishment are shared by both groups. Selected youth custody trainees are, however, located in the prison and selected adults in the youth custody centre. This gives maximum flexibility in the use of the accommodation and allows some mixing of female adult prisoners with female young offenders which can be beneficial to both groups. We have no plans to alter this general arrangement. As a response to recent incidents of misbehaviour, the youth custody trainees at Styal have, as an interim measure, been dispersed more widely throughout the establishment, so as to benefit more from the stabilising influence of the adult prisoners.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners under the age of 17 years are held at Her Majesty's prison, Styal;

(2) how many adult prisoners and youth custody prisoners, respectively, are detained at Her Majesty's prison, Styal.

Mr. Mellor: On 25 January 1985 190 adults and 47 youth custody trainees, of whom six were aged under 17 years, were accommodated at Her Majesty's prison and youth custody centre, Styal.

Detained Persons (Deaths)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have died in police custody in each of the last five years, with a breakdown by cause of death; in how many cases each year inquests were held; and what was the result of the inquest in each case.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The number of persons who died in police custody during the years 1980 to 1983, together with the cause of death, number of inquests and inquest verdicts, is contained in the annual reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary — HC 409 (1980), 463 (1981), 15 (1982) and 528 (1983)—and, for those within the Metropolitan police district, in the annual reports of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (Cmnd. 8254, 8569, 8928 and 9268).

Information for 1984 is not yet available but will be included in the 1984 reports of the Chief Inspector and the Commissioner.

Mrs. Jagjit Kaur Kahlon

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood of 28 November about the case of Mrs. Jagjit Kaur Kahlon.

Mr. Waddington: Mrs. Jagjit Kaur Kahlon and her husband were interviewed in New Delhi on 19 November 1984. A second interview is to be arranged as a matter of priority so that a full report covering all the issues we need to consider can be prepared. Once that report has been received and considered I shall write to the hon. Member.

Motorways (Police Surveillance)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources he will make available for the provision of higher police manning levels on motorways to supervise adherence by motorists to recommended speed limits in conditions of extreme cold weather and very poor visibility conditions.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Deployment to particular policing tasks is a matter for chief constables. Police authorities are responsible for fixing the authorised establishment of forces, subject to my right hon. and learned Friend's approval. In considering an application to approve an increase in establishment he takes careful account of any motorway policing requirements.

Public Order

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects to publish the report of his review of public order legislation; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will introduce legislation to permit him to ban processions without the prior need for an application from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis or the appropriate local authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The procedure for banning marches under section 3 of the Public Order Act 1936 is one of the matters considered in the review of public order law, whose conclusions my right hon. and learned Friend hopes to announce as soon as possible.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Average Incomes

Mr. Greenway asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average income in 1955 and in each succeeding fifth year expressed in constant prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Rees: Average income—personal income per capital—at constant prices for the years requested was as follows:

	£
1955	1,782
1960	2,081
1965	2,437
1970	2,734
1975	3,308
1980	3,571

These figures are based on data in *Economic Trends* annual supplement (1985 edition) tables 18 and 45.

Johnson Matthey Bankers

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer who were the directors of Johnson Matthey Bankers at the time of the rescue operation mounted by the Bank of England; and if any of these persons are currently holding directorships or other positions of responsibility in any firm or organisation in receipt of public funds.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The directors of Johnson Matthey Bankers at the time of the rescue operation mounted by the Bank of England were:

Mr. E. G. Peterman (Chairman).
Mr. P. D. F. Varrall (Deputy Chairman).
Mr. R. G. Wheeler (Managing Director).
Mr. P. J. C. Firth (Deputy Managing Director).
Mr. P. J. K. Smith.
Mr. I. R. Fraser.
Mr. J. J. Shaw.
Mr. I. J. Thornburn.

The executive directors were Mr. Wheeler, Mr. Firth, Mr. Smith and Mr. Fraser. Mr. Shaw and Mr. Smith continue to be directors, but the other six were obliged to resign.

I regret that the further information requested by the hon. Member is not readily or fully obtainable, and could in any case be provided only at disproportionate cost. The main reasons for this are that no central register is kept of firms and organisations in receipt of public funds, and former directors of recognised banks or licensed deposit-taking institutions are not obliged to inform the authorities of their directorships.

EC (Own Resources)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the increase in the European Economic Community own resources when the maximum value added tax rate is raised to 1·4 per cent.

Mr. Ian Stewart: After allowing for the United Kingdom's VAT abatement as a result of the Fontainebleau mechanism—as well as relief to Germany in respect of the financing of that abatement—the potential increase in the amount of revenue available to the Community as a result of raising the VAT ceiling from 1 per cent. to 1·4 per cent. will be some 15 to 20 per cent.

Betting Duty

Mr. Greenway asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what percentage the off-course general betting duty would have to be increased in order to offset the abolition of the on-course general betting duty or a reduction of the on-course general betting duty by 2 per cent.

Mr. Hayhoe: The current off-course rate of general betting duty would have to go up by 0·5 and 0·25 percentage points respectively.

Sterling (Exchange Rate)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the US dollar to the pound sterling exchange rate since May 1979; and what was the change in the preceding five years.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The percentage changes in the US dollar's exchange rate against the pound sterling during the periods requested were as follows:

May 1974-May 1979	+17·3
May 1979-Jan 1985*	+82·3

(*average to 29 January).

Developing Countries (IMF Conditions)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the International Monetary Fund imposes any conditions relating to purchase of arms or level of military expenditure when making loans to, or rescheduling the debt of, developing countries; and what policy on these matters is put forward by the United Kingdom representative.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No, the IMF does not impose any such conditions in its loans to member countries. The fund itself does not reschedule countries' debts, though other creditors may choose to take account of IMF conditionality in deciding whether to reschedule. United Kingdom support for applications for IMF loans depends on their technical merits.

Social Security

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of gross domestic product at market prices was allocated to expenditure on social security in 1983-84; and what he expects the outturn to be for 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Rees: The recently published public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9428) showed the latest estimated outturn expenditure on social security in the United Kingdom for 1983-84 as £36,301 million and an expected outturn for 1984-85 of £39,145 million. Social security benefit payments—which account for some 96 per cent. of all social security expenditure — are considered to be transfer payments and, therefore, do not form part of gross domestic product. However, if the figures are expressed as a percentage of GDP, they would amount to 11·9 per cent. and 12·0 per cent. respectively.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Heddle asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to the answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire, *Official Report*, 15 January, columns *119-20*, if he can anticipate the date by which the response by the Commission to the Government's reply to the reasoned opinion under article 169 of the treaty of Rome alleging that certain aspects of the value added tax zero rates enforced in the United Kingdom, including those applicable for non-domestic construction work, are contrary to the provisions of the sixth value added tax directive, is likely to be received.

Mr. Hayhoe: It is entirely for the Commission to decide in the light of our reply whether further action on its part is justified. I have no indication when it is likely to reach a decision.

EC (Expenditure)

Mr. Fowlkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what percentage total European Economic Community expenditure has increased in each year since 1970.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January 1985, c. *160*]: Information prior to 1973 is not readily available.

The remainder of the information requested is set out in the table. The budget figures to which the percentages relate were established in units of account (ua) before 1978; from 1978 until 1980 they were established in European units of account (eua). Since these two units were calculated on different bases they are not directly comparable, except in the case of the European development fund for which it was agreed that a conversion rate of 1ua = 1eua would be adopted. Community budgets from 1981 have been established in European currency units (ecu), with the agreement that 1ecu = 1eua for the years 1981 and 1982.

Percentage increase over previous year of 1 per cent.

Year	*Per cent.*
1974	2
1975	20
1976	35
1977	13
1978	29
1979	17
1980	12
1981	14
1982	19
1983	−1
1984	19

Final figures for 1985 are not yet available.
Source: Figures derived from the reports of the European Court of Auditors'.

WALES

Heath Hospital, Cardiff

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the £4 million repair work required to put right building defects in the Heath hospital, Cardiff; if he will indicate the amounts of cash he proposes to spend in the immediate years ahead; if the £4 million is to be taken from the budget of South Glamorgan area health authority or from the all-Wales capital programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The total cost of the remedial work under-taken to date is £2,718,000 made up as follows:

	£
1980-81	
Repair of Mosaics	1,050,000
1981-82	
Defects in Pembroke House and Ward B4G	154,000
Brecknock House	156,000
1982-83	
Tower Block and Paediatric Department	224,000
1983-84	
Carmarthen House	190,000
1984-85	

	£
Denbigh House	227,000
Elevated Roads	188,000
Dental Block and Ward Block	529,000
	2,718,000

The estimated expenditure required to complete the works is £1,135,000 made up as follows:

	£
1985-86	
Glamorgan, Radnor and Meirionydd Houses	510,000
Tunnels	175,000
Central Complex	110,000
1986-87	
Cardigan House	340,000
	1,135,000

The full cost of the remedial work will be borne by the all-Wales capital programme.

Mr. Abse asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether, as a result of the settlement reached on 10 February 1984 between the Welsh Health Technical Services Organisation and S. W. Milburn and Partners and W. S. Atkins and Partners pertaining to structural and material defects in the Heath hospital, Cardiff, any sums have been or will be, paid into the Consolidated Fund directly or indirectly; by whom; and where in the Estimates and Appropriation Accounts such sums are, or will be, recorded.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: There was no direct payment into the Consolidated Fund. The payment received by the Welsh Health Technical Services Organisation was offset against payments due for remedial work at the University hospital of Wales.

A summary of all Welsh health authorities' losses and compensation is included in the summarised accounts of health authorities presented annually and published as a White Paper.

Mr. Abse asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total cost of remedial work done on the Heath hospital, Cardiff, during its construction; what is the estimated expenditure in 1985 costs to effect the work specified in the Ove Arup report as needing immediate remedial action; and what is the additional cost of remedial work specified in the report, including roofs, needing future remedial action.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Any remedial work done on the Heath hospital during construction was undertaken within the terms of the construction contract. The actual expenditure on completed remedial work and expected expenditure at 1985 prices on remedial work yet to be undertaken on the elements in the Ove Arup report which were accepted as requiring urgent attention are listed in my written answer of today to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). Other work not considered to be immediate will form part of the South Glamorgan district health authority's normal maintenance and repair programme.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of the Housing Corporation's gross expenditure in Wales in 1983-84 was accounted for by value added tax.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Precise information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost, but the Housing Corporation estimates that VAT accounted for a very small proportion of the gross expenditure in 1983-84.

Chiropodists

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many chiropodists there are in the National Health Service in Wales, by each of the area health authority areas; if he is satisfied with this level of provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The numbers of chiropodists are as follows:

Health Authority	*At 30 September 1984*	
	Number	*Whole-time equivalent*
Clwyd	13	13·0
East Dyfed	11	10·6
Gwent	21	20·5
Gwynedd	14	12·8
Mid Glamorgan	32	31·0
Pembrokeshire	4	3·5
Powys	10	9·3
South Glamorgan	25	22·2
West Glamorgan	32	30·3

It is for individual health authorities to decide whether this level of provision is satisfactory.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report* for each Manpower Services Commission area the number of *(a)* 16-year-olds and *(b)* 17-year-olds to enter the youth training scheme in Wales in 1985-86 on the basis of the 12 November 1984 rules; if he proposes to increase the youth training scheme allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No decision has yet been taken. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Grenada

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to offer further aid to the new Government of Grenada.

Mr. Raison: I am today informing the Grenada Government that we are prepared to make available a new interest-free loan of £5 million, for expenditure over about five years, on capital projects to be agreed between our two Governments. This follows an initial commitment of £750,000 which I announced to the House on 28 November 1983, at column 378, and a subsequent £1 million loan which I announced on 7 February 1984 at columns 566-67.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Outgoers Scheme

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many producers have now committed themselves to becoming outgoers; and whether any more are to be invited to join the scheme.

Mr. MacGregor: By 25 January 1985 1,237 producers in England and Wales had committed themselves to surrendering a total of 150·3 million litres of quota in a full year. Others still have to decide whether or not to go out of production, and as their decisions become known we will send out further invitations as and when we need to replace any who drop out.

To date, invitations have been sent to those with up to 367,000 litres, and this week a further 80 producers, with up to 387,000 litres, are to be invited to join the scheme. Previously we have excluded a small number of producers because their milk production was only a relatively small part of their overall farming enterprise. However, now that we are increasingly inviting much larger producers, this restriction is no longer being applied.

TRANSPORT

Buses

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received from metropolitan counties on his White Paper "Buses."

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received representions from six metropolitan county councils, the passenger transport executives, a number of metropolitan district councils and from numerous individuals in the metropolitan areas. The content of the representations has been varied but in general has favoured continuation of the existing local monopoliés, which are advantageous to bus operators rather than passengers, who will benefit from the Government's policy of fair competition.

Combined Transport

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assistance has been made available in each of the countries of the European Community to combined transport operators under European Economic Community directive 82/603/EEC and European Economic Community regulations 1107/70 as amended by regulation 1658/82.

Mr. David Mitchell: No such assistance has been provided in the United Kingdom. Details of assistance in other European Community countries are not available.

Hurn Airport (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport why, in the light of the fact that Hurn airport, Christchurch, lies wholly within the borough of Christchurch, he has made no contact with the borough council about his forthcoming visit, nor has he or his Department invited the council as such to be present during his visit.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The arrangements for my visit to Bournemouth (Hurn) airport were a matter for its joint owners, Dorset county council and Bournemouth borough council.

Lorry Ban Proposals (GLC)

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has completed his consultations with the Greater London council on its lorry ban proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I have considered carefully all aspects of the Greater London council's proposals and the points made by it is response to consultation.

Having done so, I am satisfied that in deciding to proceed with its lorry ban proposals without a public inquiry the GLC was not satisfactorily discharging its duty under section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and that my direction is necessary to secure compliance with that duty.

Accordingly, I have issued a direction under that Act to the GLC, a copy of which is being placed in the Library of the House.

The effect of that direction is to require the GLC to seek my consent to introduction of its proposals for a night-time and weekend lorry ban.

If my consent is sought, it would be my intention to establish a public inquiry so that the GLC's scheme, the many issues it raises and the many objections it has attracted can be publicly and impartially weighed. I would then decide whether or not to give my consent in the light of that inquiry's findings.

Road Accident Statistics

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has made any arrangements to allow the recording of injury accidents, which may involve electrically assisted pedal cycles, in the stats 19 system.

Mrs. Chalker: At present the arrangement is that these vehicles be included with ordinary pedal cycles. However, the Department is consulting local authorities and police forces with a view to using a "special projects" box on the stats 19 form to record vehicles such as the C5.

Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycle Regulations

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to monitor the operation of the Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles Regulations.

Mrs. Chalker: We are watching developments and the Transport and Road Research Laboratory will look at models of electrically assisted cycle produced on a substantial scale.

Airports Policy

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish his White Paper on airports policy; if the White Paper will set out his latest ideas on privatisation of the British Airports Authority and on local authority airports; if he will list the main subjects to be dealt with in the White Paper; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport intends to make a

comprehensive statement on airports policy when he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announce their decisions on the Stansted/Heathrow terminal 5 planning inquiries.

Vehicle Speed Limiters

Mr. Moate asked the Secretary of State for Transport what tests have been conducted recently by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory on the use of vehicle speed limiters for lorries and buses; and with what results.

Mrs. Chalker: The Transport and Road Research Laboratory has carried out limited tests on one speed-limiting device. This performed satisfactorily in controlling speeds and safely reverted the vehicle to normal accelerator control when electrical failure was deliberately induced.

M6 (Accident Statistics)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents have arisen on the M6 motorway between junctions 1 and 12 during the last five years; and how many motorists' deaths have occurred as a result.

Mrs. Chalker: The information is as follows:

M6 Road accidents and fatalities between junctions 1 and 12: 1981 to 1983

	1981	*1982*	*1983*
All injury accidents	193	178	192
Deaths	6	5	8

Data for further years could be given only at disproportionate cost.

ENERGY

Spent Reactor Fuel

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Energy what provisions are currently planned for the long-term dry storage of spent advanced gas-cooled reactor fuel; what bodies have been delegated responsibility for such provision; and what arrangements are proposed for financing such provision in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Goodlad: No commitments have been made to date.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Spencer asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish estimates of the number of homes heated by combined heat and power in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Denmark; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Estimates of the number of dwellings connected to combined heat and power/district heating plant are not available.

Fuel Disconnections

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he is satisfied with the working of the fuel industries' code of practice on disconnections.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The operation of the code is being monitored by the Electricity and Gas Consumers' Councils. Their reports to date indicate that the code is working satisfactorily.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what was the trend in the number of *(a)* gas and *(b)* electricity disconnections over the last four quarters for which figures are available.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I have asked the chairmen of the British Gas Corporation and the Electricity Council to provide the figures direct to the hon. Member.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what response he has made to the report on fuel disconnections by the Policy Studies Institute.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Stevens) on 29 March 1982 at column 25.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will introduce legislation to remove the power of disconnection from the gas and electricity supply industries and to confer responsibility for such decisions either upon the county courts or some other arbitration body.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: No.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the last inspection date for all nuclear power stations and the next expected date.

Mr. Goodlad: To ensure compliance with conditions attached to nuclear site licences and to provide an overall surveillance of activities affecting safety on a licensed site, inspectors from Her Majesty's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate pay regular and frequent visits—usually at least once a month—to each licensed nuclear power station site for two or three days at a time, or for longer periods if necessary.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the normal inspection procedure for nuclear power stations; and how often installations are partially or completely shut down or not producing electricity during such inspections.

Mr. Goodlad: Inspectors of Her Majesty's Installations Inspectorate pay frequent visits—usually monthly—to licensed nuclear power station sites. Nuclear power reactors are required to be shut down every two years for maintenance and inspection under conditions attached to their nuclear site licences. Nuclear power reactors may also be shut down or run at reduced power from time to time for operational reasons.

Electricity (Imports)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the quantity of electricity imported from France, and any other European country, via the European grid for each month since April 1984 and for each year since 1972.

Mr. Goodlad: No electricity has been imported from France or any other European country since 1982. I understand from the CEGB that since 1972 the net flows of electricity via the 160MW link with France—now decommissioned—were as follows:

Year ending 31 March	Net Imports/ Exports* (gigawatt hours)
1972	280
1973	273
1974	159
1975	11
1976	3
1977	−88
1978	nil
1979	−76
1980	−2
1981	3
1982	nil

* minus sign (−) indicates exports.

DEFENCE

Eastern Atlantic

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the United States maritime prepositioning ships allocated to the eastern Atlantic will come under Standing Naval Force Atlantic.

Mr. Stanley: This is a matter for the United States authorities.

Mr. D.E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any British port will act as a regular port of call to the United States maritime prepositioning ships allocated to the eastern Atlantic; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: Security considerations prevent me from commenting on the operational movement plans for these ships.

Ethiopia

Mr. Wilkinson asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will discuss with Royal Air Force commanders means to ensure that supplies dropped from C130 Hercules aircraft of RAF Support Command in Eritrea and Tigre reach the local population and do not fall into the hands of the Ethiopian army.

Mr. Stanley: We agreed that the RAF should air-drop supplies, initially in Shewa province, on the clear understanding that food would go only to those in need. The RAF was invited by the Ethiopians to observe distribution arrangements on the ground and two members of the detachment were present at the dropping zone when a trial was conducted on 26 January. The RAF remains fully prepared to assist with air-dropping, but the Ethiopian authorities have not so far agreed that air-dropping can commence on a regular basis.

Towed Arrays

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of towed arrays in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

SCOTLAND

Private Hospitals

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of private hospitals which offered acute/surgical care, the number of beds and the occupancy rate for all facilities offering such care by region in each of the last five years.

Mr. John MacKay: Information on occupancy rates is not available centrally; but the remaining information is as follows:

Health Board	Private Hospitals Offering Acute/Surgical Care									
	1980		1981		1982		1983		1984	
	No	Bed Compliment	No	Bed Complement	No	Bed Complement	No	Bed Complement	No	Bed Complement
Argyll and Clyde	1	271	1	297	1	297	1	297	1	297
Dumfries and Galloway	1	23	1	23	1	23	1	23	1	23
Forth Valley	1	16	1	16	1	16	1	16	1	16
Grampian	1	22	1	22	1	22	1	36	1	36
Greater Glasgow	2	91	2	91	2	91	2	128	2	163
Lothian	2	67	2	67	2	67	2	67	2	78
Tayside	1	30	1	30	1	30	1	30	1	30
TOTAL	9	520	9	546	9	546	10	597	10	643

Pay Beds

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of authorised National Health Service pay beds, the number of deaths and discharges of patients, and the average daily occupancy of National Health Service pay beds, giving numbers and percentages for each region for each of the last five years.

Mr. John MacKay: The information available centrally is given in the following table. Information on deaths and discharges is not available centrally.

Health board	1979-80			1980-81			1981-82			1982-83			1983-84		
	No. of pay beds*	Average daily occupancy		No. of pay beds*	Average daily occupancy		No. of pay beds*	Average daily occupancy		No. of pay beds*	Average daily occupancy		No. of pay beds*	Average daily occupancy	
		No.	Per cent.		No.	Per cent.		No.	Per cent.		No.	Per cent.		No.	Per cent.
Argyll and Clyde	13	1·3	9·9	13	2·2	16·6	13	7·4	57·2	13	0·6	4·6	13	2·6	19·7
Ayrshire and Arran	12	5·3	43·9	9	3·8	42·5	9	4·0	44·4	11	3·2	29·2	11	4·5	41·0
Forth Valley	5	1·5	29·2	5	2·3	46·1	5	1·7	33·5	5	1·1	21·5	5	1·2	24·9
Grampian	14	5·9	42·2	13	5·4	41·4	13	5·2	40·0	15	4·1	27·1	17	3·0	17·6
Greater Glasgow	41	6·9	16·9	30	3·8	12·5	30	5·6	18·6	30	3·7	12·2	30	0·4	12·8
Highland	3	0·7	22·0	3	0·4	12·1	3	0·5	16·4	4	0·4	9·9	4	0·7	16·5
Lothian	21	6·9	32·7	16	6·3	39·5	16	7·6	47·7	19	8·2	43·1	19	6·7	35·4
Tayside	5	0·4	8·5	5	0·4	8·6	5	0·6	12·0	11	0·6	5·2	9	1·2	13·1
All Scotland	114	28·0	24·6	94	24·6	26·2	94	32·6	34·7	108	23·4	21·7	108	23·5	21·8

* No. of authorised pay beds at end of financial year in question.

Amenity Beds

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of National Health Service amenity beds, deaths and discharges of patients and average daily occupancy, giving numbers and percentages, for each region for each of the last five years.

Mr. John MacKay: This information is not available centrally.

Housing Co-operatives

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what encouragement his Department is providing for the development of tenant management co-operatives and par value co-operatives; and what initiatives his Department has taken over the recommendations made in the report of the Housing Co-operatives Review Committee, published in December 1983, following upon the conference attended by the Minister with responsibility for housing in Scotland for September 1982.

Mr. Ancram: The development of tenant management and par value co-operatives is primarily the responsibility of the housing authorities concerned locally. The Scottish Development Department does, however, provide financial assistance to the tenant participation advisory service, which is responsible for developing interest in and knowledge of all forms of tenant participation, including management and par value co-operatives. The Scottish Development Department is also in close touch with Glasgow district council over its innovative proposals for the development of par value community ownership schemes.

I have welcomed the report of the Housing Co-operatives Review Committee, most of whose recommendations call for action by housing authorities. The Scottish Development Department has been giving consideration to the recommendations which affect central Government and will shortly be meeting officers of the tenant participation advisory service to discuss them further.

Public Transport (Deregulation)

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what research he has commissioned or experimentation he will commission into the likely effects of deregulation of public transport as proposed in the Government's White Paper on buses—Cmnd. 9300—in urban and rural areas in Scotland;

(2) what assessment he has made of experience of deregulation in Hereford and Australia in the context of public transport needs in the regions and islands of Scotland.

Mr. Ancram: The Scottish Development Department keeps in close touch both with relevant research on public transport and with local transport needs and circumstances in Scotland and will continue to do so.

Abortion Statistics

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give a breakdown by number of previous children of those women resident in Scotland upon whom abortions were performed in each of the following years: 1969, 1970, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983;

(2) if he will give a breakdown by marital status of the women of the total number of abortions performed in each of the following years on resident women in Scotland in 1969, 1970, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983;

(3) if he will give a breakdown of the number of abortions performed in Scotland on resident women by the statutory grounds for which those abortions were performed in each of the following years: 1969, 1970, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983; and what was the total number of abortions performed on such women in each of those years.

Mr. John MacKay: Information about abortions performed in Scotland showing parity, marital state and statutory grounds for abortion is given in section 5 of "Scottish Health Statistics," published annually and available in the Library.

The 1974 edition also includes data on marital state and statutory grounds for the years 1969 and 1970 but gives parity for 1974 only. Parity* figures for the earlier years requested are as follows:

Parity figures*

Number of previous children	1969	1970
None	1,200	1,870
1	360	476
2	530	806
3	599	857
4	396	616
5 and over	447	624

* The number of preceding completed pregancies.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of the total

number of abortions performed on women resident in Scotland by the following gestational ages of the foetus: under nine weeks, nine weeks, 10 weeks, 11 weeks, 12 weeks, 13 weeks, 14 weeks, 15 to 19 weeks, 20 to 23 weeks and over 24 weeks in each of the following years: 1969, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. John McKay: Data are not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The nearest available information to that requested is for periods of gestation under 10 weeks, 10 to 13 weeks, 14 to 17 weeks, 18 to 19 weeks, 20 to 24 weeks and 25 weeks and over; details for 1975 and the later years requested are given in table 5.3 of "Scottish Health Statistics" 1982 and 1983, copies of which are in the Library. The figures for 1969 are:

Period of gestation (weeks)	*Number*
Under 10	948
10 to 13	1,454
14 to 17	789
18 to 19	168
20 to 24	97
25 and over	7
Not stated	93

Birth Statistics

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state *(a)* the total number of live births, *(b)* the total number of illegitimate live births, *(c)* the ratio of live births to abortions and *(d)* the number of illegitimate births as a percentage of live births for women who are aged (i) over 20 years and (ii) under 20 years, and resident in Scotland in each of the following years: 1967, 1969, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. John MacKay: Tables A1.1 and S1.1 of the 1983 annual report of the Registrar General for Scotland and table S1.1 of the 1974 report give data (other than percentages) about the requests at *(a)*, *(b)* and *(d)*. The ratios for live births to abortions for all women are as follows:

	Ratio
1967	n/a
1969	25:1
1974	9:1
1978	9:1
1980	9:1
1982	8:1
1983	8:1

n/a=Not available.

THE ARTS

Cash Limits

Mr. Waller asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts if it is intended to change any of the cash limits for which the Minister for the Arts is responsible.

Mr. Waldegrave: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary spring Supplementary Estimate my right hon. and noble Friend proposes to increase the 1984-85 cash limit on Class V, Vote 10—Arts, the Arts Council and other institutions, The National Heritage and the Government Art Collection — by £241,000 from £123,900,000 to £124,141,000. The net increase is required to meet the cost of residual payments by the South Bank Theatre Board to its contractors and consultants in connection with erecting and equipping the National theatre building. The expenditure will be charged to the Reserve.

NORTHERN IRELAND

State-enrolled Nurses

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many state-enrolled nurses employed in Northern Ireland were trained in the Republic of Ireland; whether reciprocal arrangements exist for state-enrolled nurses trained in Northern Ireland to be employed in the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: No state-enrolled nurses employed in Northern Ireland were trained in the Republic of Ireland. There are no reciprocal arrangements between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland for the employment of state-enrolled nurses in the Irish Republic.

Cattle, Sheep and Pigs

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many live cattle, sheep and pigs have been exported to the Irish Republic in each of the last five years for which records are available.

Dr. Boyson: The information is as follows:

Thousand

	Cattle	*Sheep**	*Pigs*
1979	130·4	244	16·5
1980	60·1	449	272·6
1981	86·3	538	583·3
1982	48·3	509	594·6
1983	15·3	446	516·4

* Estimated numbers.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of private hospitals that offered acute surgical care, the numbers of beds and the occupancy rate for all facilities offering such care, by region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Chris Patten: There are two private hospitals in Northern Ireland providing acute surgical care, the Ulster independent clinic in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board area and the St. John of God hospital in the Southern Health and Social Services Board area. The number of beds in each is 50 and 36, respectively, although these are not used exclusively for acute care. Information on bed occupancy rate is not held centrally.

Amenity Beds

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of National Health Service amenity beds, deaths and discharges of patients, and average daily occupancy, giving numbers and percentages, for each region for each of the last five years.

Mr. Chris Patten: Hospital beds are not specifically designated for amenity purposes. The remainder of the information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pay Beds

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of authorised National Health Service pay beds, the number of deaths and discharges of patients, and the average daily occupancy of National Health Service beds, giving numbers and percentages, for each region for each of the last five years.

Mr. Chris Patten: Details of availability and uptake of accommodation by hospital private patients in each of the last five years are set out as follows.

These beds, when not occupied by private patients, are used by Health Service patients. Information on discharges and deaths is not recorded separately for private patients.

Private In-Patient Provision

	Total number of patients who may be accommodated	*Average daily paying patients occupying those beds*	*Average occupancy rate percentage*
Eastern Health and Social Services Board			
1979	90	20·06	22·3
1980	90	12·75	14·2
1981	90	12·15	13·5
1982	90	*	*
1983	90	15·65	17·4
Northern Health and Social Services Board			
1979	22	2·36	10·7
1980	22	1·99	9·0
1981	22	2·36	10·7
1982	22	2·39	10·9
1983	22	3·29	14·9
Southern Health and Social Services Board			
1979	14	1·59	11·3
1980	14	1·01	7·2
1981	14	1·09	7·8
1982	14	1·68	12·0
1983	14	1·62	11·6
Western Health and Social Services Board			
1979	23	5·81	25·3
1980	23	5·38	23·4
1981	23	4·77	20·7
1982	23	4·66	20·3
1983	23	5·54	24·1

* Information not available due to industrial action in the Health and Social Services Board.

Exceptional Heating Allowance

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has now approved an exceptional heating allowance to persons in receipt of supplementary benefits to ameliorate the effects of the severe weather in Northern Ireland; what criteria are used to determine when such an allowance is paid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 31 January 1985, c. 298]: A single payment of supplementary benefit can be made where a period of exceptionally severe weather has resulted in greater than normal fuel consumption and a claimant has not put aside enough money to meet the extra cost. A decision on whether or not the conditions prescribed in the relevant regulations are satisfied rests with the independent adjudication authorities. Following discussions with the Meteorological Office, the Chief Adjudication Officer for Northern Ireland has issued guidance on the temperature level at which the weather condition should be regarded as satisfied. This is based on criteria published in paragraphs 7426 to 7449 and appendix 19 of the Northern Ireland S manual, and takes account of temperature data supplied by the Meteorological Office. The relevant trigger point has not yet been reached in Northern Ireland, but, if it is, the Department of Health and Social Services will publicise the fact and provide information on how claims for single payments should be made.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Lord Lewin

Mr. Foulkes asked the Attorney-General if he will prosecute under the Official Secrets Act the former chief of the defence staff, Lord Lewin, for describing in an interview on 29 June 1984 the use of the towed array system in detecting the General Belgrano.

The Attorney-General: If the hon. Gentleman would care to write to me identifying what is alleged to have been said and to whom on 29 June 1984, I will consider it.

Official Secrets Act 1911

Mr. Dobson asked the Attorney-General if he will provide details of proceedings that have been commenced under sections 1 and 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 since 9 February 1983 set out in the manner of appendix II to the Franks report.

The Attorney-General [*pursuant to his answer*, 28 January 1985, c. *37-38*]: One further prosecution was commenced in 1984 under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911. A civilian employee of a police force disclosed information obtained from the police national computer to a company trading in burglar alarms.

My answer also erroneously described the prosecution in 1984 of a Foreign Office clerk as arising from the disclosure of minutes written "by her Secretary of State to colleagues" although in fact the minutes were sent to her Secretary of State.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Chatsworth Collection

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, in respect of the drawings sold at auction on 3 July from the Chatsworth collection (i) the number of export licences applied for which were *(a)* referred to and *(b)* not referred to the Reviewing Committee for the Export of Works of Art, (ii) the number of export licences which have been issued in normal course *(a)* by 12 November and *(b)* at the latest available date and (iii) how many of the export licences applied for have now beeen issued *(a)* in respect of applications referred to the Reviewing Committee and *(b)* in respect of applications not so referred; and if he will also set out the position separately regarding individual applications in each category in respect of which licences have not been issued;

(2) whether the figures for the numbers of export licences issued in respect of drawings from the Chatsworth collection contained in the replies by his right hon, Friend the Minister of State, *Official Report*, 12 November 1984, column *85*, and by his hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, *Official Report*, 9 January, column *448*, were compiled on the same basis.

Mr. Channon: The figures given in the two replies were compiled on the same basis. Of the 61 export licence applications received for drawings known to have come from the Chatsworth collection, 21 were referred to the reviewing committee. On the advice of the committee, export licences were temporarily withheld in respect of 13 of the applications so referred, but were later issued in respect of 12 of these: only in the remaining case was an offer made to purchase the work on behalf of a British collection. Licences have also been issued in respect of all the applications not referred to the reviewing committee —40 in number—in respect of those applications which were referred to the committee but where the committee did not recommend that licences should be withheld—eight in number. It has been the practice of successive governments not to provide information about export licences applied for or issued for reasons of commercial confidentiality. I regret that I therefore cannot provide the further details requested.

Telegram Service

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether he has given consideration to the restoration of a telegram service in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is his assessment of the savings resulting from the ending of the telegram service since its termination;

(3) what representations he has received calling for the restoration of the telegram service;

(4) how many tele-messages have been sent in each year since the termination of the telegram; and how many telegrams were sent in the equivalent period before termination;

(5) what profit or loss has been made by the tele-message service each year since its inception;

(6) what proportion of tele-messages were delivered within 24 hours in each year since the termination of the telegram.

Mr. Butcher: I have to say that the questions asked are primarily matters that are the responsibility of BT and the details of the services it offers are a matter for its commercial judgment within the terms of its licence and current legislation. However, I can say that I have received no recent representations about the ending of the inland telegram service nor proposals for the establishment of a new service. I regret that I am unable to provide some of the information requested as this can only be supplied by BT and I understand is commercially confidential.

Weighing and Measuring Machines

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new weighing and measuring machines have been submitted to his inspectors for type approval in each of the years 1979 to 1984, respectively, and what is the gross sum collected in each of those years in inspection fees.

Mr. Fletcher: The information available on weighing and measuring equipment submitted to the Department for pattern examination is as follows:

Number of Instruments submitted during year (excludes variants) and total income from new submissions and variant

Financial year	*Number*	£
1979-80	56	32,618
1980-81	28	88,795
1981-82	45	112,207
1982-83	89	137,290
1983-84	81	222,486

Software Products (Double Licensing)

Mr. Randall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the United States authorities about the problems of double licensing of software products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The United States authorities are fully aware of our views on the application of their re-export requirements to exports from the United Kingdom.

COCOM

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will publish the COCOM list.

Mr. Channon: I expect to be able in March to make and publish an Export of Goods (Control) Order which, when brought into force, will give effect to the new COCOM arrangements.

Fish and Chip Shops

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many fish and chip shops are recorded as having gone bankrupt since 1 May 1984.

Mr. Fletcher: I regret that this information is not available. Fish and chip shops would be included under "hotels and catering" in tables 2 and 3 of the article on insolvencies in *British Business*, 25 January 1985.

Rowntree Mackintosh, Edinburgh

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will receive a delegation representing the work force of the Rowntree Mackintosh factory in Edinburgh to discuss the proposed closure of the plant.

Mr. Tebbit: As the reception of such a delegation would be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, I have passed the hon. Member's request to him.

Electrical Equipment (Standards)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any proposals for the accreditation of organisations concerned with standards for electrical equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish in the *Official*

Report a table showing import penetration for products of manufacturing industry for the year 1984 using 1984 imports as a numerator and 1983 production as a denominator.

Mr. Channon: The figures are not yet available.

Shipbuilding (Privatisation)

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions his Department has had with potential purchasers of privatised shipyards about possible Government financial support for maintaining after privatisation capacity utilisation at levels similar to those occurring prior to privatisation.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *46*]: There have been no such discussions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked British Shipbuilders to set in hand action to dispose of its warshipbuilding interests. The Government's intention is that, wherever possible, the yards will be sold to purchasers who intend to continue shipbuilding and who can demonstrate that they have the necessary skills and finance.

Radio Stations

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licences have been granted for cellular radio base stations under the Telecommunications Act 1984; and how many of these are in the vicinity of the M25 motorway.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 30 January 1985, c. *215-16*]: Two licences to operate the cellular radio telephone systems have been granted under the British Telecommunications Act 1981 and have effect as if granted under the Telecommunications Act 1984. A total of about 40 base stations will provide full coverage of the M25 motorway by early summer.

Space Agency

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the creation of an independent Space Agency for Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 30 January 1985, c. *216*]: My hon. Friend the Minister for Information Technology announced on 29 January 1985 that a British National Space Centre is to be set up to improve the development of space technology in the United Kingdom and to co-ordinate space policy more effectively.

ENVIRONMENT

Swans

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has any indication of the consequences of a decline in the swan population;

(2) when he expects to hear the results of the Nature Conservancy Council's research into swan deaths;

(3) what evidence he has of the decline of the swan population in various parts of the United Kingdom;

(4) what evidence he has that anglers are buying substitutes to lead weights; and what action he has taken and proposes to take to encourage the use of substitutes;

(5) if he has any evidence of any increase in the swan population anywhere in the United Kingdom;

(6) what steps, other than the substituting of lead weights for fishing, he is taking to *(a)* protect and *(b)* increase the swan population;

(7) what steps are being taken to remove lead shot from rivers and river banks.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Nature Conservancy Council held a meeting to review the position on lead poisoning of swans on 24 January. The mute swan population does not appear to be declining in overall numbers. A census conducted by the Wildfowl Trust in 1983 estimated the total number of mute swans in Britain to be about 19,000. This figure represents a 7 per cent. increase over a similar census in 1978.

However, there are marked regional variations in the figures. The following 14 counties — pre-1974 geographical boundaries — have shown a decrease of more than 10 per cent. over the period: Dorset, Glamorgan, Gloucester, Oxford, Huntingdon, Nottingham, Caernarvon, Dunbarton, Selkirk, Peebles, Midlothian, Argyll, Sutherland and the Outer Hebrides. On the other hand, significant increases have taken place in the southern and eastern counties of England, and in parts of northern England and Scotland.

Research indicates, however, that despite the overall increase in the population, in excess of 3,000 mute swans continue to die each year from lead poisoning by anglers' lead shot.

The meeting also examined the position regarding non-toxic alternatives to lead shot. Significant progress has been made in developing substitutes. At least two products have been available since the beginning of the 1984 fishing season and a number of others are in various stages of development. Anglers have been testing the alternatives, as a result of which modifications have already been made. Further trials of new and improved products are taking place. The manufacturers and representatives of the national angling bodies have agreed to join together in a working group under the chairmanship of the Nature Conservancy Council to consider what can be done to further refine and encourage the use of non-toxic alternatives.

In the meantime, spill-proof dispensers, in which lead-shot is now widely sold, have been developed to reduce the spillage of shot on river banks. Other equipment has also been developed for use by anglers to retrieve discarded line and shot from river banks.

The Nature Conservancy Council is now considering the detailed evidence presented at its review meeting, and will report any recommendations to Ministers in due course.

Buildings of Architectural or Historical Interest

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in view of the substantial increase in the number of buildings in the list of buildings of architectural or historical interest as a result of the current resurvey, he has any proposals to increase funds available to the district councils to meet claims for grant-aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The purpose of the current survey is to identify buildings of outstanding architectural or historic interest. The size of the statutory list is expected

to increase from 280,000 buildings in 1982 to over 400,000 when completed in 1987, though this does not necessarily imply the need for a pro rata increase in grant aid, much of which in any case comes from the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. The levels of expenditure devoted to conservation by district councils is for them to decide in the light of their priorities and resources.

Local Government Act 1972

Mr. Norman Hogg asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions section 261 of the Local Government Act 1972, concerning remuneration of employees of existing local authorities outside Greater London, has been invoked; what were the circumstances on each occasion; and what was the result on each occasion.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

Water Authorities

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the letters from him to the chairmen of the English water authorities referred to in his reply of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *555*.

Mr. Gow: I am placing copies of the letters in the Library of the House.

Structure Plans

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* those structure plans submitted for approval to his Department over the past two years, indicating those for which an examination in public has already been held, together with those for which an examination in public is proposed and the date, where known, when each examination is expected to be held.

Mr. Macfarlane: The position is as indicated:

Structure plans	*Submitted*	*Examination in public*
Hereford and Worcester	February 1983	held October 1983
Warwickshire	October 1984	proposed June 1985
Alterations to approved plans		
South Wiltshire	April 1983	held November 1983
Central Berkshire	May 1983	dispensed with
West Midlands	June 1983	held December 1983
Cheshire	August 1983	held February/March 1984
Oxfordshire No. 2	December 1983	held September 1984
North East Hampshire	January 1984	held July 1984
South Hampshire	February 1984	held November/December 1984
Greater Manchester	March 1984	held November 1984
Derbyshire No. 2	March 1984	dispensed with
Bedfordshire No. 1	July 1984	*
Bedfordshire No. 2	September 1984	*
Greater London	October 1984	section 6(1)/Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 invoked
West Yorkshire	November 1984	*
Shropshire	December 1984	*
East Sussex No. 4	December 1984	*
West Sussex	January 1985	*
Tyne and Wear (Green Belt)	January 1985	*
North Yorkshire	January 1985	*

* Need for an examination in public under consideration.

Local Authorities (Mineral Resources)

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the work and future financing of the Natural Environment Research Council and role of the British Geological Survey and its assistance to local authorities over land, mineral resources and workings and onshore oil industry.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) will continue to receive a grant-in-aid from the Department's science budget, determined in the light of advice from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. This grant-in-aid is £65·9 million in 1984-85 and will be £67·3 million in 1985-86. The council also carries out research commissioned by Government Departments and other bodies, on the basis that the full economic cost of suchwork is borne by the commissioning body.

The British Geological Survey is one of the NERC's component institutes. As well as conducting research in the earth sciences, it provides advice to local authorities and Government Departments on geological matters including land structure, mineral resources and workings and the onshore oil industry. The NERC intends this service to continue.

Regional Emergency Committee

Mr. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if regional emergency committees will meet between 26 February and 16 March.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 31 January 1985, c. *279*]: The answer should read:

There are no plans to hold meetings of the regional emergency committees between 26 February and 16 March.

GLC (Research Library's Database)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times his Department has used the Greater London council research library's Acompline on-line database; and what arrangements will be made to ensure that its users continue to receive this service in the event of the Greater London council's abolition.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his reply*, 31 January 1985, c *281*]: The joint library of the Departments of the Environment and of Transport used the Acompline on-line database 97 times during 1983 and 1984. No decision has yet been reached on the future of the Greater London research library and the services it provides. A more forthcoming attitude by the GLC towards discussing the implications of the Government's abolition proposals would greatly help to reduce uncertainty in this and other areas.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how far the temperature would have to fall in the north, north-west and Yorkshire and Humberside regions in the months of December, January and February in order to trigger special payments for pensioners under the severe weather allowance scheme.

Mr. Whitney: Single payments may be awarded to supplementary benefit claimants who have used more fuel than they have budgeted for because of a period of exceptionally severe weather. The table shows the average weekly temperature — the average of the mean daily temperatures over seven days—which would be needed to reach the "trigger point" at which the Chief Adjudication Officer considers the "exceptionally severe weather" condition in the regulations to be satisfied, for each of the five weather stations used for the north and north-west of England, Yorkshire and Humberside.

Weather station	*Average weekly temperature necessary to reach "trigger point"* (°C)
Boulmer (Northumberland)	−1·9
Carlisle	−2·6
Finningley (South Yorkshire)	−1·6
Leeming (North Yorkshire)	−3·5
Manchester	−1·8

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing *(a)* the administrative costs of paying supplementary benefit to the unemployed for the years 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85 and *(b)* the administrative costs of paying unemployment benefit over the same period.

Mr. Whitney: Administrative costs cannot be allocated precisely to individual benefits, but the following figures give a rough indication:

£ million

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Unemployment benefit	110	140	130	130	145
Supplementary benefit to the unemployed	175	235	290	330	350

Hypothermia

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people died of hypothermia in 1982, 1983 and 1984

Mr. John Patten: The available information is shown in the table.

Deaths with mention of hypothermia, 1982 to 1984: England and Wales

Year	*Number*
1982	671
1983	539
1984*	*455

* Figures for 1984 are for January to September only.

"Sport for Positive Health"

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which regional health authorities are sponsoring "Sport for Positive Health" projects; and how much they are spending on which schemes.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally.

Community Health Centres

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many community health centres are *(a)* in existence and *(b)* in the planning stage; how these are, or are to be, funded and staffed; how many clients are, or are to be, served; what facilities or services are, or will be, provided; and what is their relationship to other health and local authority services.

Mr. John Patten: The most recent (1983) figures show that health authorities have provided 1,093 health centres, with 29 more in the planning stage. The services provided at any centre will be those normally available from general medical practitioners contracted to a family practitioner committee who wish to practice there; and community health services provided by staff employed by the health authority concerned, to the extent that it feels appropriate in the light of local needs and resources. Accommodation is sometimes provided for the staff of local authority social service departments, but that will depend upon local arrangements. Information is not collected centrally about the number of people served by health centres. This will depend upon the number of general practitioners based at each centre, and the local organisation of other services provided there.

Amenity and Pay Beds

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what was the number of National Health Service amenity beds, deaths and discharges of patients and average daily occupancy, giving numbers and percentages, for each region for each of the last five years; (2) what is the number of authorised National Health Service pay beds, deaths and discharges of patients, average daily occupancy, giving numbers and percentages, for each region for each of the last five years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of private hospitals which offer acute surgical care and the number of beds and the occupancy rate for all facilities offering such care by region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is not available in the exact form requested. I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply when 1983 information is available centrally.

Incontinence Pads

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the responsibilities of health authorities with regard to the supply of incontinence pads to parents of children incontinent by reason of physical or mental disability; and if he will give a summary of any guidance his Department has given to health authorities concerning appropriate levels of supply.

Mr. John Patten: Health authorities are empowered to supply incontinence pads to parents of incontinent children where the children live in their own homes. The extent to which they do so will depend upon local consideration of service priorities in the light of available resources. No specific guidance has been issued to health authorities concerning appropriate levels of supply, as a nursing assessment would normally be made of the needs of an individual child.

Thornton View Hospital, Bradford

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many patients in Thornton View hospital, Bradford, have died between October 1984 and the latest available date.

Mr. John Patten: We do not collect this sort of detailed local information centrally. The hon. Member may wish to seek information from the chairman of Bradford health authority.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from Bradford city council concerning Thornton View hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have had representations from the city solicitor who, I understand, was acting on the instructions of a sub-committee of Bradford city council, that the closure of the hospital should be delayed because population data used in the district health authority's plans were misleading. I have replied that I am satisfied that the new figures presented by the city council do not have any significant bearing on the decision, and that Bradford, with 45 per cent. more beds for elderly patients than the national average, will be able to provide satisfactory services to elderly people.

Dentists

Mrs. Currie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will show, for the year 1979 and for the most recent year available (i) the total number of dentists employed by, or under contract to, the National Health Service, (ii) the average income of a dentist under contract to the National Health Service, both in money and real terms and (iii) the total cost to the National Health Service of dentistry in money and real terms.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Currie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will show, for 1979 and for the most recent year available (i) the total number of general practitioner doctors under contract to the National Health Service, (ii) the average earnings of a general practitioner under contract to the National Health Service, (iii) the average list of patients served by such a general practitioner and (iv) the total cost to the National Health Service of general practitioner services in money and real terms.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The total number of general medical practitioners — unrestricted principals — in England was 21,357 in 1979 and 23,254 in 1983, the latest year for which figures are available. Average list sizes of patients per doctor were 2,286 in 1979 and 2,116 in 1983. The average intended net income for general medical practitioners in 1979-80 was £12,867, and in 1983-84 was £20,160 from 1 April 1983 and £20,670 from 1 January 1984. The total cost in England to the National Health Service of general medical services, including pharmaceutical services, net of charges was £1,219·6 million in 1979-80 and £2,183·0 million in 1983-84 — an increase of 23 per cent. in real terms.

Heating Costs

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what provision is made under his Department's regulations relating to special help with heating costs when the winter weather is very cold for those who have made purchases of discounted bulk solid fuel in the preceding summer months for consumption in the subsequent winter.

Mr. Whitney: In addition to the regular weekly help with fuel costs available through the supplementary benefit scheme, the regulations provide for single payments to be awarded to supplementary benefit claimants who have used more fuel than they have budgeted for because of a period of exceptionally severe weather. It is for the independent adjudication authorities to decide whether in a particular case the claimant is entitled to a payment under these provisions and, if so, how much. I understand that the Chief Adjudication Officer takes the view that a claimant who has bought solid fuel in sufficient bulk to last through a normal winter but who has used more than expected because of a period of

exceptionally severe weather and whose stocks are therefore used earlier than expected could be entitled to a single payment under these provisions. I also understand that he will be looking at the existing guidance in paragraphs 7426 to 7459 of the S Manual, a copy of which is in the Library, in the light of experience and will consider what further guidance should be given about entitlement of people who buy solid fuel in bulk.

Limited List Prescribing

Dr. Glyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider prolonging the period during which consultation can take place with the medical profession, the pharmaceutical industry and organisations representing patients regarding his proposed limited list of prescribable drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Almost three months have been allowed for consultation. We regard this as adequate and have no plans to extend it.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to publish his final limited list of drugs following the completion of the consultation period; and if he will accompany the final list with an explanation of any changes made as compared with the draft list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We shall make an announcement covering the point raised by the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Voluntary and Private Residential Home

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the numbers of people aged over 65 years in local authority, voluntary and private residential homes each year since 1976 to 1984.

Mr. John Patten: The Department's publication "Statistics of Residential Accommodation for the Elderly and for Younger Physically Handicapped People at 31 March 1983 — England", a copy of which is in the Library, contains the information requested in respect of accommodation for the elderly for the years 1976 to 1983 inclusive. The publication "Homes and Hostels for the Mentally Ill and Mentally Handicapped at 31 March 1983 — England", which is also in the Library, contains parallel information for the accommodation in question but is limited to residents sponsored or supported by local authorities. Information is not available centrally on those not so supported or sponsored. The corresponding provisional information for the position at 31 March 1984 is as follows:

Type of Home	*Total number of residents aged 65 or over in Homes for the Elderly/Disabled*	*Number of supported/sponsored residents aged 65 or over in homes for the:*		
		Elderly/Disabled	*Mentally Ill*	*Mentally Handicapped*
Local Authority	101,996	101,996	247	278
Voluntary	26,005	8,913	119	160
Private	52,675	1,394	72	88
Total	180,676	112,303	438	526

Post Neonatal Mortality

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what proposals he has, arising from the report on cot deaths, to ensure that parents and doctors are better informed about appropriate treatment for sick babies;

(2) what action he intends to take in the light of the statement in the report on cot deaths that many of the mothers whose babies died were heavy smokers, did not breast feed their babies and lived in poor housing and environmental conditions.

Mr. John Patten: The report of the DHSS-funded multicentre study of post-neonatal mortality has important implications and calls for a considered response by the professions as well as by the Department, which is holding a conference in March to promote a full discussion of the several issues raised. We hope that this will identify positive steps that can be taken in the fields of prevention and highlight areas for further research.

Cigarette Advertising and Sponsorship

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he intends to take to prevent a further renewal of current agreements on cigarette advertising and sponsorship.

Mr. John Patten: The Government will be reviewing the current voluntary agreements with the tobacco industry in due course.

Cigarette Smoking

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what new proposals he has to inform children of the dangers of cigarette smoking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Health Education Council, which is funded by the Government, has a substantial continuing programme concerned with alerting children to the health hazards of smoking. The work is carried forward through schools, the media, by special promotions such as the current "Pacesetters Don't Smoke" campaign and in other ways. A new television campaign, aimed at informing families as a whole of the special risks to health of cigarette smoking, is planned to start shortly. Research

has been commissioned by the Government and by the Health Education Council with the intention of finding more effective ways of discouraging children from smoking.

Child Benefit

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to introduce a two-tier child benefit system involving a higher benefit for low income families and a taxed benefit for high income families.

Mr. Whitney: Child benefit is within the scope of the social security review which is now being completed. We hope to be in a position to announce any proposals for change in the course of the next few months.

AIDS (Nurses)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service nurses have contracted acquired immune deficiency syndrome resulting from close contact with hospital patients suffering from this disease.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Dysentery

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of dysentery have been recorded during the last five years in the west midlands region; and what proportion of the number of cases on a national level these represent.

Mr. John Patten: The information is shown in the table.

*Number of notifications of dysentery in the West Midlands region and England and Wales, with West Midlands as a percentage of England and Wales, 1980 to 1984**

Year	*West Midlands*	*England and Wales*	*Per cent.*
1980	457	2,709	16·9
1981	446	3,401	13·1
1982	749	2,850	26·3
1983	395	5,004	7·9
1984*	563	7,697	7·3

* Provisional figures.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he proposes to take to combat the increase in the level of dysentery cases in the north of England; and what resources he will make available to northern district and regional health authorities to improve hygiene standards on housing estates in those areas worst affected.

Mr. John Patten: Higher levels of incidence of dysentery have been reported from two locations in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Experts in infectious diseases from the Government financed communicable disease surveillance centre (CDSC) have been in touch with the medical officers for environmental health who have responsibility for infectious disease control in these locations and have offered advice and guidance on control measures as appropriate. The CDSC is continuing to monitor the situation.

High standards of personal hygiene, including adequate handwashing with normal soap and water, is the key to the control of dysentery.

Food Supply Wastage (Hospitals)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what investigations he plans to conduct into the levels of provision of hot and cold foods served to patients and the quantities of food supply wastage within National Health Service hospitals.

Mr. John Patten: It is the responsibility of individual health authorities to ensure that they provide palatable and nutritious food for their patients economically and without undue waste of food. We plan shortly to publish the report of the National Health Service scrutiny on the cost of catering and shall be calling for action from health authorities to review their catering services and seek a reduction of food wastage.

Hospital Admissions and Operations

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what emergency procedures he plans to adopt to enable hospital admissions and operations to take place without hindrance in the event of extreme cold weather conditions.

Mr. John Patten: It is the responsibility of health authorities to manage and supervise hospital and specialist surgical services to meet local need. Arrangements for admissions to NHS hospitals for both medical and surgical procedures are planned to take into account circumstances which would significantly affect demand. We would expect extremes of weather conditions, epidemics, major accidents and natural disasters to be amongst the factors taken into account.

Nursing Staff

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of nursing staff in mental illness and mental handicap hospitals is, respectively, registered, enrolled, students, pupils or other categories.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is given in the table.

	England 30 September 1983	
	Mental Illness Hospitals‡ (per cent.)	*Mental Handicap Hospitals‡ (per cent.)*
All nursing staff*	100	100
First level (Registered) nurse†	35	25
Second level (Enrolled) nurse†	20	17
Students	12	8
Pupils	4	4
Other nursing staff	29	46

* The figures are based on whole-time equivalent numbers including tutorial staff but excluding administrative and agency staff.

† Includes first level nurses with and without the RMN or RNMH qualification and second level nurses with and without the EN(M) and EN(MH) qualification.

‡ Includes staff in mental and mental handicap units and wards within non-psychiatric hospitals.

Prescriptions

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the average number of prescriptions per patient a year within the National Health Service in each year since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The following is the information available:

Year	*Number of items dispensed per head**
1979	6·6
1980	6·6
1981	6·5
1982	6·8
1983	6·8

* The number of NHS prescribed items dispensed by retail pharmacists, appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and for personal administration by prescribing doctors in the calendar year divided by the number of patients registered on NHS general practitioner lists as at 30 September in that year.

Drug Prescribing Levels

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what studies he intends to conduct to examine the correlation of drug prescribing levels with delays in hospital treatment for patients within the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

General Practitioner Surgeries

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what resources he intends to make available to general practitioner surgeries to improve ease of access to premises, consulting room facilities, internal waiting areas and seating and standards of lighting, heating and ventilation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what responses he has received from the British Medical Association, the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress to the consultation paper issued by the Department of Health and Social Security on proposals to extend statutory sick pay for employees from eight weeks to 28 weeks.

Mr. Whitney: No responses from the British Medical Association and the Confederation of British Industry have yet been received to the consultation paper. Draft comments have been received from the Trades Union Congress. The TUC comments state that it does not oppose in principle the further extension of the coverage of statutory sick pay. It proposes that the rates of statutory sick pay should be increased and makes a number of comments on the individual points raised in the consultation paper. These will be carefully considered along with all the other representations received.

Abortions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown of the total number of abortions performed on women resident in England and Wales by the following gestational ages of the foetus: under nine weeks, nine weeks, 10 weeks, 11 weeks, 12 weeks, 13 weeks, 14 weeks, 15 to 19 weeks, 20 to 23 weeks, over 24 weeks in each of the following years: 1969, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is shown in the table.

Number of legal abortions by gestation, 1969, 1975, 1980-1983
Residents of England and Wales

Year	*Gestation (weeks)*										
	All	*Under 9*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15-19*	*20-23*	*24 and over*
1969	49,829	6,644	5,660	6,702	7,014	6,176	4,826	3,422	7,381	998	174
1975	106,224	25,028	17,614	17,546	14,276	10,179	6,292	3,864	6,658	847	124
1980	128,927	30,851	21,527	21,047	17,047	11,895	7,150	4,224	8,732	1,853	381
1981*	128,581	39,816	18,543	25,242	12,754	12,096	5,024	4,268	8,082	1,480	235
1982*	128,553	41,668	17,503	27,224	11,434	12,129	4,282	4,102	8,222	1,488	197
1983*	127,375	43,860	16,081	26,239	10,601	11,959	4,204	4,157	8,292	1,509	238

* Provisional.
From 1969 to 1980 gestation is calculated as the number of completed weeks between last menstrual period and date of operation. In March 1981 a new notification form was introduced which seeks a direct statement of gestation and the basis on which it is derived.
Not stated gestation is included in "All" gestation

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown by number of previous children of those women resident in England and Wales upon whom abortions were performed in each of the following years; 1969, 1970, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is as follows:

Number of legally induced abortions for all women resident in England and Wales by the number of previous live and stillborn children for 1969, 1970, 1974, 1978 and 1980 to 1983

Year	Total	Number of previous live and stillborn children						
		0	1	2	3	4	5+	Not stated
1969*	49,829	21,389	5,345	8,200	6,514	3,874	4,059	448
1970	75,962	33,069	8,118	12,560	9,989	5,996	5,485	745
1974	109,445	53,349	13,253	20,154	12,624	5,964	3,993	108
1978	111,851	57,840	14,416	20,942	11,152	4,375	2,539	587
1980	128,927	70,019	16,518	23,688	11,606	4,379	2,392	325
1981	128,581	67,400	16,746	23,498	11,050	3,882	1,979	4,026
1982	128,553	69,296	17,041	23,369	10,554	3,666	1,832	2,795
1983	127,375	69,979	17,030	22,412	10,109	3,475	1,755	2,615

* 1969 figures for previous liveborn children only.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown by marital status of the woman of the total number of abortions performed in each of the following years on resident women in England and Wales: 1969, 1970, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is shown in the table.

Number of legal abortions by marital status, 1969, 1970, 1974, 1979, 1980 to 1983 Resident of England and Wales

Year	Total	Marital status				
		Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced/ Separated	Not known
1969	49,829	22,287	22,979	464	3,955	144
1970	75,962	34,492	34,314	634	6,409	113
1974	109,445	53,321	45,102	718	10,190	114
1978	111,851	56,416	42,156	659	11,972	648
1980	128,927	68,756	44,253	667	14,008	1,243
1981	128,581	70,035	42,434	673	13,713	1,726
1982	128,553	71,836	40,510	579	13,732	1,896
1983	127,375	73,259	38,431	587	13,444	1,654

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown of the number of abortions performed in England and Wales on resident women according to the statutory grounds on which those abortions were performed in each of the following years: 1969, 1970, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983; and what was the total number of abortions performed on such women in each of those years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is shown in the table.

Abortions performed in England and Wales on resident women, 1969, 1970, 1974, 1978, 1980-83 by statutory grounds

Year	Statutory grounds								
	All	1	2	3	4	5	6	2 with 4	3 with other
1969	49,829	1,842	35,969	2,281	1,107	14	31	742	7,843
1970	75,962	2,163	57,021	3,486	1,225	10	35	823	11,199

Statutory grounds	Year					
	1974	1978	1980	1981	1982	1983
All	109,445	111,851	128,927	128,581	128,553	127,375
1 (With any other(s))	1,061	679	680	752	655	538
2 (Alone)	88,130	92,949	110,294	108,100	110,216	108,806
3 (With any other(s) except 1)	18,559	15,855	16,046	17,897	15,665	16,007
4 (With 2)	1,686	2,356	1,900	1,818	2,006	2,019
5 And/or 6	9	12	7	14	11	5

Notes:

Statutory grounds as listed in schedule 2 to the Abortion Regulations 1968

1. Risk to life of woman.
2. Risk of injury to physical or mental health of woman.
3. Risk of injury to physical or mental health of existing child(ren).
4. Substantial risk of child being born abnormal.
5. In emergency—to save life of woman.
6. In emergency—to prevent grave permanent injury to physical or mental health of woman.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of the abortions performed on women resident in England and Wales of foetuses aged *(a)* under 20 weeks, *(b)* 20 to 23 weeks, and *(c)* 24 and over weeks were carried out in (i) National Health Service premises and (ii) non-National Health Service premises in the latest year for which figures are available; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of abortions in each category.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is shown in the following table:

Legal abortions by gestation; numbers and percentages by category of premises, 1983 residents of England and Wales

Category of premises	All	Gestation (weeks) Under 20	20-23	24 and over
NHS				
Number	62,609	62,017	459	76
Percentage	49·2	49·4	30·3	31·9
Non-NHS				
Number	64,766	63,515	1,052	162
Percentage	50·8	50·6	69·7	68·1
Total				
Number	127,375	125,532	1,509	238
Percentage	100	100	100	100

Not stated gestation is included in All gestation.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown according to the statutory grounds on which abortions were performed on women resident in England and Wales where the foetus was aged 20 to 23 weeks and 24 weeks or more; and what each of these figures is as a percentage of the number of abortions of foetuses of these ages in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The latest available information is shown in the following table.

Abortions by gestation and statutory grounds for England and Wales residents, 1982

	Gestation (weeks) 20-23 Number	20-23 Percentage	24 and over Number	24 and over Percentage
Total	1,490	100	198	100
Statutory grounds*				
1. (with any other(s))	10	0·67	2	1·01
2. (alone)	1,119	75·10	149	75·25
3. (with or without 2)	75	5·03	3	1·52
4. (with any except 1)	284	19·06	41	20·71
5. or 6	2	0·13	3	1·52

* Grounds as listed in Schedule 2 of the Abortion Regulations 1968:
1. Risk to life of woman.
2. Risk of injury to physical or mental health of woman.
3. Risk of injury to physical or mental health of existing child(ren).
4. Substantial risk of child being abnormal.
5. In emergency—to save life of woman.
6. In emergency—to prevent grave permanent injury to physical or mental health of woman.

Live Births (Statistics)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state *(a)* the total number of live births, *(b)* the total number of illegitimate live births, *(c)* the ratio of live births to abortions, *(d)* the number of illegitimate births as a percentage of all live births for women who are aged (i) over 20 years and (ii) under 20 years, the resident in England and Wales in each of the following years; 1967, 1969, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The figures requested are shown in the table.

England and Wales

Year	Total live births*	Total illegitimate births*	Ratio of live births to abortions†	Illegitimate births as percentage of all live births
Women aged under 20				
1967	84,542	21,642	—	25·6
1969	81,659	21,626	8·8	26·5
1974	68,724	20,861	2·5	30·4
1978	55,984	21,643	2·4	38·7
1980	60,754	25,860	1·7	42·6
1982	55,435	28,739	1·6	51·8
1983	54,059	30,423	1·5	56·3
Women aged 20 and over				
1967	747,622	48,286	—	6·5
1969	715,879	45,415	17·6	6·3
1974	571,161	35,625	7·0	6·2
1978	540,434	38,994	6·1	7·2
1980	595,480	51,512	6·4	8·7
1982	570,496	61,118	6·1	10·7
1983	575,075	68,788	6·2	12·0

* Including a small number of births registered in England and Wales to women resident outside the country.
† Abortions under the 1967 Abortion Act.

Employment Benefit Offices (Terminals and Microcomputers)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why a United States computer company was awarded a contract to supply terminals and microcomputers to employment benefit offices.

Mr. Whitney: The award of contract followed a competitive procurement exercise conducted in accordance with European Community directives and the general agreement on tariffs and trade code on Government procurements. It was therefore open equally to British and foreign companies to apply and be considered in the normal way.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 4 February 1985

HOME DEPARTMENT

Official Secrets Act

59. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to repeal section 2 of the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Mellor: No.

Terrorist Offences (Statistics)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average period between remand and trial for prisoners refused bail and charged with offences related to terrorism in Great Britain in 1984; and how many prisoners were held in this manner.

Mr. Mellor: The only information which is readily available concerning prisoners charged with terrorist-type offences relates to prisoners who are currently in prison custody in England and Wales and in category A. It does not cover prisoners who have been released or downgraded.

In 1984, 14 prisoners were first received in custody charged with terrorist-type offences and placed in category A. As at 25 January 1985 none of the trials of these men had been completed.

Day Centres (Attendance)

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation orders had conditions of attendance at a day centre attached since the Criminal Justice Act 1982 conditions came into force.

Mr. Mellor: Figures reported by the probation service and published in table 2.8 of "Probation Statistics, England and Wales, 1983" are available only for the first half of 1983; owing to industrial action by some probation officers corresponding figures are not available for the second half of 1983 and will not be available for 1984. It is estimated that some 500-600 probation orders imposed in the period 31 January-31 December 1983 included a requirement to attend a day centre.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* murderers of police and prison officers, *(b)* sexual or sadistic murderers of children and *(c)* people who have committed murder by shooting in the furtherance of theft were in prison at the most recent convenient date.

Mr. Mellor: I will reply as soon as possible.

Probation Orders

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation orders were made in the years ended December 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" (tables 7.1 and 7.2 of the volume for 1983, Cmnd. 9349). Corresponding information for 1984 is not yet available.

Drugs Misuse

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much heroin, cocaine, marijuana and other illicit drugs were seized by police, customs or other officers during the calendar year 1984; and if he will give this information together with comparable figures for the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: I understand from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the latest figures of seizures by Customs officials are as given in the table below. Information on seizures by the police in the years 1979 to 1983 is given in Table 1.3 of "Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs, United Kingdom, Supplementary Tables 1983", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House; corresponding figures for 1984 will be available later in the year.

Seizures by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise of controlled drugs

United Kingdom — *Kilogrammes*

Drug type	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984**
Cocaine	21·6	35·7	13·6	12·1	73·3	34·8
Heroin	40·3	38·1	87·2	183·2	212·5	299·0
Morphine	2·4	6·4	6·1	2·2	0·5	0·7
Opium	60·3	30·2	9·9	18·6	2·9	5·6
LSD	—†	0·002	0·001	0·003	0·010	0·003
Cannabis	6,402·7	18,082·3	16,579·0	12,603·5	14,242·2	15,774·4
Cannabis resin	5,227·0	7,406·0	7,536·1	3,793·3	6,429·9	9,102·1
Cannabis liquid	40·6	122·6	73·5	28·5	20·2	27·6‡
Amphetamine	0·1	0·3	8·3	2·2	13·0	16·1

* Provisional
† Less than ½ gramme
‡ In addition 2·2 litres of cannabis liquid were seized for which a weight is not available

Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the provisions of the Repatriation of Prisoners Act will come into operation.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to make an order bringing the Act into operation before the end of March. The United Kingdom will then ratify the Council of Europe convention of the transfer of sentenced persons. The convention will come into force three months after three member states of the council have ratified it; so far only one has done so.

European Assembly

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of the European Assembly who represent constituencies in the United Kingdom are not citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not recorded.

Television Licences (Evasion)

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prosecutions took place for television licence evasion in 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984;

(2) how many people were found guilty of evading television licences in 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The number of prosecutions and convictions were as follows:

	prosecutions	*convictions*
1981	67,803	67,299
1982	81,247	80,979
1983	94,111	93,827
1984	109,143	108,830

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much revenue resulted from fines paid for television licence evasion in 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I regret that information in respect of revenue resulting from fines for particular types of offence is not available centrally.

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation that will allow compensation to be given to the British Broadcasting Corporation for revenue lost due to television licence evasion.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to do so.

Probation Officers (Reports)

Mr. Spencer asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases in each of the last three years probation officers have refused to provide courts with social inquiry reports on the ground that the offender had been convicted of a political offence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not available, but I am not aware that this is an issue which has caused significant difficulties for the courts. The recent instance which I believe my hon. Friend has in mind was an isolated one, in which a satisfactory solution has been found.

Charities

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to introduce amendments to the law relating to charities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to introduce amendments to the law relating to charities but he is keeping the situation under review.

Cruelty to Animals Act 1876

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is now his Department's latest position with regard to the updating and modernisation of the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876.

Mr. Mellor: We shall introduce legislation as soon as Parliamentary time permits. We have been refining some of our proposals and will announce details shortly.

Experiments on Living Animals

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the reasons for the increase in experiments on living animals in 1983 over 1982 of 23 per cent. in household chemicals experiments.

Mr. Mellor: Experiments with household substances are performed for the purpose of safety testing. The increase in the number of experiments in 1983 reflects a greater need for such tests. The total number of experiments with household substances, however, remains a very small proportion of the total, ie 17,153 out of 3·6 million in 1983 (less than half of one per cent.).

Abortion

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences were recorded for procuring illegal abortions in each of the following years: 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1982 and 1983; in how many of these cases prosecutions were proceeded with; and how many convictions resulted in each of those years.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" under offence classification 14; in the volume for 1983 statistics of offences recorded by the police are given in table 2.8 of Cmnd. 9349 and statistics of persons proceeded against and found guilty are given in Supplementary tables, vol. 1, table S1.1(A) for magistrates' courts and vol. 2, table S2.1(A) for the Crown court. Figures for the earlier years specified are given in the following table.

Offences of procuring an illegal abortion recorded by the police, persons proceeded against and persons found guilty England and Wales

	Offences recorded by the police	*Persons proceeded against at magistrates' courts*	*Persons found guilty at all courts*
1965	184	61	60
1970	212	49	41
1975	14	1	1

Winson Green Prison

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list in the *Official Report* the religious faiths represented by the eight ministers accredited to visit inmates at Winson Green prison in Birmingham.

Mr. Mellor: The eight visiting ministers currently accredited at Winson Green prison in Birmingham represent Buddhists, Christian Scientists, Jews, Muslims, Pentecostal Church, Quakers, Salvation Army and Sikhs.

Assisted Visits Scheme

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Giros and tavel warrants were issued under the assisted visits scheme during the financial year 1983-84.

Mr. Mellor: The Department of Health and Social Security, which administers the assisted visits scheme on behalf of the Home Office, made 29,027 Giro transactions and issued 28,710 travel warrants during 1983-84.

Women Prisoners

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the numbers of women in prison at the latest available date who had their children with them; and what were their location, the ages of the children and the sentence being served by the mother and the offence she had committed or was alleged to have committed.

Mr. Mellor: On 1 February 1985, there were 21 women in custody with their children. The establishment, age of children and sentence details of the mothers are as follows:

Establishment	*Age of Child*	*Mother's Offence*	*Mother's Sentence*
Askham Grange (11)	2 months	Theft	15 months
	3 months	Obtaining by deception	19 months
	4 months	Theft	12 months
	6 months	Obtaining by false instrument	3 years
	6 months	Deception	6 months
	6 months	Deception	6 months
	8 months	Theft	6 months
	11 months	Illegal importation of drugs	3 years
	12 months	Robbery	2 years
	13 months	Illegal importation of drugs	15 months
	15 months	Deception	18 months
East Sutton Park (1)	6 months	Theft	12 months
Holloway (4)	6 weeks	Illegal importation of drugs	20 months
	6 weeks	Supplying drugs	18 months
	3½ months	Illegal importation of drugs	Trial
	4½ months	Shoplifting	28 days
Styal (5)	1 month	Possession and supplying of drugs	9 months
	2 months	Possession of drugs	12 months
	3 months	Illegal importation of drugs	2 years
	3 months	Illegal importation of drugs	6 months
	5 months	Illegal importation of drugs	18 months

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors are taken into account when deciding to separate a child from its mother who is in prison.

Mr. Mellor: The prison department's policy on this matter is set out in circular instruction 51/1983, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. If the hon. Member has any particular point in mind I would be glad to look into it.

Horses

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek powers to prevent suffering to horses tethered out in the open without proper food and shelter.

Mr. Mellor: No. It is already an offence under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 to cause unnecessary suffering to a domestic or captive animal.

LD 50 Poisoning Test

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek powers to prohibit the use of the LD 50 poisoning test.

Mr. Mellor: The Government welcome the growing recognition by the scientific community and regulatory bodies that formal LD 50 tests are increasingly not necessary. Where they are shown to be necessary, however, they will continue to be allowed, subject to strict controls. Wherever possible a limit test or some other alternative method should be employed.

Advisory Committee on Animal Experiments

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reconstitute the Home Office advisory committee on animal experiments to exclude those with any involvement in, or connection with, vivisection.

Mr. Mellor: No.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek powers to prohibit the use of animals in tobacco and alcohol research.

Mr. Mellor: No. Work related to tobacco and alcohol has implications for pharmacological and medical research which go beyond the needs of those who actually drink and smoke; and its continuance, subject to proper controls, is necessary for those purposes.

There is very little research into tobacco and its substitutes — only 2,659 experiments in 1983 which made it the smallest research category. Work on alcohol is indistinguishable from other medical research. As it is one of our major medical and social problems it would be difficult to stop it on the grounds of triviality; and, like tobacco, it has consequences for those who do not consume it which undermines the argument that its ills are entirely self-induced and should not be mitigated at the expense of living animals.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek powers to prohibit the use of animals to test cosmetics and toiletries.

Mr. Mellor: No. The Government have a duty to comply with the provisions of EC directives and to ensure that safe products are marketed. The number of cosmetics and toiletries tests represents less than half of 1 per cent. of all those performed, and has declined steadily in recent years. We welcome that decline. Under the new legislation proposed in the White Paper "Scientific Procedures of Living Animals" (Cmnd. 8883), however, all applications for project licences to test cosmetics and toiletries will automatically be referred to the proposed Animal Procedures Committee for advice as to whether the tests should be permitted.

ENERGY

National Coal Board (Finances)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give, in a similar form to that used in his answer of 6 July 1984 to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Proctor) the income and expenditure of the National Coal Board for 1983-84, indicating the loss and his Departments' level of subsidy.

Mr. David Hunt: In 1983-84 the income of the National Coal Board was £5,028 million (including adjustments for taxation, extraordinary items and exchange losses). Of this, social grants were £270 million. Expenditure in the year including interest was £5,903 million. Deficit grant was £875 million.

These figures, which are taken from the NCB report and accounts, are not directly comparable with those given in the answer of 6 July 1984, due to changes in definition. Nor do they cover the full extent of Exchequer payments in support of the coal industry, some of which do not pass through the books of the National Coal Board.

Mr. Ian MacGregor

Mr. Holye asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library a copy of the full text of the compensation agreement between Her Majesty's Government and Lazard Frères for the release of Mr. Ian MacGregor to become chairman of the National Coal Board.

Mr. David Hunt: No. I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply of 30 October 1984 at columns *879-80*.

Libyan Oil

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy what have been the amounts of Libyan oil imported into the United Kingdom, both in quantity and as a proportion of total oil imported, in each of the years from 1979 to date.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Information about the amounts of oil which have been imported into the United Kingdom is provided in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", which is available in the Library of the House.

Sleipner Gas

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will undertake not to reject the Sleipner deal until his revised estimates of gas reserves on the United Kingdom continental shelf are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: In considering the proposed purchase of Sleipner gas, I shall take account of all relevant factors.

Coal Industry (Assets)

Mr. Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Energy if there have been any discussions between his Department and the National Coal Board regarding proposals to sell any of the principal assets of the coal industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government have no plans to privatise coal mines, and no discussions of any such proposals have taken place between my Department and the NCB.

Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, in the light of the European collaborative agreement on fast breeder reactors, he will propose that the creation of the European nuclear fuel reprocessing plant should be at Dounreay in Caithness: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend intends to make a statement on this matter in due course.

Thermal Energy

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the definition of thermal energy generation employed by his Department or the agencies sponsored by it; and if he will explain how the thermal energy generation figures are determined.

Mr. David Hunt: This Department does not use the expression "thermal energy generation": the Department and the various electricity undertakings use a number of

definitions for the description of electricity generation in thermal power stations, depending on the context. The terms used in published statistics are usually defined in the publications in which they appear.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Agricultural Production

57. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the Overseas Development Administration funds is spent on raising agricultural production in developing countries.

Mr. Raison: In 1983, the latest year for which the relevant figures are available, total aid programme expenditure was £1,170 million, of which £1,034 million can be allocated by sector. Of this latter figure, an estimated 26 per cent. (or about £267 million) was spent on bilateral or multilateral aid activities aimed at raising agricultural production. Aid to other sectors, for example, roads, may well also help increase agricultural production.

Agricultural Development

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conveniently available figures he has for that part of the United Kingdom long-term aid programme to agriculture in developing countries which is designed to make developing countries more self-sufficient.

Mr. Raison: There is no separate British aid programme for agricultural development. Most aid for this and other economic sectors is provided under individual country programmes. The following table provides details of expenditure (for the three latest available years) on bilateral project aid by detailed sector, and on other identifiable bilateral or multilateral aid benefiting agriculture. All such aid is designed to improve developing countries' self-sufficiency either directly through improved food production or indirectly through improved national incomes and greater foreign exchange earnings. Other projects, for instance roads, may have a significant bearing on agricultural development.

Expenditure on project aid to agriculture by detailed sector

Sector	*1981* £	*1982* £	*1983* £
Crop production	229,184	56,246	—
Livestock	275,919	999,675	410,256
Fertilisers	—	—	5,488,992
Farm equipment	4,129	306,672	122
Seeds	11,708	5,396	—
Fruits and berries	763,000	—	1,813,000
Rubber	4,622,000	4,735,000	8,255,000
Sugar	7,483,000	3,099,065	4,352,774
Coffee/cocoa/tea	4,109,373	3,947,452	4,431,192
Oil products	1,997,599	429,004	8,016,477
Agric services	233,931	228,327	214,707
Hunting and trapping	5,573	319	—
Agric development	1,925,338	2,180,716	3,094,138
Agric research	169,687	187,725	103,541
Livestock research	—	—	251,425
Agro-industries	—	268,000	—
Agro-related education	15,207	55,818	263,801
Agricultural extension	502,303	1,658,410	2,495,724
Livestock services	344,655	547,519	346,935
Agriculture and livestock	22,692,606	18,705,344	39,538,084
Agricultural water resources	4,510,100	6,233,290	5,205,698
Land development/ reclamation	4,437,302	1,408,044	1,295,490
Land settlement/ compensation	2,130,212	4,776,962	2,980,924
Land survey	115,174	100	207,455
Land development and irrigation	11,188,788	12,418,396	9,689,567
Natural fertiliser mining	—	—	615,409
Fruit/vegetable preserving	128,000	—	—
Oils and fats	689,144	2,164,000	90,000
Grain mill products	—	1,450,000	1,150,000
Sugar refineries	1,032,453	355,200	2,575,764
Animal feeds	92,770	4,339	—
Agricultural processing	1,942,367	3,973,539	3,815,764
Fertilisers	70,042,778	17,381,046	8,428,384
Agricultural storage	1,972,589	1,556,860	50,645
Cold storage	—	—	76,500
Agricultural development banks	11,600,000	10,500,000	39,950,000
Total agriculture	119,439,128	64,535,185	102,164,353
Other identifiable aid to agriculture			
Bilateral			
Agricultural R and D	9,306,000	9,170,000	11,179,000
Land Resources Development Centre	840,000	769,000	891,000
Multilateral			
International Agricultural Research	2,925,000	3,765,000	4,000,000
FAO (developmental share only)	538,000	1,672,000	1,852,000
IFAD	881,000	2,110,000	3,552,000

It is not possible to give figures for manpower and training aid to agriculture which is designed to make countries more self-sufficient.

Equally, Britain's contributions to the EDF, IDA, Regional Development Banks and the UNDP will be used in part for agricultural self-sufficiency, but there are no figures available.

South Pacific (Cyclones)

58. **Mr. Key** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to assist south Pacific countries affected by recent cyclones.

Mr. Raison: Within 24 hours of each cyclone we made cash grants for relief aid, of £50,000 to Fiji and about £43,000 to Vanuatu. I have also authorised an allocation of up to £700,000 for rehabilitation of key services in Fiji.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Judicial Review

52. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Attorney-General how many appeals against the refusal of leave to apply for judicial review were heard, allowed and dismissed by the Court of Appeal during the years 1980 to 1984, respectively.

The Attorney-General: I regret that no figures are available for 1980 to 1982. In 1983, 27 appeals were

heard. 21 were dismissed, three were allowed but the applications were subsequently withdrawn, and no order was made in three cases. In 1984 35 appeals were heard, 31 were dismissed and four allowed, of which in one case the application was withdrawn, one dismissed and two are still pending.

Official Secrets Act

53. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Attorney-General how many prosecutions he has initiated under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act in the last two years.

The Attorney-General: Since 4 Februrary 1983 I have authorised eight such prosecutions.

Terrorists (Evidence)

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General how many people have been convicted on the evidence of converted terrorist witnesses; in how many cases this evidence was corroborated by other evidence, other than the evidence of another converted terrorist; and in how many cases the evidence of the converted terrorist constituted the sole evidence of the existence of the crime itself.

The Attorney-General: In so far as the question relates to the evidence of accomplices in trials for scheduled offences, the number of persons who were either convicted or pleaded guilty in consequence of evidence given by such accomplices is as follows:

Year	*Number of persons*
1982	4
1983	69
1984	11

In 1984 the convictions of 14 of the persons tried in 1983 were quashed on appeal to the Court of Appeal.

There is no comprehensive record of, and it is not now feasible to identify without disproportionate cost, the matters which may have been before the court for the purposes of individual charges or whether they were capable of constituting corroboration.

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General how many people currently await trial on the evidence of converted terrorists; what proportion of these persons have been refused bail; and what is the average period of remand for which persons detained without bail have been held to date after being charged on the evidence of a converted terrorist irrespective of whether that person has yet been brought to trial.

The Attorney-General: There are at present 46 persons awaiting trial whose prosecution has been directed by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland and in respect of whom the chief constable has furnished evidence which includes the evidence of an alleged accomplice. Of these 46 persons, 25 have been admitted to bail, one did not apply for bail and 20 have been refused bail. Of the 20 persons who have been refused bail, five have been in custody since July 1983, three since August 1983, nine since October 1983 and the remaining three since February, March and April 1984 respectively.

Land Registry Fees

Mr. Murphy asked the Attorney-General if he has any plans to reduce Land Registry fees; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: It is intended to reduce the fees on dealings and first registrations and to exempt some services from fees altogether with effect from 1 June.

Jury vetting

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Attorney-General if he will name the cases tried since 1 August 1980 in which jury vetting has occurred, and specify the offences charged and the results of the trials.

The Attorney-General: Jury vetting has occurred in the cases detailed in the following table:

Name(s) of accused	*Offence(s) charged*	*Venue and date of commencement of trial*	*Result*
Brian Keenan Robert Campbell Margaret Parrett Jacqueline O'Malley Richard Glenholmes Christine Cambell Gerard Tuite Robert Storey	Conspiracy to effect escape from prison Firearms offences	Central Criminal Court on 17 March 1981	5 defendants convicted
Antonio Sanchez and Luis Garcia	Sections 1 and 7 of the Officials Secrets Act 1911	Central Criminal Court on 9 June 1982	Both convicted
Hugh G. Hambleton	Section 1 of the Official Secrets Act 1911	Central Criminal Court on 29 November 1982	Convicted
John McCombe	Conspiracy to cause explosions. Possession of explosive/firearms	Central Criminal Court on 9 May 1983	Convicted
Michael Bettaney	Section 1 of the Official Secrets Act 1911	Central Criminal Court on 10 April 1984	Convicted
Clive Ponting	Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911	Central Criminal Court on 28 January 1985	Case proceeding
Khaled Mansoor Mohammed Shleback Khalifi Arouzoz Abu Shnayb	Sections 2 and 3 of the Explosive Substances Act 1883	Manchester Crown Court on 4 February 1985	Case proceeding

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Attorney-General whether, since 1 August 1980, jury vetting has been approved in any case in which national security was not involved, or in which the jury was not asked to sit in camera.

The Attorney-General: Since 1 August 1980 jury vetting has been authorised in five cases which did not or do not involve matters of national security. In each case the alleged offences were of a terrorist nature and the grant of authority accorded with paragraph 4 of the guidelines which I published on that day. In each case where authority was based upon consideration of national security part of the evidence was taken in camera. Two of the five cases have yet to come to trial.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Attorney-General how many records have been forwarded to him in accordance with paragraph 12 of his guidelines on jury checks (as amended in July 1980); and if he will make a statement as to *(a)* how many jurors are referred to in those records and *(b)* the use made by counsel of the information passed to him.

The Attorney-General: Five reports have been made by the Director of Public Prosecutions to the Attorney-General in accordance with paragraph 12 of the guidelines. A total of 10 jurors were referred to in these reports. Of these, three were challenged by the Crown and one was challenged by the defence as a result of information passed to it in consequence of the report in that case.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Attorney-General whether any person has been excluded from a jury by approved jury vetting on the grounds of his actual or suspected membership of a political party, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or the National Council for Civil Liberties; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. and learned Member to paragraph 5 of the guidelines published on 1 August 1980, which sets out the circumstances in which the holding of extreme political views may make it desirable to exclude an individual from jury service in certain exceptional cases of public importance.

Membership of a particular political party or the organisations referred to by the hon. Member does not constitute grounds for challenging a potential juror.

PRIME MINISTER

Foreign Exchange Markets (American Intervention)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister whether she asked the President of the United States for American intervention in the foreign exchange markets to support the sterling exchange rate.

The Prime Minister: Discussions between Heads of Government remain confidential.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister whether the Government will appoint a committee of inquiry to consider why imports of manufactures are rising faster than exports.

The Prime Minister: No. Trends in trade in manufactured goods are kept under regular review by the Department of Trade and Industry. In addition, trade in manufactured goods with the EC has recently been considered by the House of Commons Trade and Industry Committee and the trade balance in manufactured goods is currently the subject of an inquiry by the House of Lords Select Committee on Overseas Trade.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister if she will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in the unit value and volume of imported manufactures since 1970 and 1978, respectively.

The Prime Minister: The information is as follows:

Imports of manufactures

Percentage changes over periods	*Unit value indices*	*Volume indices*
1970-1984	+336	+194
1978-1984	+52	+47

Chemical Warfare

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister whether it was with her authority that Mr. Bernard Ingham contacted Independent Television News during the evening of Wednesday 9 January about coverage of the Government's attitude towards British manufacturing of a chemical warfare retaliatory capability.

The Prime Minister: Mr. Ingham acts in accordance with the duties of his office.

Channel Crossing

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if her discussions with President Mitterand on a possible Channel tunnel and road link produced a common position as to the side of the road on which motorists would drive in any such road tunnel; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have not discussed this question with the French President.

GCHQ Cheltenham

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister whether there has been any change in the positive vetting procedures carried out with respect to employees at the Government communications headquarters, Cheltenham.

The Prime Minister: As a result of its investigations into the case of Geoffrey Arthur Prime, the Security Commission recommended, and the Government subsequently accepted, a number of improvements to the positive vetting procedures used by GCHQ and other intelligence and security agencies. Changes have been made to implement these recommendations.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister why staff at the Government communications headquarters, Cheltenham, have been questioned about their attitudes to herself as part of the positive vetting procedure.

The Prime Minister: Positive vetting investigators have discretion, in the course of interviews with subjects under investigation, to discuss and to put questions on topics of current political interest with a view to ascertaining whether the subject has, or may be likely to have, extreme views or associations of a kind which might suggest that he or she would not be suitable for employment in a post which required regular and constant

access to highly classified information, the improper disclosure of which could be damaging to the security of the state. Such questions have no other purpose than that, and the expression of views which may not coincide with those of the Government of the day has no bearing on or relevance to an investigation unless it appears to the investigator to go beyond the normal expression of dissent in a parliamentary democracy.

All that being said, I do not think it necessary or appropriate for investigators to put questions of the kind suggested by the hon. Member. If such questions have been put, it is without my knowledge or consent, and I have given instructions for my views to be made clear to the investigators concerned.

Falkland Islands and South Georgia

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government have sought outside legal advice as to the comparative validity of the United Kingdom's constitutional and territorial claims to the Falkland Islands and South Georgia, respectively; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Communications between the Government and legal advisers are confidential and it would not be in accordance with the practice in matters such as this to disclose the source of the advice which the Government have received.

The Government have stated on numerous occasions that they have no doubt about British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands or the Falkland Islands Dependencies.

Plutonium

Mr. Robertson asked the Prime Minister if the statement made by the right hon. Member for Kinross and West Perthshire on 21 April 1964, *Official Report*, column 1098, regarding the use of civil plutonium in the United Kingdom and the use by the United States Government of civil plutonium received from the United Kingdom, still represents the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

The Prime Minister: Her Majesty's Government have no plans for using plutonium derived from the United Kingdom's civil nuclear programmes for defence purposes. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy informed Parliament of the United States' policy in answer to a question from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 2 July 1984 at column *36*.

Ministerial Cars

Dr. Marek asked the Prime Minister who pays the penalties imposed on ministerial cars which have committed parking offences.

The Prime Minister: If the offences are related to Departmental business the cost of the penalty is currently met by the Government car service.

Correspondence

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will place in the *Official Report* a copy of her letter to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley of 29 January.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Dear Mr. Foulkes,

Thank you for your letter of 11 January about the licence granted to Firstland Oil and Gas plc for onshore oil prospecting on the Falklands. The granting of this licence was confirmed on 23 July 1984 by Mr. Ray Whitney, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in reply to a Parliamentary Question. A subsequent letter from Tim Renton, his successor, to Mr. Tam Dalyell about the details of the contract was published in Hansard on 25 October 1984.

You asked why the matter was "solely for the Falkland Islands Government". The granting of the licence falls within the powers of the Civil Commissioner under the Falkland Islands Mining Ordinance. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has the power only to approve the terms and conditions and the period of validity of the licence. Such approval was given.

You also asked about the resources of the Falkland Islands Government to assess applications for oil and gas prospecting in the Falklands. The Falkland Islands Government can call on the full resources of Her Majesty's Government, by means of consultation with the Department of Energy through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

As for the date of establishment of Firstland Oil and Gas plc, the company was established in May 1984. I understand that it then took over all the assets of Campatou, the foreign-based company to which you referred, which has been engaged in oil exploration since 1981, principally in Texas and Oklahoma in the United States. Lest there should be any misunderstanding I should emphasise that Firstland is incorporated in the UK, and that its directors are British nationals with experience in oil and gas exploration. Firstland has an option to buy land owned by Falkland Islands Properties, which as you say is registered in Jersey. The prospecting rights of Firstland were granted to it by the licence from the Falkland Islands Government.

You state that Firstland's operations in the Falklands are being conducted by their subsidiary company Campatou. I understand that the only operation so far carried out under the licence is a survey conducted in November and December last year by a British geologist employed by one of the leading British companies active in this field, and that Campatou has not been involved in any way.

You asked finally what guarantee there was that revenue from a successful oil strike would accrue to the Falklands or to the UK. The provisions of the Falkland Islands Mining (Mineral and Oil) Regulations ensure that revenue would accrue to the Falkland Islands Government to which, under the terms of the licence granted to Firstland, rent (and any royalties due in respect of oil or gas extracted) are payable.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Thatcher

Falkland Islands

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will deposit in the Library a copy of the Falkland Islands Mining (Minerals and Oil) Regulations.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister what is *(a)* the yearly rent and *(b)* the rate of royalties payable on oil extracted, imposed in the licence granted to Firstland Oil and Gas plc.

The Prime Minister: As stipulated in the Falkland Islands Mining (Mineral Oil) Regulations 1964, the licence provides for an annual rent for each square mile of the licensed area at the following rates:

	Rent
1st year of initial term	50 pence
2nd year of initial term	£1.00
3rd year of initial term	£1.50

	Rent
4th year of initial term	£1.75
1st year of renewal	£2.00
2nd year of renewal	£2.25
3rd year of renewal	£2.50

It also provides for a royalty of 12½ per cent. of the value of all crude oil won and saved and of all casinghead petroleum spirit recovered by Firstland Oil and Gas plc from the licensed area; and a royalty of 5 per cent of the value of all natural gas produced and sold from the licensed area. The rent paid in the relevant year is deducted from the amount of royalities so payable.

Press Briefings

Mr. Madden asked the Prime Minister if she will give details of the regular arrangements under which she, or her officials, brief journalists each week; and if she will give details of the arrangements whereby her ministerial colleagues, or their officials, regularly brief journalists.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Madden asked the Prime Minister if she will make it her policy to arrange for the preparation of an official public record of any part of briefings with journalists given by her, her ministerial colleagues, or their officials, which are conducted on an attributable basis.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Madden asked the Prime Minister what representations Ministers have received from parliamentary journalists seeking briefings from them, or their officials, on an attributable basis.

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of any. My office has, however, received a report of the parliamentary lobby journalists' inquiry into lobby practice. This recommended enabling Ministers, among others, to speak on the record in a lobby briefing if that is mutually agreed. My colleagues and I have taken note of this opportunity.

Mr. Madden asked the Prime Minister if she will instruct all Ministers who brief journalists that such briefings should be conducted on an attributable basis and that all briefings held by departmental officials should be conducted on the same basis.

The Prime Minister: No.

Information Officers

Mr. Madden asked the Prime Minister what is the total number of officials in her Office and in Government Departments who are designated as information officers, or who are primarily concerned with giving information to the media; and what is the total cost, including salaries, of those officials.

The Prime Minister: In all Government Departments there are currently 998 staff in the information officer group and 58 associated senior staff in the open structure. Their annual costs are estimated to be £26·9 million, including salaries, and overheads for accommodation and common services.

Information officers are engaged on a wide variety of duties including press office work, Government publicity at home and abroad, and internal information. There are no central records of the number of staff in other grades whose duties involve giving information to the media.

Five members of staff in my office have responsibilities for giving information to the media.

Parliamentary Questions (Forestry)

Mr. Dewar asked the Prime Minister if she will list the matters on which *(a)* the Secretary of State for Scotland, *(b)* the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, *(c)* the Secretary of State for Wales and *(d)* the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, respectively, answer parliamentary questions on matters relating to forestry.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Wales excercise their responsibilities for forestry matters in relation to Scotland, England and Wales respectively. General policy and other questions relating to Great Britain as a whole are normally answered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland deals with all matters relating to forestry in Northern Ireland.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Natural Environment Research Council (Chairmanship)

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements he proposes to make for the future chairmanship of the Natural Environment Research Council.

Mr. Brooke: The Department has appointed a firm of consultants, Messrs. John Stork and Partners, to help in the selection of a chairman of the Natural Environment Research Council from 1 October 1985. My right hon. Friend hopes to be in a position to announce the name of the individual concerned in the summer.

Alpha Research

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement giving conveniently approximate figures as to how many alpha research projects were rejected in 1984 by the Natural Environment Research Council.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that 157 research grant applications graded alpha were rejected by the Natural Environment Research Council in the calendar year 1984. This represents 58 per cent. of the total number of grant applications (270) which were graded alpha.

Educational Needs (Statements)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children in ordinary schools have statements of their educational needs as required under the Education Act 1981.

Mr. Dunn: I am writing to the hon. Member.

Value Added Tax (Publications)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what assessment he has made of the implications of the imposition of value added tax on

books and other publications on *(a)* public library usage and *(b)* book provision;

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications of the imposition of value added tax on the level of purchases of books and other publications by students.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have been asked to reply.

I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Nottinghamshire (School Milk)

Mr. Alexander asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many school-age children in Nottinghamshire receive free or subsidised milk in *(a)* county council maintained and *(b)* private schools.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

Claims received to date from the Nottinghamshire county council for the 1983-84 school year have been for the following amounts:

	£
(a) maintained schools	410,208
(b) non-maintained schools	9,328

Mr. Alexander asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much European Economic Community subsidy is paid to Nottinghamshire county council to provide milk to pupils in *(a)* county council maintained and *(b)* private schools.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that the information requested is not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Sugar Products

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the concentration ratio for the top two, three and four firms in the sugar products industry in 1979 and 1983 or the nearest available years.

Mr. Butcher: I am unable to provide the information requested as this would entail disclosure of particulars relating to individual undertakings in the sugar and sugar by-products industry*, which would be in breach of the provisions of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947 under which the source data were collected.

* Group 420, standard industrial classification (revised 1980).

Telegram Service

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what other countries in *(a)* Europe and *(b)* the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development operate a telegram service; and which countries in (i) Europe and (ii) the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development do not.

Mr. Butcher: I understand that all other countries in Europe and OECD still operate a telegram service of some sort, although methods for originating and delivering the message may vary.

Software Products (Double Licensing)

Mr. Randall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the effect on the balance of payments of the information technology industry of the proposal to introduce double licensing on software products.

Mr. Butcher: The effect should be negligible since the great majority of exports of software products are to free-world destinations.

Manufactured Goods (Import Substitution)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has about the progress of import substitution in the manufactured goods sector of the economy; and if he is aware of any manufactured products imported in 1979 but not then manufactured in the United Kingdom which are now made in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Butcher: A satisfactory answer to this question could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects manufacturing output in both volume and real terms value to exceed the 1979 levels.

Mr. Butcher: Manufacturing output rose 1·5 per cent. in the three months to November 1984 to a level about 3 per cent. higher than a year earlier. On the latest data, output is now 8·5 per cent. above its low point in 1981 Q1 but still 8 per cent. below its level in 1979. The prospects for continuing growth are encouraging. CBI survey results suggest continued growth in manufacturing output and investment. The 1979 level of output will be surpassed in due course. Within manufacturing, output of the electrical engineering and chemical sectors is already well above their respective 1979 levels.

Metrology Report

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he received the recommendations of the Eden committee on metrology; and if he intends to publish the full report when it is available.

Mr. Fletcher: I received a preliminary statement of the Eden committee's main recommendations in December 1984. I expect to receive the full report during the next few weeks and will then decide upon publication arrangements.

Coal and Fuel Oil (Trading Deficit)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table comparing the increase in the trading deficit in *(a)* coal other than anthracite and *(b)* fuel oil in the first 11 months of 1984 compared with the same period in 1983, together with his estimate of the effect of this on the exchange rate and on the real cost of imports generally.

Mr. Channon: The trade balances for coal other than anthracite, and fuel oil are in the table. Estimates of the effects of changes in trade balances on exchange rates and imports costs cannot be meaningfully estimated.

Overseas Trade Statistics Basis
£ million, not seasonally adjusted

	1983	*1984*	*Increase in deficit between periods*
*Coal other than anthracite**			
January to November	−7	−413	406
Year as a whole	−1	−469	468
Fuel Oil†			
January to November	−669	−2,353	1,684
Year as a whole	−722	−2,690	1,970

* SITC Division 32 less Subgroup 322.1.
† SITC Subgroup 334.4.

EC (Trading Deficit)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the United Kingdom deficit with the EEC in 1984 in *(a)* trade in manufactures less precious stones and *(b)* total imports less crude oil and precious stones.

Mr. Channon: In 1984, the deficit on trade in manufactures less precious stones was £7·8 billion on the balance of payments basis. For total trade less crude oil and precious stones the deficit is estimated to have been £10·3 billion on the same basis.

Materials Advisory Group (Report)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce his proposals following the receipt of the report of the materials advisory group.

Mr. Pattie: My right hon. Friend announced on 1 August 1984 that he had received the final report of the group and was considering its recommendations. I am grateful to the chairman, Mr. John Collyear, and members of the group for their efforts. The report rightly emphasises the crucial importance of new materials and processes, and their significance for technical change and competitive advantage in new and improved products. Work in these fields will be to the benefit of industry. It is therefore for industry to decide which areas should be developed and to provide finance for this purpose. I have reservations about the need for public finance and for a separate assisted scheme as such. Whilst there is a need for collaboration between researchers, developers, designers and users of this technology, there could well be more effective arrangements, closer to industry, than those proposed.

I am therefore publishing today the Collyear report; copies are being placed in the Library. At the same time I am inviting industrialists and others to let me have early comment on the opportunities identified in the report and how the most effective co-ordination and collaboration can be arranged. Comments will be taken into account in the review of the Department's support for industrial research and development which I announced on 12 November 1984.

Weights and Measures

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each of the past four years the following: hourly charges for the examination of weighing machines and measuring equipment submitted for pattern approval, the percentage by which these fees have increased in each of these years and the proportion by which these increases have varied from the change in the cost of living for each year, respectively.

Mr. Fletcher: The information is as follows:

Date	*Hourly charge*	*Increase on earlier rate*	*Increase on a year earlier in RPI*
	£ per hour	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
1 January 1981	*	—	13·3
1 January 1982	22	—	12·0
1 January 1983	30·25	37·5	4·9
1 January 1984	32	5·8	5·1

* No hourly charge. The fees charged were fixed and listed in a schedule.

Grants and Aid

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list all forms of grant or other aid available through his Department for areas that qualify for assisted or intermediate status;

(2) if he will list all forms of grant or other aid available through his Department for areas that do not qualify for assisted or intermediate status.

Mr. Trippier: Information on the assistance available from the Department of Trade and Industry to companies in the assisted areas and elsewhere in the United Kingdom is given in the booklets "Does your Project Qualify?" and "How to Make Your Business Grow". Copies of these are available in the Library.

Farm Produce (Exports)

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce Export Credits Guarantee Department cover for the export of farm produce.

Mr. Channon: The Export Credits Guarantee Department already makes its facilities available to cover the export of farm produce, subject to its normal criteria.

Cleveland

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much in gross terms has been paid to companies in Cleveland under Government regional grant aid policies in each of the past five years.

Mr. Trippier: The information available in respect of regional grant aid paid to companies in Cleveland county in each of the past five years is given in the following table.

£000

	1979-80*	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85†
(a) Regional development grant paid under part II of the Industrial Development Act 1982 and its predecessor legislation	50,732	43,708	43,728	22,839	22,609	9,945
(b) Regional selective assistance paid under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 and its predecessor legislation	2,981	1,440	1,483	1,231	1,951	2,052

* From May 1979.
† To 30 September 1984.
Notes:
(a) Amounts over £25,000 paid to all applicants in respect of qualifying premises in Cleveland. Grant payments of £25,000 or less cannot be attributed to any unit smaller than a planning region.
(b) All amounts paid for projects located in Cleveland.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimated provision was made for regional grant aid to Cleveland when compiling the Department's annual budget for each of the past five years.

Mr. Trippier: Estimates of the annual spend on regional development grant aid are not made in respect of individual planning regions or counties in England.

British National Space Centre

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the functions of the British national space centre; who will head it and from where it will be staffed; what its budget is and from where this will be provided; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The Government intend to establish a British national space centre in order to improve the development of space technology in the United Kingdom, and to strengthen the co-ordination of space policy. Detailed arrangements are being worked out and will be announced in due course. But it is likely that the technology centre will be located at RAE, Farnborough, where there is already a successful joint technology programme funded by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence.

European Space Agency (Meeting)

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what resolutions were adopted following the European Space Agency ministerial meeting in Rome on 30-31 January regarding a long-term European space plan and proposals for European participation in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration space station project; and if he will make a statement regarding specific United Kingdom involvement in these developments.

Mr. Pattie: I represented the United Kingdom at a meeting of the Council of the European Space Agency on 30 and 31 January in Rome, the first such Council at Ministerial level since 1977. I am arranging for copies of the Council's resolution and final declaration which were published at the end of the meeting to be placed in the Library of the House.

The resolution approves a long-term European space plan covering the agency's activities for the next 10 years. These will include new developments in the field of man-in-space and in-orbit infrastructure — the Columbus space station programme; development of a new heavy-lift capability launcher Ariane-5; an expansion of the scientific programme by 5 per cent. a year for the next 5 years; and continuing developments in the satellite technology for communications and remote sensing.

The Council welcomed and accepted President Reagan's invitation to participate in the space station and the Columbus programme will be Europe's proposed contribution. For the United Kingdom, I warmly endorsed the proposals overall. I was able to secure agreement from other member states that Britain's industrial participation in the Columbus programme should include the lead in studies on free-flying, astronaut-tended platforms and, on this basis, indicated that we shall contribute 15 per cent. to the £50 million two-year feasibility phase of this programme. With a view to possible later adoption by ESA, the United Kingdom was also invited to keep its ESA partners informed of its further studies on a next-generation technology proposal for a horizontal take-off and landing space vehicle..

Small Master Antenna Television

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to make a statement on the future of small master antenna television.

Mr. Butcher: We hope to come to a decision before the next round of cable franchises is initiated by the Cable Authority at the end of February.

Gartcosh Steel Plant

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on future investment plans for the Gartcosh steel plant.

Mr. Butcher: Any proposals for investment at Gartcosh are primarily a matter for BSC.

COCOM

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, before making the export control order giving effect to the recent COCOM agreement he will first publish for consultation a draft of the proposed order.

Mr. Channon: No, but in view of the considerable interest about the details of the proposed new Export of Goods (Control) Order, I intend to allow a period of at least three weeks between publication of the order and its entry into force.

Electrical Equipment (Standards)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any proposals for the accreditation of organisations concerned with standards for electrical equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 1 February 1985, c. *352*]: The White Paper "Standards Quality & International Competitiveness" (Cmnd. 8621) identified the considerable industrial and trade benefits to be had from the voluntary accreditation of certification bodies. Accordingly in May 1984 the Government signed a memorandum of understanding with the British Standards Institution under which the National Accreditation Council for Certification Bodies has been established. The council will assess applicant certification bodies against published criteria, which are now being developed, and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will then decide whether to grant accreditation. Accreditation, which will be available to any qualifying body, including those concerned with electrical equipment, is expected to commence in summer this year.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Interest (Relief)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of taxpayers in each income group receiving relief on mortgage interest and the average relief per mortgagor, together with the assumed rate of interest for the financial year 1984-85.

Mr. Moore: The latest estimates are given in the following table. The figures are derived from a projection from the 1982-83 survey of personal income (the latest available), on the basis of interest rates prevailing during 1984-85. It has been assumed that the rates of interest, currently set by mortgagees will remain in force until the end of the fiscal year. The table does not include the relief given to former option mortgagors who are now included in the arrangements for giving mortgage interest relief at source. I regret that it is not possible to provide reliable estimates for this group in detail.

Taxpayers receiving mortgage interest relief and average relief by range of total income 1984-85

Range of total income (lower limit) £	*Numbers receiving mortgage interest relief* '000	*Average relief per mortgagor* £
3,000	65	130
4,000	130	230
5,000	200	280
6,000	340	375
7,000	410	410
8,000	510	430
9,000	460	430
10,000	1,060	460
12,000	1,130	510
15,000	950	570
20,000	530	820
30,000	190	1,290

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of relief on mortgage interest for each of the years from 1975-76 to 1983-84 and the estimated cost for 1984-85.

Mr. Moore: I regret the delay in obtaining the latest estimates, which are as follows. Figures for 1983-84 and 1984-85 are provisional.

Mortgage interest tax relief

	Total cost £ million
1975-76	895
1976-77	1,090
1977-78	1,040
1978-79	1,110
1979-80	1,450
1980-81	1,960
1981-82	2,050
1982-83	2,150
1983-84*	2,750
1984-85*	3,500

* Including the cost of relief in respect of mortgages previously under the option mortgage scheme.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will be replying to the four questions about mortgage interest relief tabled by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury for answer on 11 January.

Mr. John Moore: I regret the delay in providing replies to these questions. All four are being answered today.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer

(1) what would be the increased tax revenue if relief on mortgage interest payments were allowed only at the standard rate of tax;

(2) what would be the increased tax revenue if relief on mortgage interest payments was allowable only at each of the following rates of taxation *(a)* 25 per cent., *(b)* 20 per cent. and *(c)* 15 per cent.;

(3) how many persons currently receive mortgage tax relief at above the standard rate of tax; and what is the annual cost to the Exchequer of this relief;

(4) how many persons currently paying tax only at standard rate would pay tax at a higher rate if mortgage tax relief were removed from higher rates of tax; and what would be the additional income to the Exchequer.

Mr. Moore: I regret the delay in providing this information. Estimates of the direct revenue yields in a full year from restricting mortgage interest relief at 1984-85 levels of mortgage lending are shown as follows. The figures do not take account of possible changes in taxpayers' behaviour.

Rate of mortgage interest relief per cent.	*Direct revenue yield £ million*
15	1,840
20	1,290
25	730
30	180

About 700,000 mortgagors receive relief at rates in excess of the basic rate of income tax. Of these, about 190,000 who are currently liable only at the basic rate are kept out of higher rates by virtue of relief on their mortgage interest.

European Council

Mr. Normanton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the estimated total cost attributable to public funds for each of the meetings of the European Council during the last five years; and what proportion and actual cost was borne by the British taxpayer.

Mr. Ian Stewart: When the European Council meets in Brussels the costs borne from United Kingdom public funds are chiefly the subsistence costs of those attending from the United Kingdom. The remaining costs are included in the overall budget of the Council to which the United Kingdom contributes from its gross payments to the Community Budget. However, when the European Council meets outside Brussels the major costs are borne by the Presidency. The estimates and figures requested could not therefore be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Bank of England

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list his ministerial responsibilities regarding the policy of the banking department of the Bank of England.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend has no direct responsibility for the policies of the banking department of the Bank of England. Responsibility for the banking department rests with the Governor and the Court of the Bank under the Bank of England Acts and the bank's charters.

Privatisation

Mr. Merchant asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the proceeds from privatising public sector assets in each fiscal year since 1979-80, divided into the following categories: *(a)* sale of public sector enterprises, *(b)* sale of public sector assets (land and so on) and *(c)* sale of council housing.

Mr. Moore: Net receipts to the Exchequer from disposals regarded as falling within the Government's privatisation programme are classified as special sales of assets. Proceeds from special sales of assets in each year since 1979-80 are shown in table 1, divided between receipts from sales of Government shareholdings in companies, and receipts from other disposals, mostly of land and buildings. Full details were given in the "Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 to 1987-88", Cmnd. 9428 vol. II, table 2.14.

Figures for central Government and local authority sales other than special sales of assets, consisting of routine disposals of land, buildings, vehicles, plant and machinery, are given in table 2. Of these, sales of council housing are by far the largest component. Estimated receipts from council house sales are given in table 3.

Table 1
Special sales of assets

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Share sales	336	126	305	380	1,099
Other disposals	34	279	189	108	43

Table 2
Central Government and local authority sales of land, buildings, vehicles, plant and machinery (other than special sales of assets)

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Gross receipts	779	1,162	1,896	2,624	2,337

Table 3
Council house sales (GB)

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Gross receipts	522	714	1,411	1,991	1,583

Pension Funds

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received from *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* organisations and *(c)* individuals on the need to change the present taxation regime affecting employee and employer contributions to pension funds and lump sums given under pension arrangements.

Mr. Moore: The recent speculation about possible changes in the present tax regime has provoked a considerable number of letters from hon. Members and members of the public, in addition to many representations from various trade associations and representative bodies. Almost all have expressed opposition to any such change.

Income Tax Thresholds

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the income tax threshold for a two-child family as a percentage of average earnings for the years 1982, 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Moore: The table shows the tax threshold and the break-even point—defined as the level of income at which receipt of child benefit equals liability to income tax—for a married man with two children and no tax allowances or reliefs other than the married man's allowance.

	Income tax threshold		*Break-even point*	
	£	*as percentage of average earnings*	£	*as percentage of average earnings*
1982-83	2,445	29·9	4,341	53·0
1983-84	2,795	31·4	4,905	55·2
1984-85	3,155	33·0	5,453	57·1

Average earnings are for full-time men, paid at adult rates, in all occupations and assume an increase of 7½ per cent. between 1983-84 and 1984-85, in line with the underlying rate of increase assumed by the Government Actuary.

Value Added Tax (Free Newspapers)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact on the employment and viability of the free newspaper industry of imposing a notional price on such publications for the purposes of a value added tax levy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Treasury Ministers have considered carefully the representations that have been made on behalf of the free newspaper industry, including those on this point. I expect to meet the Association of Free Newspapers shortly.

It would be inappropriate at this stage before my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement to comment further.

Value Added Tax (Food)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the additional full year revenue if all food at present zero rated were rated at 5 per cent. for value added tax purposes.

Mr. Hayhoe: It is estimated that the net additional revenue in a full year at 1984-85 prices would be £1,100 million.

Unemployed Persons (Revenue Loss)

Mr. Ashley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will set out in tabular form his estimate of the monthly loss of revenue to the Exchequer when an adult worker becomes unemployed, assuming that he or she was previously on full-time average weekly male or female earnings for *(a)* a single man, *(b)* a single woman and *(c)* a married man with a dependent wife and two children, giving in each case the loss of revenue from (i) income tax, (ii) indirect taxes, (iii) employers' national insurance contributions and (iv) employees' national insurance contributions;

(2) what is his estimate of the loss of revenue arising from an increase of 100,000 in the numbers unemployed from *(a)* income tax, *(b)* indirect taxes, *(c)* employers' national insurance contributions and *(d)* employees' national insurance contributions.

Mr. Lawson: Any such estimates would depend on a large number of arbitrary assumptions.

Taxation Categories

Mr. Silvester asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers fall into each of the following categories *(a)* single, *(b)* married couple, husband only working, *(c)* married couple, wife only working, *(d)* married couple, both earning, *(e)* single pensioners and *(f)* married couple pensioners.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *320*]: The latest estimates in respect of 1984-85 are as follows:

Taxpayers under 65	*Taxpayers (thousands)*
Single	7,800
Married couple, husband only working	4,400
Married couple, wife only working	300
Married couple, husband and wife both working	5,150
Total taxpayers under 65	17,650
Taxpayers over 65	
Single	1,250
Married couples	1,300
Total taxpayers over 65	2,550
Total taxpayers	20,200

Mr. Silvester asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the cost of the dependent relative relief;

(2) what would be the cost of the dependent relative relief if its value were raised to that of the additional personal allowance, assuming the existing conditions for reduction.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *320*]: The dependent relative allowance costs about £15 million in 1984-85. If the level of the allowance was increased to £1,150 there would be an additional cost of about £140 million at 1984-85 levels of income in respect of the 500,000 current claimants. I regret that it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the cost of additional claims for relief.

EC (Agriculture Expenditure)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of European Community expenditure was taken up by agriculture in each of the last three years.

Mr. Jopling: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 December 1984 to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) at column *607*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Republic of Ireland

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Billericay on 21 January, *Official Report*, column 315, how many separate representations were made, and in what form they were made, by the Irish Foreign Minister to Her Majesty's ambassador to Dublin on 15 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Her Majesty's ambassador received such representations orally and on one occasion.

Belize

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will make it their policy to seek to retain their military presence in Belize while external threats to Belize continue.

Mr. Renton: British troops will remain for an appropriate period to assist Belize with external defence and in the training of the Belize defence force. We wish to see as soon as possible conditions prevail in which the garrison can be safely withdrawn.

EMPLOYMENT

Young People

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment if, in evaluating the relationship between the earnings of young people relative to adults and their employment prospects, account is taken of the structure of employment demand and available labour supply.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The conclusion that the employment prospects of young people are adversely affected by the high cost of the labour relative to adults was reached after evaluating the results of a number of studies including work on the structure of employment demand and available labour supply. Some studies do suggest that employment structure and labour supply affect demand for young workers. Such results are not, however, inconsistent with the findings on youth's labour costs.

Grants and Aid

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list all forms of grant or other aid available through his Department for areas that do not qualify for assisted or intermediate status;

(2) if he will list all forms of grant or other aid available through his Department for areas which qualify for assisted or intermediate status.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: All employment measures administered by this Department are available throughout the country.

In addition the Department is responsible for submitting applications to the European social fund in respect of training and employment schemes in the United Kingdom.

Social fund support is available for a wide range of schemes in its priority regions, and for a narrower range in other areas. The European Commission which administers the Fund, is currently considering which regions should have priority for support in 1986.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied with the cost-effectiveness and workings of industrial tribunals.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am satisfied that the industrial tribunals are providing a service that is generally cost-effective and working well. We will continue to look for further improvements without impairing judicial standards or independence and taking proper account of the interests of the parties involved in the system.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many industrial tribunals there are in the United Kingdom; and where they are situated.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Industrial tribunals sit at the times and places determined by the presidents of the industrial tribunals and their regional chairmen. Permanent accommodation for hearing industrial tribunal cases is provided at 25 locations in England and Wales and at 5 locations in Scotland. These are situated as follows:

Birmingham*
Shrewsbury
Bristol*
Exeter
Bury St. Edmunds*
Bedford
Cambridge
Norwich
Cardiff*
Leeds*
Hull
Liverpool*
London Central*
Ashford
London North*
London South*
Brighton
Manchester*
Newcastle*
Middlesbrough
Nottingham*
Leicester
Sheffield*
Southampton*
Reading

Glasgow
Edinburgh
Dundee
Aberdeen
Inverness

* Regional offices of the industrial tribunals.

Tribunals are held at centres in other locations as and when requested. Questions relating to the industrial tribunals in Nothern Ireland are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Employment how much has been paid, in each of the past five years, to industrial tribunal chairmen and panellists by way of allowances and expenses.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

	1979-80 £000's	1980-81 £000's	1981-82 £000's	1982-83 £000's	1983-84 £000's
Salaries of presidents and full-time chairmen	*	*	1,683	1,962	2,038
Fees of part-time chairmen and members	1,490	2,244	2,625	3,028	3,302
Travel and subsistence expenses of presidents and full-time chairmen	*	*	43	48	53
Travel and subsistence expenses of part-time chairmen and members	460	452	580	674	762

* The information is not available in the form requested for 1979-80 and 1980-81.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many respondents have obtained costs from industrial tribunals, since powers to award costs were made available for frivolous and vexatious cases; and what was the largest sum awarded.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is readily available only in respect of cases which have been the subject of a pre-hearing assessment. In the four years since the pre-hearing assessment procedure was introduced in October 1980, costs were awarded to 271 respondents at full hearings following such assessment. The largest sum awarded was £1,092.50p.

Industrial Relations

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the objectives of the Government's industrial relations policy; and if he is satisfied with the progress being made.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Our objectives are to redress the imbalance of bargaining power created by the legislation of 1974 and 1976 and to promote a more democratic and responsible trade union movement. Some 40 employers have already sought the protection of the legal remedies provided by our legislation against indiscriminate or undemocratic industrial action. The monopolistic hold of the closed shop has been broken. The second largest trade union in the country and a number of other unions affiliated to the TUC have now decided to apply for public funding for postal ballots.

The provisions of the Trade Union Act 1984 for elections by secret ballot and regular ballots on trade unions' political funds have yet to come into force. The full benefits of our step-by-step legislative programme have therefore yet to be seen but that programme has already proved to be a vital agent of change.

Free Newspapers and Magazines

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made of the numbers of persons employed in the manufacture, distribution and sale of free newspapers and magazines in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Department's employment statistics are analysed according to the 1980 standard industrial classification, which does not separately distinguish activities associated with the manufacture, distribution and sale of free newspapers and magazines.

Inner Urban Areas (Unemployment)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the average level of unemployment for male and female adults, and young people, respectively, and in total for the 56 districts which presently enjoy designated area status under the Inner Urban Areas Act.

Mr. Alan Clark: Male, female and total unemployment levels for local authority districts are available in the House of Commons Library; but separate information for adults and young people will not be available until later this year.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of the known unemployed are *(a)* single men, *(b)* single women and *(c)* married men with dependent wives and children.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest information comes from provisional results of the 1983 labour force survey, which shows that in the second quarter of 1983 there were 2,939 thousand persons without a job and looking for work, of whom 31 per cent. were single men, 20 per cent. single women and 19 per cent. married men with dependent children under 16. Separate information on those men with both dependent children and dependent wives is not available.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment, of those who became unemployed during December 1983, what proportion obtained a job during 1984; on average, how many months elapsed before they did so; if the figures are now publicly available; and if he will give the figures for the last period for which there are figures.

Mr. Alan Clark: Precise figures are not available in the form requested. However, broad estimates indicate that roughly half of people becoming unemployed leave the claimant register within three months while the order of four in five leave the register within a year. Information is not available on the proportion finding jobs.

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of those in work for each year since 1970.

Mr. Alan Clark: Quarterly estimates of the employed labour force are published regularly in table 1.1 of the labour market data section of *Employment Gazette*, copies of which are in the Library. Estimates for September 1981 to September 1984, the latest available, were published in the January issue of *Employment Gazette*. Estimates for March 1970 to June 1981 were contained in table 1.1 of Historical Supplement No. 1 to the August 1984 issue of *Employment Gazette*.

WALES

Bypasses (Anglesey)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to receive the consultants' report on the

bypasses for the five villages on the A5 on Anglesey; in what order he expects the studies to be completed; and when he expects to receive the report on the first one.

Mr. Stradling Thomas: The consultants expect to submit one formal report covering all five bypass proposals by the end of the year.

Expenditure

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will break down the figures in table 3.16 of the Government's expenditure plans for 1985-86 to 1987-88, Cmnd. 9428-II on the same basis as tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11 and 3.13 of the same publication.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: There are no Welsh equivalents to tables 3.9 and 3.13. Otherwise the information is as follows:

Programme 16.1 Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

	1979-80 £ million	*1980-81 £ million*	*1981-82 £ million*	*1982-83 £ million*	*1983-84 £ million*	*1984-85 £ million*	*1985-86 £ million*	*1986-87 £ million*	*1987-88 £ million*
Market regulation and production support	3	5	12	9	19	22	24		
Other agricultural support	43	53	41	52	59	59	53		
Animal health	1	1	—	—	—	—	—		
Other agricultural and food services	1	1	—	—	—	1	2		
Support for the fishing industry	—	—	1	1	1	3	2		
TOTAL PROGRAMME	48	60	54	62	79	85	81	80	80

Programmes 16.2 and 3 Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment

	1979-80 £ million	*1980-81 £ million*	*1981-82 £ million*	*1982-83 £ million*	*1983-84 £ million*	*1984-85 £ million*	*1985-86 £ million*	*1986-87 £ million*	*1987-88 £ million*
Regional Development Grants	—	—	—	—	—	28	56		
Selective assistance to industry in assisted areas	3	7	7	11	17	27	33		
Development Board for Rural Wales (excluding subsidies)	9	6	6	7	7	8	8		
Development Board for Rural Wales (subsidies only)	2	2	2	2	2	2	2		
Residual expenditure under repealed sections of the Local Employment Act 1972	−1	0	—	—	—	—	—		
Welsh Development Agency (including ECSC and EIB borrowing)	48	65	77	57	44	43	44		
Promotion of tourism	3	4	5	5	5	6	7		
Other support services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Employment									
Careers service—local authorities	2	3	2	2	3	4	4		
Careers service—strengthening scheme	0	0	[illegible]	1	1	1	1		
TOTAL PROGRAMMES 16.2 AND 3	66	87	100	85	79	119	155	180	140

Programme 16.4 Roads and Transport

	1979-80 £ million	*1980-81 £ million*	*1981-82 £ million*	*1982-83 £ million*	*1983-84 £ million*	*1984-85 £ million*	*1985-86 £ million*	*1986-87 £ million*	*1987-88 £ million*
Central Government									
ROADS									
Capital expenditure	69	88	95	110	136	113	107		
Current expenditure	5	5	13	9	12	10	10		
TOTAL	74	93	108	119	148	123	117	130	160
Freight Facilities Grant	3	1			1	1	1		
TOTAL CENTRAL GOVERNMENT	77	94	108	119	149	124	118	130	160
Local Authorities									
CAPITAL EXPENDITURE									
Roads	44	50	48	66	58	57	58		
Car parks	2	3	1	1	1	1	1		
Public transport	3	1	2	4	4	4	4		
TOTAL	49	54	51	71	63	62	63	70	60
CURRENT EXPENDITURE									
Roads	48	52	72	69	75	78	80		
Car parks (net of receipts)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		

	1979-80 £ million	1980-81 £ million	1981-82 £ million	1982-83 £ million	1983-84 £ million	1984-85 £ million	1985-86 £ million	1986-87 £ million	1987-88 £ million
Revenue support for public transport	4	4	4	3	4	4	4		
Concessionary fares	4	5	5	6	7	7	7		
Professional and technical services	12	15	15	9	9	10	11		
Road safety	—	—	1	1	1	1	1		
TOTAL	68	76	97	89	97	100	103	110	120
TOTAL LOCAL AUTHORITIES	117	130	148	159	159	162	166	180	180
Public Corporations									
New Towns	—	—	2	2	▮	2	2		
TOTAL PROGRAMME	194	224	258	280	309	288	286	310	340
Nationalised Industries									
External finance	4	5	6	6	7	7	7	—	—

Programme 16.5 Housing

£ million

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Current expenditure									
General subsidies									
Central government subsidies to local authority housing*	56	68	39	13	3	6	8		
Rate fund contributions to local authority housing	10	11	12	11	9	4	4		
Central government subsidies to new towns housing*	3	3	2	1	1	1	2		
Central government subsidies to housing associations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Total general subsidies	69	82	53	25	13	11	14		
Administration									
Local authorities	5	5	5	5	6	6	7		
Housing Corporation: grant in aid	0	0	0	0	0	1	1		
Other	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Total current expenditure	75	86	59	31	20	19	23		
Capital expenditure									
Local authority gross expenditure									
HRA land, new dwellings and acquisitions	62	62	48	43	46	28			
HRA renovation	20	22	21	47	48	37			
Enveloping and environmental improvement	0	0	0	0	1	5			
Slum clearance	3	2	2	1	1	1			
Other	0	1	0	0	1	0			
Improvement and thermal insulation grant	15	15	19	43	109	82			
Gross lending to private persons for house purchase and improvements	25	11	6	7	8	5			
Loans and grants to the housing association	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Total local authority gross expenditure	125	113	96	141	214	158	147		
Local authority receipts									
Sales	−6	−8	−44	−56	−40	−32			
Repayment of sums outstanding on sales of dwellings	−2	−2	−3	−10	−19	−25			
Repayment of loans to private persons for house purchase and improvements	−13	−14	−18	−20	−17	−29			
Repayment of loans to housing associations	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Total local authority receipts	−21	−24	−65	−86	−76	−86	−78		

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Total net local authority expenditure	104	89	31	55	138	72	69		
Other capital									
Home loan scheme for first-time purchasers (net) and other lending (net)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Public corporations finance									
Housing Corporation									
Gross loans and grants to housing associations	25	29	33	47	49	42	42		
Receipts	0	0	−1	−2	−8	−3	−3		
Total net housing corporation expenditure	25	29	32	45	41	39	39		
New Towns									
Gross expenditure									
Land	0	1	0	2	0	0			
New dwellings	3	3	2	3	3	5			
Renovations	0	0	1	0	1	0			
Total new towns gross expenditure	3	4	3	5	4	5	3		
Receipts									
Sales	−1	−2	−3	−9	−3	−4			
Repayment of sums outstanding on sales of dwellings	0	0	0	−1	−2	−2			
Total new towns receipts	−1	−2	−3	−10	−5	−6	−8		
Total net new towns expenditure	2	2	0	−5	−1	−1	−5		
Total gross capital expenditure	153	146	132	193	267	205	193		
Total receipts	−22	−26	−69	−98	−89	−95	−90		
Total net capital expenditure	131	120	63	95	178	110	103		
Total programme	206	208	122	126	195	129	126	130	130

* Figures for outturn years are net payments made in the year, made up of local authority claims for the year plus adjustment to claims in respect of prior years. Where these adjustments are large the figures shown will diverge from outturn entitlements.

Programme 16.6—Other Environmental Services

£ million

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Local environmental services excluding Urban Programme									
Current expenditure	122	138	152	165	171	173	181		
Capital expenditure (including coast protection)	46	55	52	48	47	35	41		
Local authority rate collection (current expenditure)	2	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Records, registration of births, death and marriages (current expenditure)	4	6	6	7	7	7	7		
Urban programme	5	6	8	18	14	27	25		
Derelict land reclamation	—	—	—	12	13	7	15		
Community ownership of development land	2	−1	1	−2	−1	—	—		
Water research and other services	4	2	1	1	1	1	1		
Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments	1	2	2	2	2	5	6		
Central and miscellaneous services (including environmental research)	3	3	3	3	3	4	4		
Public Corporations finance	3	7	4	2	2	1	−9		
TOTAL PROGRAMME	192	219	230	257	260	261	272	290	290

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Nationalised industries external finance	33	22	24	23	18	20	20	20	10

Programme 16.7—Education

£ million

			1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Schools:											
Under-5s	Local Authority	Current	18	25	26	27	32	36	37		
Primary, Secondary and Other	Central Government	Capital	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
	Local Authority	Capital	16	25	23	26	25	24	25		
Primary	Local Authority	Current	113	137	150	158	158	159	164		
Secondary	Local Authority	Current	146	183	204	218	232	238	239		
Special	Local Authority	Current	13	15	17	18	18	19	20		
Other	Central Government	Current	—	—	—	—	1	1	2		
	Local Authority	Current	4	5	5	6	6	7	7		
Transport	Local Authority	Current	15	18	20	21	23	24	23		
Meals and Milk	Local Authority	Current	26	24	25	27	27	26	23		
Further Education:											
Further education	Local Authority	Capital	5	8	7	7	8	6	6		
	Local Authority	Current	52	61	69	79	85	87	87		
	Central Government	Current	2	2	3	3	3	4	4		
Awards to students	Local Authority	Current	6	6	7	8	8	9	9		
Miscellaneous Educational Services:											
Youth service	Local Authority	Current	4	4	4	5	6	6	6		
Other educational services	Central Government	Current	—	—	1	2	2	2	2		
	Local Authority	Capital	2	2	0	1	1	1	1		
	Local Authority	Current	3	4	5	5	6	4	5		
Administration and inspection	Local Authority	Current	20	24	27	29	31	32	33		
Total Education:											
	Central Government	Capital	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
	Central Government	Current	2	2	4	5	6	7	8		
	Local Authority	Capital	23	35	30	34	34	31	32		
	Local Authority	Current	420	505	558	601	632	647	653		
TOTAL PROGRAMME			446	544	594	641	673	686	694	710	730

Programme 16.8—Arts and Libraries

£ million

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Central Government:									
National Library of Wales									
Capital	1	1	—	—	—	1	1		
Current	1	2	2	2	2	2	3		
National Museum of Wales									
Capital	—	—	1	1	1	1	1		
Current	4	5	6	6	6	6	6		
Other Arts									
Capital	1	—	—	—	—	—	—		
Current	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		
Total Central Government	7	8	9	9	9	10	11		
Local Authorities									
Libraries									
Capital	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Current	10	12	13	15	16	16	16		
Museums									
Capital	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		
Current	1	1	1	1	1	1	2		

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Total Local Authorities	12	14	15	17	18	18	19		
TOTAL PROGRAMME	19	22	24	26	27	28	30	30	30

Programme 16.9—Health and Personal Social Services

£ million

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Health Services									
Hospital and Community Health Services									
Current Gross	326	425	479	517	544	584	627		
Charges		1	1	1	1	1	2		
Net	326	424	478	516	543	583	625		
Capital	24	31	41	45	49	51	48		
*Family Practitioner Services**									
Current Gross	114	142	161	187	201	215	216		
Charges	8	11	13	15	17	18	19		
Net	106	131	148	172	184	197	197		
Central Health and Miscellaneous Services									
Current	10	13	16	18	21	22	24		
Capital						2	1		
Total NHS Gross	474	611	697	767	815	874	916		
Net	466	599	683	751	797	855	895		
Personal Social Services									
Central Government Service									
Current					1	4	6		
Local Authority Services									
Current Gross	86	105	115	126	138	144	157		
Charges	15	18	21	23	25	26	28		
Net	71	87	94	103	114	119	129		
Capital	6	6	5	5	5	5	6		
Total PSS Gross	93	111	120	131	144	153	168		
Net	77	94	99	108	119	127	140		
Total Programme Gross	567	722	817	898	959	1,028	1,084		
Charges	24	30	35	39	43	45	49		
Net	543	693	782	859	916	982	1,035	1,090	1,140

* Includes costs of administration of Family Practitioner Committees previously included in HCHS.

Mr. Rogers asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give a breakdown of the capital expenditure under the heading "Other (Non-Home Office) Services", as shown in his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *214*, by each of the Welsh county councils for the years 1981-82 and 1982-83.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information is as follows:

Analysis of Other (Non-Home Office) Capital Expenditure for Welsh County Councils (£000)

	Employment services	General administration	Agriculture	Recreation	Planning	Consumer protection	Other rate fund services	Trading services	Total other non-Home Office services
Clwyd:									
1981-82	9	92	50	36	24	8	*−34	639	824
1982-83	16	138	386	157	142	1	2	883	1,726
Dyfed:									
1981-82	—	83	168	299	127	—	1	74	752
1982-83	—	91	179	252	306	—	40	352	1,221
Gwent:									
1981-82	16	504	36	54	—	1	295	1,349	2,254
1982-83	364	1,611	212	50	963	—	191	908	4,300

	Employment services	General administration	Agriculture	Recreation	Planning	Consumer protection	Other rate fund services	Trading services	Total other non-Home Office services
Gwynedd:									
1981-82	54	228	46	141	203	—	—	—	672
1982-83	157	4,562	48	80	490	—	—	—	5,337
Mid Glamorgan:									
1981-82	24	428	12	—	1,068	21	—	—	1,553
1982-83	31	885	29	—	1,037	48	1,250	1,259	4,539
Powys:									
1981-82	—	87	42	13	48	—	—	—	190
1982-83	—	42	50	15	140	—	—	—	246
South Glamorgan:									
1981-82	—	5	5	399	193	—	131	—	734
1982-83	—	138	15	355	126	—	159	329	1,123
West Glamorgan:									
1981-82	19	5,796	—	52	5	—	—	880	6,753
1982-83	78	4,694	—	170	28	—	—	534	5,505

* Includes an adjustment for earlier years; incorrectly reported in the previous written answer of 17 January (*Official Report*, column *214*).

Home Office Services

Mr. Rogers asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of capital expenditure on Home Office services by each of the Welsh county councils for each of the last five years since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The table gives details of capital expenditure on Home Office services by Welsh county councils and joint police authorities.

Capital expenditure on Home Office services in Wales
1979-1980 to 1983-1984

(£000)

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84
Clwyd	163	187	102	295	367
Dyfed	190	49	162	264	291
Gwent	845	934	658	1,456	1,650
Gwynedd	92	271	233	179	128
Mid Glamorgan	560	455	363	705	892
Powys	125	95	71	131	145
South Glamorgan	387	809	14	395	438
West Glamorgan	23	66	80	138	292
Joint Police Authority					
Dyfed Powys	299	0	316	348	593
Joint Police Authority					
North Wales	399	357	481	536	875
Joint Police Authority					
South Wales	890	1,142	994	1,750	3,053

Notes:

1. Home Office services includes the fire service given separately in the written answer on 17 January at Column *214*. The other services included are police, magistrate and other courts, probation and civil defence.
2. Dyfed/Powys joint police authority covers Dyfed and Powys; North Wales joint police authority covers Clwyd and Gwynedd; and South Wales joint police authority covers Mid Glamorgan, South Glamorgan and West Glamorgan.

Inner Urban Areas Act

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to extend designated area status to other districts in Wales under the Inner Urban Areas Act.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: None at present, but the matter is kept under regular review.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the total financial benefits which have accrued to districts in Wales which presently enjoy designated area status under the Inner Urban Areas Act since obtaining that status.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Under the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978, designated districts have additional powers to assist in the economic regeneration of their areas through the provision of grants and loans, particularly in declared Improvement Areas. These grants and loans are eligible for urban programme support and since 1979-80 some £2·7 million out of a total Urban Programme allocation of £23 million to these districts has been approved as a contribution towards these activities.

Mid-Glamorgan

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to visit Mid-Glamorgan in the near future or meet representatives of Mid-Glamorgan county council.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have made frequent official, political and personal visits to Mid-Glamorgan and will continue to make such visits. I presently have no plans to meet representatives of Mid-Glamorgan county council.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the report, "Deprivation in Mid-Glamorgan", from Mid-Glamorgan county council, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The report, received on 25 January, makes recommendations about designated area status in Mid-Glamorgan. The details on which the recommendations are based will need further discussion. I am arranging for that.

Council Houses

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications have been made to his Department for the remunicipalisation of former council houses; how many such applications have been successful; how many have been refused; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Since we introduced the right-to-buy scheme on 3 October 1980, 10 applications to re-acquire former council houses have been submitted to the Department. Of these four received consent; four were refused consent and two were subsequently withdrawn by the local authority concerned.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of Wales' contribution to the estimated £100 million savings resulting from Her Majesty's Government's proposed limited list of prescribable drugs.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No firm estimate is possible until our deliberations on the results of the consultation exercise are concluded. On the basis of the provisional list issued for consultation the saving in Wales is estimated to be about £5 million per annum.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has engaged in with general practitioners in Wales concerning Her Majesty's Government's plans for a limited list of prescribable drugs.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Our chief medical officer issued a consultation letter to all general medical practitioners in Wales in December 1984 requesting comments on the Government's proposals by 31 January 1985. Senior Welsh Office officials subsequently met representatives of the Welsh Council of the Royal College of General Practitioners to receive representations.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from consultants in Wales concerning Her Majesty's Government's proposed limited list of prescribable drugs.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Four hospital consultants have written offering constructive suggestions regarding the content of the proposed limited list.

Empty Dwellings

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage of empty dwellings in the private, public and other Government-owned housing sectors.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is as follows in respect of housing association, private and local authority dwellings, equivalent data for other Government-owned dwellings as at 1 April 1984; is not available.

	Per cent.
Housing Association	6
Private	6
Local Authority	1

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the total and the percentage of (i) men and (ii) women unemployed in Wales, unadjusted, including school leavers and *(b)* how many long-term unemployed men in Wales there are and what percentage this is of the total in Wales, unadjusted.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: This information is available in the House of Commons Library.

ENVIRONMENT

North West Water Supplies (Pollution)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the representations he has received concerning the recent pollution of north-west water supplies.

Mr. Macfarlane: I told the hon. Member on 14 January 1985 at columns *4-5* that no pollutants had entered the North-West water authority's water supplies recently as a result of pollution in the River Dee catchment. That remains the case. I have received representations on the river pollution incidents from one local authority and one private individual.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to introduce legislation to prevent expenditure by local authorities for propaganda purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government has already explained in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on 9 January at columns *763-4*, we do not preclude legislation. There are, however, questions of interpretation of the present law still to be resolved by the courts.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly be advising the House of details of the intended impartial inquiry into a number of aspects of local government including discretionary spending on publicity.

Rent Officer Notes

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list in the *Official Report* the titles of all rent officer notes sent by his Department to rent officers; and if he will place copies of such documents in the Library.

Mr. Gow: Statistical notes issued biannually to rent officers by my Department are available and copies are placed in the Library.

Rent Officers (Documents)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what circulars, advice, guidance, or other documents have been distributed by his Department to rent officers within the last five years.

Mr. Gow: It has always been the Department's practice to issue guidance in various forms to rent officers relating to the rent registration system and to the operation and management of the rent officer service. This has continued under the present Government.

Rent Assessment Panels

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the way in which lay members of rent assessment panels are appointed; if he will list those bodies which are asked to nominate lay members of panels; and if he will publish the criteria by which lay members are appointed.

Mr. Gow: Members of rent assessment panels in England are appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. Members who are authorised to sit as committee chairmen are appointed by my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor.

Most candidates are proposed by panel presidents, vice-presidents or serving panel members on the basis of local knowledge. Other nominations come from a variety of sources. My right hon. Friend does not invite outside organisations to suggest potential lay members, but it is open to such organisations to do so if they wish. All candidates are interviewed initially by panel presidents who submit recommendations to the Secretary of State.

Lay members are taken from all walks of life, so that panels should reflect the communities which they serve. Members are selected for their qualities of judgment, common sense and ability to take an unbiased view.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will estimate the additional costs to charitable institutions, such as children's homes, youth clubs and tenants' organisations if, as a result of the proposed abolition of the Greater London council, they lose the discount prices for clothing, furniture, and so on, which they currently enjoy through the Greater London council supplies department;

(2) if he will estimate the change in the cost of exercise books purchased by the Greater London council supplies department on behalf of the Inner London education authority and the London boroughs that will be incurred in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council;

(3) if he will estimate the effect of the proposed abolition of the Greater London council on the costs of goods and services currently purchased by London boroughs from the Greater London council supplies department.

Sir George Young: I do not believe that meaningful estimates of this kind could be made; nor do I accept that there need be additional costs. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government made clear in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) at columns *378-9*, the GLC's central purchasing arrangements can be maintained if the successor bodies so wish it. In any case other local authority purchasing consortia offering comparable services already exist; and the services of the Crown Suppliers are also available.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, in respect of the years 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, how many appeals there have been against local authority decisions in England and Wales to refuse planning permission for the change in use of premises to amusement arcades or centres; and how many appeals have been allowed in each year.

Mr. Macfarlane: The information requested is not available. If my hon. Friend has a particular case in mind, I shall look into it.

Homes Insulation Grant Scheme

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his forecasts of the likely outturn of expenditure on the homes insulation grant scheme for 1984-85.

Sir George Young: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter on 21 January 1985 at column *266*.

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether homes owned by county or metropolitan councils and occupied by officers of an authority engaged in fire protection, policing or school caretaking work, can qualify for assistance under the homes insulation programme.

Sir George Young: The occupiers of homes described by my hon. Friend are eligible to apply for grant under the Homes Insulation Act 1978.

Office Building (Cleveland)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to how many projects involving the building of new office blocks are currently in progress in Cleveland.

Sir George Young: I am advised that there are two projects currently in progress involving office development.

Nottinghamshire (Grants)

Mr. Brandon-Bravo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the special grants to the city of Nottingham over the past two years;

(2) if he will list the special grants to the Nottinghamshire county council over the past two years.

Mr. Macfarlane: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Palace of Westminster (Pesticides)

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what monitoring of air for pesticide level is or has been carried out within the Palace of Westminster;

(2) which pesticides are used and have been used in treating wood, timbers or fabrics within the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Mr. Macfarlane: The following pesticides are known to be used in the Palace of Westminster:

Kitchens
- Phenitrothion
- Brodifacoum
- Deltamethrin

Westminster hall
- Cooper WDP

Furniture
- Cuprinol

Some building materials, such as timber and plywood, are likely to have been treated with pesticide during manufacture but the chemicals used are not normally made known. It is, however, known that the plywood backing of the painted panels in the restored ceiling of the Chamber of the House of Lords was treated with Basileum SPI. Large items of furniture which have been attacked by pests are treated off-site, by commercial contractors. My Department does not keep records of the materials used.

The level of pesticide in the air is monitored only in Westminster hall for a period immediately after the timbers have been sprayed.

Caravan Sites Act 1968

Mr. George Gardiner asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authority districts in England now designed under the terms of the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

Mr. Macfarlane: The following authorities are so designated:

London boroughs
- Barking
- Bexley
- Camden
- Croydon
- Enfield
- Greenwich
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Havering
- Hillingdon
- Islington
- Kensington and Chelsea
- Kingston upon Thames
- Lambeth
- Lewisham
- Merton
- Newham
- Redbridge
- Richmond upon Thames
- Sutton
- Waltham Forest
- Wandsworth
- Westminster

District councils whose areas contain the designated areas of former county boroughs
- Bolton
- Bury
- Leeds
- Lincoln
- Manchester
- Oxford
- Plymouth
- St. Helens
- Stoke on Trent
- Wolverhampton

County councils
- Dorset
- West Sussex
- Wiltshire

District councils
- Ashford
- Aylesbury Vale
- Boston
- Chiltern
- Chester
- Dartford
- Eastbourne
- Gravesham
- Hastings
- High Peak
- Huntingdonshire
- Hyndburn
- Luton
- Milton Keynes
- Nuneaton and Bedworth
- Oldham
- Oswestry
- Rochdale
- Rother
- Selby
- South Bedfordshire
- South Bucks
- South Derbyshire
- Trafford
- Wealden
- West Lindsey

Gipsies

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider requiring local authorities to provide a greater number of sites for gipsies in winter.

Mr. Macfarlane: I have no plans to require local authorities to make varying levels of site provision to meet seasonal fluctuations of gipsy movements, but authorities should have regard to such fluctuations when planning the kinds of sites needed.

Mr. John Fraser asked Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of places provided by each London borough for gypsies.

Mr. Macfarlane: Following is the information for numbers of pitches provided:

	Numbers
Barking	16
Barnet	nil
Bexley	16
Brent	nil
Bromley	20
Camden	nil
Croydon	15
Ealing	nil
Enfield	15
Greenwich	54
Hackney	nil
Hammersmith & Fulham	*20
Haringey	12
Harrow	15
Havering	16
Hillingdon	30
Hounslow	17
Islington	nil
Kensington & Chelsea	*

	Numbers
Kingston upon Thames	15
Lambeth	15
Lewisham	16
Merton	15
Newham	14
Redbridge	17
Richmond upon Thames	16
Southwark	15
Sutton	15
Tower Hamlets	15
Waltham Forest	16
Wandsworth	12
Westminster	nil

*Westway site shared by the London boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham and Kensington and Chelsea.

Association of Metropolitan Authorities

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends meeting representatives of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have at present no firm plans for such a meeting.

Housing (Inquiry Report)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his response to the recent report of the inquiry into British housing by the National Federation of Housing Associations.

Mr. Gow: The recently published document is a summary of the evidence which I am studying. The inquiry's conclusions and final report are expected to be published in the summer.

London Docklands Development Corporation (Compulsory Purchase)

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what compulsory purchase orders have been submitted to him for confirmation by the London Docklands Development Corporation; and what is the number of owners, leaseholders or occupiers, served with statutory notice.

Sir George Young: As I told the hon. Member on 25 January at column *555-6* only the London Docklands Development Corporation (Johnsons draw dock, Ferry street E14) CPO 1984 has been submitted. The corporation has certified that all owners, leaseholders or occupiers have been served with statutory notices. The order shows two such persons.

Mr. Edward Berman

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment for what purpose he obtained the services of Mr. Edward Berman; and what was the period of any contract or arrangement made, together with the terms of service and remuneration paid to him or Inter-Action or any other organisation.

Sir George Young: Mr. Edward Berman was appointed as a special adviser to the then Secretary of State for the Environment on inner city matters, with particular reference to the role of voluntary organisations. His appointment was for nine months from 4 October 1982 to 4 July 1983, on the basis of two-thirds time, to be averaged over the period of the appointment. This was later revised and for the period 1 April to 4 July the appointment was on a full time basis. His salary was based on the mid-point of the assistant secretary scale. The terms of Mr. Berman's appointment provided that, while he was required to withdraw from the paid employment of the Inter-Action Trust, he was permitted to work for it on a voluntary basis, and to undertake consultancy work in time not spent working for the Secretary of State.

Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what meetings have taken place between civil servants in his Department and officers of London boroughs to co-ordinate requests under section 5(2) of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984; what boroughs were involved; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his answer*, 31 January 1985, c. *281*]: This subject has arisen on numerous occasions in the course of discussions about abolition-related matters. My Department is always ready to discuss the use of section 5, with any borough (or district) that wishes to do so.

Owner-Occupiers

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of owner-occupiers in every fifth year from 1955 to the present, expressed as a gross figure and as a percentage of the population this represents; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Estimates of the owner-occupied housing stock are based on data from the censuses of population and housing in 1961, 1966, 1971 and 1981, and from such information as is available on gains and losses between censuses.

The latest estimates available are as follows:

Owner occupied dwellings, England

	Millions	Percentage of all dwellings
December 1950	3·4	29
April 1961	6·1	44
April 1966	7·2	48
April 1971	8·3	52
December 1975	9·4	55
April 1981	10·6	59
December 1984*	11·7	63

*Provisional.

This steady increase reflects the enormous underlying demand for home ownership, even at times when there has been massive public expenditure on council housing. I am confident that the Government's present policies of encouraging home ownership will lead to futher increases in the number of home owners in the future.

Liverpool (Housing)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he made, prior to setting the capital element of Liverpool's housing investment programme allocation, of the legally binding commitments already entered into for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: In determining housing investment programme allocations I take account of forward commitments as reported by the local authority in the HIP submissions and as amended by discussion at HIP meetings. In the case of Liverpool no assessment was possible at the HIP meeting, since the authority broke off the meeting prematurely. I am concerned about estimates of Liverpool's 1985-86 capital commitments as subsequently reported to the council by the city treasurer.

Local Government Bill

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the letter he has received from Conservative leaders of London borough councils supporting the Local Government Bill; and if the letter has been signed by the leader of Waltham Forest council.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have asked the chairman of the London Boroughs Association, who initiated the letter, to send the hon. Member a copy. It was subscribed to by the Conservative leaders of the other councils listed in the answer given in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 29 November last at column *558-9*. This included the leader of the Conservative group on the Waltham Forest council.

SCOTLAND

Kidney Patients

Mr. James Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients on an area basis were on kidney dialysis machines at 31 December last; and what are the arrangements for further machines.

Mr. John MacKay: At 31 December 1983 (the latest date for which information is available) the following number of patients with renal failure were receiving haemodialysis at the five health board units where this is provided:

	Patients
Grampian	25
Greater Glasgow	220
Highland	13
Lothian	99
Tayside	34
Total	391

It is for the five health boards which provide this treatment to decide how many dialysis machines are required for this.

Housing Defects Act 1984

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when a circular on Orlit housing and defective housing will be issued to all housing authorities in Scotland about the Housing Defects Act and the scheme of assistance for owners of prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings; and if he will consider issuing similar guidance in relation to Orlit and defective housing in the public sector.

Mr. Ancram: The circular on the scheme of assistance under the Housing Defects Act 1984 was issued to local authorities on 21 November 1984. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

The Government have no plans to issue specific guidance to local authorities regarding their own stocks of Orlit and other defective houses that come within the scope of the Housing Defects Act. Useful and detailed guidance of specific house types, including Orlits, is already available in the form of reports published by the Building Research Establishment. Authorities themselves are best placed to assess the local situation and needs; it is for them to decide what action, in any, may be necessary and then, if appropriate, to programme realistically phased works according to the resources available.

EC Grants (Edinburgh)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish a table giving the European Economic Community grants for the various European Economic Community funds which have been made available in the Edinburgh area.

Mr. Younger: The table shows the monies received for both infrastructure and industrial projects in the Edinburgh area from the European regional development fund and for agricultural projects in the Edinburgh area under the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund (FEOGA) scheme. Scotland as a whole also benefits from grants from the European social fund but it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the figures for individual areas. Edinburgh has not, as yet, benefited from the European Coal and Steel Community grants.

	ERDF		*FEOGA*
	Infrastructure projects	*Industrial projects*	
1975	97,748	47,000	105,000
1976	785,546	—	213,860
1977	55,067	—	—
1978	537,000	52,079	70,661
1979	231,000	—	—
1980	25,050	343,575	370,000
1981	1,684,336	—	—
1982	236,400	—	40,278
1983	360,000	—	—
1984	—	1,476,600	85,982
Total	4,012,147	1,919,254	885,781

Broadleaved Woodlands

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those organisations which the Forestry Commission proposes to invite to its seminar on the "Broadleaves In Britain" consultation paper on 9 May in Edinburgh; and when he will make a policy statement on forestry policy with respect to broadleaved woodlands.

Mr. John MacKay: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 24 January 1985 which provided details of those organisations invited to the Forestry Commission seminar on 8 May 1985. The following bodies have since been added to the list of invitees:

National Farmers' Union of Scotland
National Trust for Scotland
Scottish Landowners' Federation.

Forestry Ministers hope to be in a position to make a policy statement on broadleaved woodlands before the summer recess.

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans the Forestry Commission has to extend consultation over felling licences with the Nature Conservancy Council from sites of special scientific interest to include other broadleaved woodlands.

Mr. John MacKay: The Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council are discussing, in the context of the consultative paper on broadleaves in Britain, the drawing up of guidelines for the management of broadleaved woodlands of various categories. The adoption of such guidelines is considered to be preferable to extending consultation to cover broadleaved woodlands outside sites of special scientific interest.

Scottish Hospital Advisory Scheme

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many psychiatric hospitals have been visited since the beginning of 1982 under the Scottish hospital advisory scheme; and in how many cases changes were recommended to ensure that all patients are allowed to wear their own clothing.

Mr. John MacKay: Thirteen psychiatric hospitals have been visited by the Scottish hospital advisory service since 1 January 1982; in nine cases changes were recommended to ensure that all patients were allowed to wear their own clothing.

Psychiatric Hospitals

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which psychiatric hospitals in Scotland do not have a rehabilitation unit in operation at present.

(2) which psychiatric hospitals in Scotland do not have access to a staffed rehabilitation hostel outside the hospital, but within the hospital catchment area.

Mr. John MacKay: This information is not kept centrally.

Homes Insulation Grant Scheme

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he plans any reduction in the amount available in Scotland under the homes insulation scheme for 1985-86.

Mr. Ancram: The total amount available for allocation to local authorities in 1985-86 for grants under the Homes Insulation Scheme is about £0·7 million less than in 1984-85. This is because authorities have consistently underspent in recent years. The amount available for distribution in 1985-86 should certainly be sufficient to meet the anticipated demand for grant, both for first-time insulation and for the topping up of existing insulation.

West of Scotland Science Park

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to the answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *206-7*, regarding the development of the west of Scotland science park he will state the basis for the statement that the park has been operating for two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply of 30 January, *Official Report*, columns *206-7*, regarding the action of the Scottish Development Agency property division taking over the west of Scotland science park, Maryhill, if the science park is now to be managed as an industrial estate; and if he has discussed, or will discuss, the arrangements with both Glasgow and Strathclyde universities.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The west of Scotland science park will continue to be developed and managed for occupation solely by companies engaged in high technology research and development. This is reflected in the terms on which the agency leases the site from Glasgow university. Each letting moreover continues to require the concurrence of both Glasgow and Strathclyde universities. The management arrangements are the responsibility of the agency and there is no reason for me to discuss them with the universities.

School Examinations (Disruption)

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements the Scottish examination board proposes to make in the light of the instructions given to Scottish teachers by their unions to disrupt certain procedures associated with examinations for the Scottish Certificate of Education in 1985.

Mr. Younger: I am aware that certain teachers unions are threatening to disrupt administrative and other procedures associated with the 1985 Scottish certificate of education examinations at ordinary and higher grade and the certificate of sixth year studies. I would strongly deplore the taking of such unprecedented action which can only be designed to damage the vital interests of pupils themselves. The teachers should withdraw from all their current action in the light of the way forward I have offered through the Scottish joint negotiating committee (secondary education); and I would urge all teachers in any event to refrain from the extremely serious escalation of their action which would be involved in striking at the examination system.

I nevertheless recognise that pupils and their parents need urgent re-assurance about the prospects for the 1985 SCE examinations in the light of the teachers threats. Following discussions in which my Department has been fully involved, the Scottish Examination Board have today issued a circular to schools and local authorities in Scotland (copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House) giving advice on the conduct of the 1985 examinations. We shall also be placing advertisements in the press from tomorrow. The key elements of the approach being taken by the Scottish Examination Board and the Government are as follows:

> the Government will do everything possible in consultation with the board and with the local authorities to ensure that this year's SCE examinations go ahead as planned;
>
> exceptionally for this year, the Scottish Examination Board will generally be prepared to make awards based on the external written examinations only. Candidates will not be penalised if marks for oral, practical or other internally assessed work are not submitted as a result of action by teachers; but where such marks are available and would improve the overall award they will be used. The Board may however have to make special arrangements in certain subjects, in particular where the practical element accounts for a major proportion of the total mark, and will issue further advice as soon as possible;
>
> the Board cannot however make allowance in marking for any loss of teaching time before the examination:

examinations reflect actual performance, not potential. To adopt any other course would seriously prejudice the quality and acceptability of the Scottish certificate of education;

normal appeal arrangements will apply; and in any event candidates who do not obtain satisfactory marks in any subject this year will be able as usual to resit the examination in 1986. This provision includes inter alia those candidates who are sitting English, mathematics and arithmetic this year; and pupils who are in S4 this year and are sitting the certificate of secondary education examinations run by the English examining boards, in English and mathematics, will also be permitted to sit O grade in these subjects in 1986;

schools will be kept informed of any further changes in the arrangements for the 1985 examinations resulting from the teachers' actions.

I believe that the revised arrangements the SEB are adopting will provide equitably for the situation which will arise if teachers do indeed withhold co-operation from the 1985 examinations in the way suggested; and will maintain the standards of the Scottish certificate of education.

TRANSPORT

London Regional Transport

13. **Mr. Snape** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange joint discussions with the Greater London council, London Regional Transport and his Department in the light of the court judgment of 11 January on the funding of London Regional Transport.

Mr. Ridley: I have offered discussions between my officials and GLC officers in the light of my announcement on 29 January, about my intention to legislate following the High Court judgment.

18. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many meetings he has had with the Greater London Council to discuss London Regional Transport in the last six months.

Mrs. Chalker: I have had three meetings involving the GLC in the last six months, but LRT has not been discussed as the GLC has not had responsibility for LRT in that period.

Channel Link

14. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the latest report regarding the Channel link.

Mr. David Mitchell: We expect to receive the advice of the official Anglo-French working group preparing guidance for potential promoters at the end of the month.

British Rail

16. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail; and what subjects he discussed.

17. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the prospects for improved productivity in the railway industry.

Mr. Ridley: I meet the chairman of British Rail regularly to discuss matters of mutual interest, including the scope for improved productivity. I last met the chairman on 21 January and plan to see him again towards the middle of this month.

EC (Civil Aviation)

19. **Mr. Robert B. Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what are his policy aims in relation to civil aviation between European Community member states.

Mr. Michael Spicer: To introduce greater competition into air transport between member states, and to remove present restrictions. This will allow airlines to offer the services and fares which they judge will best meet consumer demand. We can already see the benefits of our more liberal agreements with the Dutch and the Germans.

Buses

21. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the Bill on bus transport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Bill was given a First Reading on 31 January.

33. **Mr. Bagier** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many professional organisations of proven expertise in the public transport field have made submissions in favour of the proposals contained in his White Paper "Buses"; and if he will list them in the *Official Report*.

41. **Mr. Cowans** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many professional organisations of proven expertise in the public transport field have made submissions in response to his White Paper "Buses", urging changes in his proposals; and if he will list them in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Ridley: I have received numerous responses from organisations with expertise in the public transport field for and against various aspects of our proposals.

39. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had respecting his White Paper "Buses"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I and my colleagues have had a number of meetings with representatives of the bus industry, of local authorities, consumers and other organisations with an interest in our proposals.

44. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library an up-to-date summary of the representations he has received on his "Buses" White Paper.

Mr. David Mitchell: No.

45. **Mr. Ron Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the submissions received by him in response to his "Buses" White Paper were on balance favourable to his proposals; and how many were opposed.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received nearly 8,000 responses both for and against various aspects of our proposals.

46. **Mr. Pavitt** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what improvements in safety standards he anticipates from implementation of the "Buses" White Paper.

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to my reply earlier today to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden).

Motor Vehicles (Lighting)

22. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce a campaign in the Greater London Council area as to the condition of lighting on motor cars and lorries.

Mrs. Chalker: We are preparing a leaflet for issue nationally which not only advises motorists about the use of lights on vehicles, but also urges them to keep all their lights clean and in good working order. Guidance on this is also given in the Highway Code.

Gatwick Airport (Noise)

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the monitoring of aircraft noise at Gatwick airport.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Aircraft taking off from Gatwick are required to meet statutory noise limits, and are monitored to ensure that these limits are observed. Infringements are taken up with the airlines concerned by my Department.

British Rail (Purchases)

24. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what total expenditure Her Majesty's Government have approved for the purchase by British Rail of new and replacement rolling stock since June 1983.

Mr. David Mitchell: Since June 1983, the Government have approved expenditure by British Rail of £216 million on new passenger rolling stock.

Air Traffic (UK-Netherlands)

25. **Mrs. Kellett-Bowman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any estimates of changes in the level of air traffic between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands as a result of the agreement reached between the two Governments in summer 1984.

Mr. Michael Spicer: London-Amsterdam traffic was 16 per cent. higher in the second half of 1984 than in the same period in 1983. This percentage increase is significantly greater than for traffic to Paris or Brussels or to Europe as a whole.

Motorways (Lighting)

26. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Transport, if, in the light of the recent report on road safety by the Select Committee on Transport, he will now consider providing lights on all new motorways and also give further consideration to lighting the unlit sections of existing motorways.

Mrs. Chalker: The report, which covers many aspects of road safety, is being considered very carefully and our response will of course cover the road lighting items raised by my hon. Friend.

Dartford Tunnel

27. **Mr. Mudd** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government concerning that offer of the Greater London council to purchase the Dartford tunnel from Essex and Kent county councils.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that GLC officials have been asked to investigate the possibility of the council acquiring the tunnel but that no offer to buy has been made.

Transport and Road Research Laboratory

28. **Mr. Higgins** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will visit the Transport and Road Research Laboratory.

Mr. Ridley: I visited the Transport and Road Research Laboratory in March last year. I expect to make further visits from time to time.

Nuclear Electromagnetic Pulse

29. **Mr. Ashby** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has ensured that essential road, rail, sea and air transport required in an emergency will not be affected by nuclear electromagnetic pulse.

38. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to harden vulnerable equipment in his charge against the effects of nuclear electromagnetic pulse.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply I gave to my hon. Friends the Members for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) and Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) earlier today.

A19

30. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretay of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the investigations being made into repairs on the A19 road.

Mrs. Chalker: In my reply to the hon. Member on 12 November 1984 I referred to further investigations by my Department on the condition of the stage II carriageway. We have concluded that certain repair work is now required to strengthen the pavement on the southbound carriageway south of the Parkway intersection to Redhill bridge, and a short section of the northbound carriageway adjacent to the intersection. These will receive an overlay in the summer of 1985. Further investigations are now in progress on the section south of the Redhill bridge, to determine the extent of any other repairs that may be necessary and these are expected to be completed in the summer.

Negotiations with the consultants and contractors involved in the original construction are continuing.

Driving Tests, Basildon

31. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many people from Basildon took the driving test in each of the last four years.

Mrs. Chalker: I regret that this information is not readily available.

Manchester International Airport

32. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, as part of his proposed programme of visits to regional airports, he will pay a visit to Manchester international airport.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I visited Manchester international airport on 14 November 1984 and received a comprehensive briefing from the management and members of the airport authority.

St. Pancras-Sheffield Line

34. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has recently met the chairman of the British Railways Board to discuss investment in the St. Pancras-Sheffield line.

Mr. David Mitchell: No.

Airports (Snow Clearing)

35. **Mr. Michael Marshall** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what, for the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available, was the total number of hours during which normal operations were suspended at all international airports as a result either of the inability of snow-clearing facilities to clear snow from runways or of the absence of such facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Such figures are not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost. However, statistics published by the British Airports Authority show that, in the financial year 1983-84, its airports were closed for the following periods for the clearance of snow and ice:

Airport	*Period of time*
Heathrow	Nil
Gatwick	Nil
Stansted	6 hours and 2 minutes
Glasgow	15 hours and 37 minutes
Edinburgh	1 hour and 30 minutes
Prestwick	Nil
Aberdeen	23 hours and 43 minutes

British Rail Services (London)

36. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the provision of rail services in and around London.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the chairman at which this is often among the subjects discussed.

Roads (Expenditure)

37. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the size and allocation of capital expenditure on motorways and trunk roads in 1984-85.

Mrs. Chalker: Planned capital expenditure for 1984-85 on motorways and trunk roads in England is £728 million, of which £579 million is allocated to new construction and £149 million to renewals.

Road Safety (Report)

40. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to reply to the Transport Committee's report on road safety; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I welcome the committee's report as a constructive contribution to the debate on how to improve road safety. I am considering its recommendations very carefully and will respond as soon as possible.

Trunk Road Programme

42. **Mr. David Marshall** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to introduce more precise dates for the start of road construction schemes as part of his review of the trunk road programme.

Mrs. Chalker: The actual start dates for trunk road schemes in England depend on the variable impact of three main interlocking factors—their relative priority within the road programme, the amount of resources available in any one year, and the rate of progress of proposed schemes through the necessary design and statutory public consultation processes. Given the variable effect of these factors it would not make sense to produce more precise forecasts of likely start dates than those currently in use.

M25 (Epping Forest)

43. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what measures have been taken for the reduction of noise from the M25 within the Epping Forest district of Essex since the official opening of that part of the motorway.

Mrs. Chalker: Four further properties in Ivychimneys road have been identified as being eligible for double-glazing; offers for this have accordingly been made to the owners. As my hon. Friend knows, we took considerable measures to reduce noise nuisance prior to the road being opened to traffic.

British Airways

47. **Mr. Terry Davis** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the cost of selling British Airways.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It is not possible to estimate the cost of the sale at this time. It will depend on a number of variables, including the sale price of the shares, which have yet to be determined.

Local Government Reform

48. **Mr. Mikardo** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what effect he expects the abolition of the Greater London council to have on London traffic arrangements.

Mrs. Chalker: Beneficial.

Concessionary Pass Schemes

Mr. Brandon-Bravo asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce legislation removing from local authorities the right to determine the specific type of public transport concessionary pass scheme which they operate within their areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Transport Bill published on 31 January contains no such provision; nor does my right hon. Friend intend to seek one. Local authorities will continue to have discretion to choose the form of

concessionary schemes best suited to their area. As the White Paper made clear, the Government's intention is to make only two changes to the current arrangements; to ensure that all operators can participate, and to make payments to operators reflect the cost of the concessions, thus avoiding concealed subsidy to bus services generally.

Highway Corridors (London)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport if roads in the areas to be covered by his highway corridor studies are currently the responsibility of either the Greater London council or London boroughs.

Mrs. Chalker: Yes.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport what liaison there will be between his consultants and the Greater London council and London boroughs during the course of the highway corridor studies.

Mrs. Chalker: My Department has invited the Greater London council and London boroughs to attend meetings and to contribute information and views on the traffic and environmental problems facing those who live and work in their areas. I hope that the Greater London council and those London boroughs that have so far refused to do so, will reconsider their position.

Road Traffic Act 1974

Mr. Mark Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for Transport when it is intended to bring into operation section 7 of the Road Traffic Act 1974.

Mr. Ridley: There are at present no plans to do so.

Channel Crossing

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport if the studies undertaken by his Department into the possible construction of a Channel road bridge and tunnel have arrived at any conclusions as to the side of the road on which motorists should drive; whether there will be a changeover half way across; and whether any common position on this issue has been arrived at with the French authorities.

Mr. David Mitchell: I will answer this question shortly.

Visibility Monitoring Sensor

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's evaluation of the Marconi MET-1 visibility monitoring sensor; and whether it is being considered for use throughout Britain's motorway network.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) on 28 and 29 January at columns *11* and *83* respectively.

I have nothing further to add.

Tanker Havens

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what public consultation his Department has carried out regarding its plans for tanker havens around the British Isles;

(2) if he will give a date for the publication of a list or map of tanker havens around the coast of Britain;

(3) if he will ensure that no sites of importance for nature conservation, as identified by the Nature Conservancy Council, are considered or used by his Department as tanker havens;

(4) if he will list those areas of coastline identified by his Department for use as tanker havens;

(5) if he will list the criteria used by the marine pollution control unit of his Department in assessing and identifying potential and actual tanker havens;

(6) if he will list those local authorities consulted by his Department regarding the identification and investigation of sites for coastal tanker havens, to be used as shelters for tankers in distress or leaking oil.

Mr. David Mitchell: It has long been established that the most effective way of preventing a continued spillage of oil from a damaged tanker is to remove her cargo by an emergency transfer operation and this can best, and most safely, be done in a sheltered place.

The possibility of drawing up a short list of specific places where such shelter might be provided was considered but has been rejected as being impractical. Instead the Nature Conservancy Council, the local authority associations and the Fisheries Departments have agreed that a broad survey of the whole of the United Kingdom coastline should be undertaken and a data bank established of all the marine, amenity and environmental factors that would need to be considered should a decision have to be taken to move a damage tanker to a sheltered place.

The NCC and MAFF have already been consulted about the environmental aspects involved and local authority views will be sought shortly.

Electrically Assisted Cycles

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the safety of electrically assisted cycles.

Mrs. Chalker: The regulations limit the weight, speed and power of these vehicles so that in general they share the hazards and safety features of ordinary bicycles. For example, being small, quiet and slow moving, they run the risk of not being noticed by other road users. But unlike bicycles they may not be used by children under 14, and particular designs of electric cycle may incorporate features not present on conventional cycles. For example, the Sinclair C5 has different conspicuity characteristics being lower than a cycle, similar in height to an open sports car, but with conspicuous white bodywork and a very good rear lamp. The C5 has a safety advantage over bicyles in that one cannot wobble or fall off it, and the brakes are very effective in both the dry and the wet. The Department does not expect the C5 to have an accident record dissimilar from that which applies to pedal cycles generally.

We are watching developments and the Transport and Road Research Laboratory will be looking at the C5 and any other type of electrically assisted cycle which may be produced on a substantial scale.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Assembly

Mr. John M. Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement regarding the progress of the working of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr. Hurd: The Assembly continues diligently to carry out its consultative functions. We now want to see it produce proposals for devolution which would be likely to command widespread acceptance throughout the community.

Compensation Payments

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the sums paid in the latest financial year and the financial year to date in *(a)* compensation for property damaged and *(b)* compensation for personal injury suffered by the security forces and the public as a result of the civil unrest in Northern Ireland from 1 January 1968 to the latest available date; and what have been the total amounts claimed for such injuries in each year and *(c)* compensation payments under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978.

Mr. Scott: Information on criminal injury compensation claims cannot be provided in the form requested as applicants do not claim specific amounts. Personal injuries compensation payments made under the Criminal Injuries to Persons (Compensation) Act (Northern Ireland) 1968 are not recorded separately for civilian and members of the security forces. The available information is as follows:

	1983-84 £	*1984-85 to 31 December* £
Total compensation payments for property damage	19,472,529	15,535,483
Total compensation payments for personal injuries under the Criminal Injuries to Persons (Compensation) Act (NI) 1963 and the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (NI) Order 1977	8,377,447	6,610,183
Compensation payments to Civilians under the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (NI) Order 1977	5,011,570	4,052,027
Compensation payments to members of the Security Forces* under the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (NI) Order 1977	2,493,130	1,976,555
Compensation payments under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978	174,240	185,405

* ie., members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Royal Ulster Constabulary (Reserve), Army and Ulster Defence Regiment.

Fair Employment Agency

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of individual discrimination were found by the Fair Employment Agency in 1984; and how many of these were against *(a)* Roman Catholics and *(b)* Protestants.

Dr. Boyson: There were 10 findings of individual discrimination, all of which were of discrimination against Roman Catholics.

Scheduled Offences

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the proportion and number of persons accused of scheduled offences on the basis, either wholly or partially, of accomplice witnesses' testimony who are accorded bail; and what is the equivalent proportion of persons accused of scheduled offences who are not charged on the basis of accomplice testimony who are accorded bail in each year since 1980.

Mr. Scott: Information is not kept in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Homes Insulation Grant Scheme

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Offical Report* a table giving, by quarter since their inception, for Northern Ireland *(a)* the number of dwellings insulated under the local authorities energy conservative programme and a breakdown of the body which completed the work, *(b)* the cost of the programme and *(c)* the number of dwellings insulated under the home insulation scheme and a breakdown of tenancies to whom the grants were paid, *(d)* the amounts of the payments, *(e)* the number of 90 per cent. grants paid and their costs and *(f)* the financial allocation for each of the past financial years to each of these schemes and the allocation for the current financial year.

Dr. Boyson: There is no equivalent in Northern Ireland to the local authorities energy conservation programme. Grants towards the cost of home insulation are available under the home insulation grant scheme which is now funded by the Department of Economic Development and administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

The table sets out, on a quarterly basis since the inception of the scheme, the number of dwellings insulated under the home insulation scheme (at standard rate of grant 66 per cent. and at special need rate 90 per cent.) in the private and public sectors; and the amounts of payments.

Financial year and quarter ending	*Private sector*				*Public sector (NIHE)*			
	Standard rate (66 per cent.)		*Special need rate (90 per cent.)*		*Standard rate (66 per cent.)*		*Special need rate (90 per cent.)*	
	Dwellings completed	*Expenditure** £	*Dwellings completed*	*Expenditure* £	*Dwellings completed*	*Expenditure* £	*Dwellings completed*	*Expenditure* £
1978-79								
December	14	nil	—	—	—	—	—	—
1979-80								

Financial year and quarter ending	Private sector				Public sector (NIHE)			
	Standard rate (66 per cent.)		Special need rate (90 per cent.)		Standard rate (66 per cent.)		Special need rate (90 per cent.)	
	Dwellings completed	Expenditure* £	Dwellings completed	Expenditure £	Dwellings completed	Expenditure £	Dwellings completed	Expenditure £
March	1,868	75,809	—	—	—	—	—	—
June	2,530	120,413	—	—	—	—	—	—
September	1,984	94,050	—	—	—	—	—	—
December	3,109	145,253	—	—	—	—	—	—
1980-81								
March	3,494	171,962	—	—	2	100	—	—
June	2,286	113,026	—	—	14	773	—	—
September	1,316	64,000	—	—	15	552	—	—
December	1,547	79,551	35	2,191	32	1,616	5	280
1981-82								
March	1,730	103,776	312	26,340	128	5,081	33	2,895
June	1,595	96,395	293	25,441	76	4,325	36	3,061
September	1,059	65,737	161	13,956	65	3,213	28	2,455
December	1,327	79,803	184	15,868	52	3,261	28	2,419
1982-83								
March	1,951	115,253	307	25,610	89	4,863	26	2,210
June	1,087	66,286	247	22,244	37	2,482	28	2,414
September	903	55,978	263	24,154	21	1,198	14	1,370
December	1,113	68,456	231	21,083	15	995	17	1,569
1983-84								
March	1,554	94,121	276	23,897	19	1,210	19	1,780
June	1,214	82,206	187	19,295	25	1,540	10	938
September	821	50,300	124	10,617	12	682	10	881
December	1,009	63,630	152	12,833	17	954	4	325
1984-85								
March	1,184	77,360	247	20,642	10	531	4	450
June	1,021	67,219	251	19,990	11	625	7	639
September	735	51,004	233	20,306	10	766	4	285
December	1,063	67,077	141	12,737	9	608	6	565
Totals	37,514	2,068,676	3,644	317,212	659	35,383	279	24,543

Breakdown of Totals

	Dwellings completed	Expenditure £
Completed insulations (private sector)	41,158	2,385,888
Completed insulations (public sector)	938	59,926
Total completed insulations	42,096	2,445,815
The number of 90 per cent. grants paid and their cost	3,923	341,756

* All sums rounded down to nearest pound, hence columns do not add.

The financial allocation for home insulation grants for past financial years was

Financial year	£000
1979-80	500
1980-81	600
1981-82	500
1982-83	450
1983-84	344

Note:
The allocation for the current financial year is £400,000.

Education and Library Boards

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to him to indicate the total expenditure on books by each of the education and library boards in Northern Ireland for each of the past six years.

Mr. Scott: Figures available include expenditure on practice materials (such as rulers, compasses, clay, wood,

chemicals etc), as well as on books at schools and institutions of further education and on books purchased for public libraries. They are as follows:

£000s

Area boards	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84
Belfast	1,717	1,708	1,857	1,694	1,437	1,512
North-Eastern	1,722	1,858	1,778	1,937	2,013	2,177
South-Eastern	1,277	1,363	1,227	1,362	1,352	1,560
Southern	1,399	1,463	1,472	1,501	1,527	1,549
Western	1,241	1,299	1,371	1,359	1,374	1,432
All boards	7,356	7,691	7,705	7,853	7,703	8,230

Kidney Patients

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing the current level of dialysis provision in Northern Ireland, the numbers on the waiting list for dialysis provision and what proposals he is making to improve the provision of and access to dialysis for kidney patients in all parts of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Chris Patten: The renal unit at the Belfast city hospital can provide dialysis treatment for up to 42 patients and this will shortly be increased by 12 as a result of proposals drawn up by the Eastern health and social services board. This dialysis provision is supported by a relatively high transplant programme which subject to the availability of donor kidneys, can cope with up to 48 transplants per year. At present 30 patients are on the waiting list for dialysis treatment and 40 are waiting for transplants. The Department of Health and Social Services in consultation with the health and social services boards is also considering the further development of services for kidney patients including the feasibility of providing dialysis units outside Belfast.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining how the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland estimates or assesses the income of small farmers for the purpose of awarding family income supplement; and whether he has any proposals to change this.

Mr. Chris Patten: Claims for family income supplement are determined by independent adjudication officers and in dealing with self employed claimants the net profit derived from the occupation is taken into account. In deciding the net profit of farmers a profit and loss account would first be sought but, if this was not available, the net profit would be estimated using profit margin figures supplied by the Department of Agriculture. There are no proposals to change this system of assessment.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, in the light of the recent exceptionally severe weather in Northern Ireland, he has any plans to give single payments to help supplementary benefit claimants meet any resultant fuel debt.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) on 1 February 1985, at column *349*.

Value Added Tax

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether value added tax is paid by his Department on the cost of salting roads and for snow clearance.

Mr. Chris Patten: Value added tax is paid on the costs of materials used and plant purchased or hired for these operations.

New Jobs (Strangford)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the 5,189 new jobs provided in Northern Ireland in the year ended 31 December 1984 were located in the constituency of Strangford.

Dr. Boyson: Of the 5,189 new jobs promoted in Northern Ireland by the Industrial Development Board in the year ended 31 December 1984, 350 were located in the constituency of Strangford.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Research and Development (Expenditure)

Mr. Strang asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what figures he uses in comparing Government research and development spending on agriculture in the United Kingdom with that in other countries.

Mrs. Fenner: International comparisons of Government expenditure on agricultural research and development are published by the OECD and by Eurostat; but in making these comparisons regard must be had to differences between the sets of national data used.

EC (Import Levies)

Mr. Merchant asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what, expressed in pence per pound, is the import levy into the EEC of the following goods *(a)* butter, *(b)* cheese, *(c)* sugar, *(d)* wheat and *(e)* beef.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is as follows. The import levies shown have been adjusted for

monetary compensatory amounts set for the United Kingdom. The rates shown are those applicable on 23 January 1985.

United Kingdom levy

	p per lb.
Butter (82 per cent. fat)	*52·5
Cheese (Cheddar)	*48·9
Sugar	†12·6
Common wheat	1·5
Beef	‡64·7

* In practice, special quota arrangements apply to most imports of butter and cheese from third countries, allowing entry at reduced rates of levy. Under these schemes a levy of 19·5p per lb would apply in the case of 80 per cent. fat butter and a levy of 4·2p per lb would apply to Cheddar cheese imported from New Zealand under the quota arrangements.

† In practice, the United Kingdom's imports from third countries are generally covered by the Lomé Convention and enter the Community levy free.

‡ The rates vary according to Tariff Heading and country of origin. The rate for carcase meat (Tariff Heading 02.01A IIa1) from third countries other than Austria, Switzerland or Sweden is quoted. In practice, most beef imports from third countries are subject to special arrangements allowing entry at reduced rates of levy.

EC Expenditure

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the percentage increase in European Economic Community agriculture expenditure in 1983 compared with 1982, and in 1984 compared with 1983; and what change he anticipates in 1985.

Mr. MacGregor: The increase in EC agriculture expenditure over the previous year was 28 per cent. in 1983 and is estimated at 16 per cent. in 1984. The 1985 Community budget has not yet been adopted.

Foodstuffs (Price)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing what adjustment has had to be made under the common agricultural policy to the price of principal foodstuffs in the United Kingdom in the period since last September as a result of the fall in the pound sterling against the deutschmark.

Mr. MacGregor: As I told the hon. Member on 17 December 1984 in a written reply at column *34*, changes in the value of the deutschemark or of sterling have no effect on CAP support prices in the United Kingdom.

Skimmed Milk Powder

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what percentage of adulterated milk powder has been exported over the last five years; and which countries have been the principal recipients;

(2) what are the principal sources of skimmed milk powder currently held in intervention in the United Kingdom;

(3) what is his latest estimate of the total amount of skimmed milk powder held in the United Kingdom under intervention; and what percentage in the current year he expects to be adulterated under European Community Regulation 443/77;

(4) what percentage of the skimmed milk powder held in storage at the Bedwan house industrial estate, near Caerphilly, has ultimately been adulterated under European Economic Community Regulation 443/77 for each year of its operation; and what has been the total yearly cost of that adulteration;

(5) what has been the total amount of skimmed milk powder, for each of the European Economic Community countries and for each of the last five years, denatured under European Economic Community Regulation 443/77; and what percentage of each country's output this constituted;

(6) what percentage of skimmed milk powder held in storage in England, Scotland and Wales, respectively, has been adulterated under European Economic Community Regulation 443/77 for each of the last five years;

(7) what has been the cost to each of the European Economic Community countries for each of the last five years of the administration of European Economic Community Regulation 443/77; and what has been the average unit cost of skimmed milk powder purchased and adulterated powder sold;

(8) what is the average period of time skimmed milk powder is held in storage before being adulterated under European Economic Community Regulation 443/77.

Mr. MacGregor: I will write to the hon. Member.

Central Bristol Channel

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) in which year sampling and sonar surveys have been carried out by his Department in the vicinity of the central Bristol channel sea wastes dump at latitude 51° 24·5'N and longitude 04° 04'W;

(2) for each year since 1974, what was the tonnage of *(a)* sewage sludge and *(b)* industrial waste licensed for disposal in the central Bristol channel; and what were the corresponding tonnages actually dumped;

(3) whether he has available to him any reports on the field assessment of effects of dumping wastes in the vicinity of the central Bristol channel at latitude 51° 24·5'N and longitude 04° 04'W that is more recent than Fisheries Research Technical Report No. 59.

Mr. MacGregor: The quantities licensed for disposal and those actually dumped in the central Bristol channel site between 1974 and 1983 (the latest year for which figures are available) were:

'000 tonnes

	Sewage Sludge		*Industrial Waste*	
	Licensed	*Dumped*	*Licensed*	*Dumped*
1974	350	281	5·1	3·0
1975	675	346	14·5	6·0
1976	481	308	7·5	6·7
1977	517	330	10·1	5·3
1978	482	394	8·5	5·0
1979	482	358	7·4	3·8
1980	482	392	5·4	2·8
1981	482	328	5·5	3·3
1982	572	320	5·4	2·8
1983	525	230	4·8	2·0

Fisheries Research Technical Report No. 59 is the latest completed field assessment, but an analysis is in train of a supplementary survey undertaken in 1983. As the report indicates, samples were taken in 1975, 1976 and 1977 and a sonar survey was carried out in 1976. Subsequently, further samples were taken in the 1983 survey.

Suffolk Small Woodlands Project

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the Forestry Commission has studied the Suffolk small woodlands project; and what plans it has to establish similar management advice schemes in other counties.

Mrs. Fenner: The Forestry Commission is fully aware of this project. The possibility of setting up schemes of this type in other parts of the country is one of the questions currently being considered in the context of the commission's review of broadleaved woodland policy.

Parliamentary Secretary (Caribbean Visit)

Mr. Parry asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Parliamentary Secretary's recent visit to the Caribbean; and why it was cut short.

Mrs. Fenner: I visited the Windward Islands at the invitation of their Governments. The purpose of the visit was to see on the ground the action being taken to secure the major improvements which Her Majesty's Government have been seeking in the quality of the fruit shipped to the United Kingdom under long-standing preferential arrangements enjoyed by these countries. These arrangements are recognised in protocol 4 of the 3rd EEC-ACP convention of Lomé.

In discussions with the Prime Ministers of each of the four islands which traditionally supply bananas to the United Kingdom market, I stressed that privileged access to the United Kingdom market implies an obligation to give the British consumer a fair deal on quality. I chaired, jointly with the Minister of Agriculture of St. Lucia, a committee to monitor progress on programmes of improvement agreed in 1983 and to determine further action necessary to ensure attainment of agreed quality targets; and I visited banana-growing regions and studied quality control procedures at every stage from production to shipping to see how measures to improve quality agreed anaupon between the United Kingdom and the Windward Island Governments were being put into effect.

I am convinced that the Governments of the Windward Islands are now fully committed to ensuring that their exports match up to the needs of the British consumer.

I returned to the United Kingdom early in order to be present for the debate in the House on 31 January.

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Parliamentary Secretary, will now resume her engagements with the banana quality monitoring committees in Caribbean countries following her return to the United Kingdom to vote in the House on 31 January; which members of her party returned with her to the United Kingdom; and what additional costs to public funds have been incurred as a result of this change of plans.

Mrs. Fenner: I returned to the United Kingdom on 31 January, together with Mr. Fenner and my private secretary. As I am not in a position to return to the Caribbean at the present time the cost of the visit to public funds will be appreciably lower than previously estimated.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any proposals to ensure price maintenance of branded products exluded from the limited list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Products which can no longer be prescribed for National Health Service use will be excluded from DHSS price control from 1 April. From that date manufacturers will be free to fix their own prices.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received advocating the inclusion of the laxative known as Duphalac Lactulose on his proposed limited list of drugs for use by paraplegics and other disabled people.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received a number of comments about the laxatives to remain available on National Health Service prescription under our limited list proposals including some which cite the needs of diabled people. We are carefully considering all these views.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of the doctors who have written to his Department commenting on the proposal to limit the range of medicines prescribable under the National Health Service have expressed unqualified approval of the proposals; how many approved of the proposals but with reservations; how many expressed opposition to the proposals; and what percentage of doctors registered to practice medicine in the United Kingdom is represented by each of the groups outlined.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received about 3,400 letters from doctors commenting on our proposals to limit the range of drugs available in certain therapeutic categories. Of these, some 1,800 support the proposals or make constructive suggestions on the contents of the list. Many of the remainder, including over 300 copies of a circular letter supplied to doctors by Roche Pharmaceuticals Ltd., show an imperfect understanding of our proposals. The number of doctors who have written represents under 2 per cent. of all doctors registered to practice medicine in the United Kingdom.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from trade unions about the effect of the limited list proposals on employment in pharmaceutical research and production.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received representations from a number of individual trades union members, from some branch organisations and from the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will name the organisations that have written to him making representations about his limited list proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received representations from a wide range of organisations but a list suitable for publication could not be compiled without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jack Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what reply he has sent to the comments and

suggestions submitted by the Royal College of General Practitioners regarding the proposed National Health Service limited drugs list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are still considering the comments and suggestions submitted by the Royal College of General Practitioners and will respond to them as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the representatives of the medical profession appointed to advise him on his limited list proposals have been required to sign a declaration under the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. Members of the group will have access to information of considerable financial value to those with an interest in the market for pharmaceutical products. They are people of considerable distinction however and we have complete confidence in their discretion and judgment. They have been encouraged to consult colleagues outside the group about the clinical aspects of the list.

Nevertheless, the legal position is that the members of the Chief Medical Officer's Advisory Group would commit an offence under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 if they made an unauthorised disclosure of information entrusted to them in confidence by Ministers or officials of our Department. Our officials drew their attention to the statutory requirements and they were invited, but not required, to sign an acknowledgement that their attention had been drawn to them and that they understood them.

Homeless Persons

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people living in reception centres have been rehoused by local authorities in the current year; and how this compares with the figures for each year since 1974.

Mr. Whitney: 249 people living in resettlement units (formerly reception centres) were rehoused in local authority rented accommodation in the 12 months up to 20 November 1984. The only other period for which figures are available was April to November 1983 when 192 people were accommodated in this way.

Circular HDC(77)1

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether measures to deal with the effects of chemical and biological weapons will be included in the new circular HDC(77)1.

Mr. John Patten: The Government are a party to the 1972 convention banning biological weapons. In the absence of a chemical weapons ban, active consideration is being given to the detection and warning of danger presented by them and what protective measures can be taken. When the results of this work are available, we shall consider including in the general guidance to health authorities on civil defence planning specific advice on dealing with the effects of chemical weapons.

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to issue the new circular HDC(77)1.

Mr. John Patten: Officials have now been able to consider published and other views on a preliminary draft circular to replace the guidance in HDC(77)1 on civil defence planning in the National Health Service. These views are being taken into account in a further draft which will be issued for general consultation at the earliest possible date.

Furniture Payments (Inquiry)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether the Social Security Inspectorate's inquiry into single payments for furniture has now been finalised; and when he proposes to publish the report;

(2) whether the inspectorate's inquiry into single payments for furniture has now reached a stage at which it can tell him how many wrongful refusals of single payments for furniture were found in the course of the inquiry; what action has been taken to correct errors found; and with what results.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her on 3 December 1984 at column 79. The Social Security Policy Inspectorate's report on its enquiry into single payments for furniture has just been delivered and we shall now be considering what action, if any, needs to be taken in the light of the report including the question of publication.

AIDS

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will bring forward proposals immediately requiring all blood donors to sign a declaration that they are not in a high-risk group for acquired immune deficiency syndrome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We must ensure that all those in the AIDS high risk groups are made aware that they should not donate. Transfusion centres have been told to distribute copies of our revised leaflet "AIDS — Important New Advice for Blood Donors".

Requiring all donors to sign a declaration will not materially increase the safeguards. However transfusion directors are free to adopt this procedure if they wish.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people have been monitored for acquired immune deficiency syndrome after acquiring HT LV-III from infected blood in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In 1984 monitoring was commenced of the three recipients of blood transfusions given by a donor who subsequently had developed AIDS; the transfusions took place in 1983(2) and 1984(1).

This same donor provided plasma from which Factor VIII was manufactured and given in 1984 to 38 haemophiliacs; the HTLV-III antibody status of these patients is being investigated.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that district and regional health authorities possess adequate resources to enable hospitals to adhere fully to the guidelines issued by his Department on acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. We are distributing nearly £500 million additional cash to regional health authorities

in 1985-86. In addition we are expecting health authorities to produce cost improvement programmes yielding in excess of the £100 million identified this year.

Blood Products

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will take steps to make immediately available to all haemophilé units imported heat-treated factor VIII; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are currently considering a number of abridged applications for product licences for imported heat-treated factor VIII. Even before such licences are granted, heat-treated factor VIII is available for prescription by clinicians on a 'named patient' basis.

Blood Donors

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied with the design of the leaflet all blood donors are required to read before giving blood; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. In recent months we have revised the content of this leaflet to strengthen its message and to extend the categories of persons in AIDS high-risk groups who should not donate blood. This revised leaflet "AIDS"—Important New Advice for Blood Donors" has been printed and issued to regional transfusion centres for their use.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the present statutory sick pay scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: Yes. The present statutory sick pay scheme is generally working well and a recent Social Security Policy Inspectorate study, a copy of which I have placed in the Library, indicates that most employees prefer it to the DHSS sickness benefit scheme. The Social Security Bill, which was recently considered by a Standing Committee of this House, provides for the extension of an employer's liability to pay statutory sick pay for his employees from 8 to 28 weeks with effect from 6 April 1986. A consultation paper on the extension was issued by the Department on 21 December 1984. A copy has also been placed in the Library.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange for the design and distribution to local authorities of a poster advertising housing benefit.

Mr. Whitney: A poster advertising a leaflet "Who Pays Less Rent and Rates?" was distributed in March 1983 to all local authorities. In addition, local authorities receive subsidy for their expenses for operating the housing benefif scheme including the costs for publicity.

Alder Hey and Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the proposal to make two wards at the Alder Hey children's hospital in Liverpool five-day wards.

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if there are any plans to alter the bed provision of the Alder Hey children's hospital and the Royal Liverpool children's hospital from seven-day wards to five-day wards.

Mr. John Patten: It is for health authorities to decide on the level of provision needed locally. The hon. Members may therefore care to write to the chairmen of Liverpool health authority about this.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to extend mobility allowance to disabled persons over 64 years of age; and what would be the cost to public funds of doing so.

Mr. Newton: Disabled people can already received mobility allowance up to age 75 provided that they satisfy the qualifying conditions before age 65 and claim before they reach age 66. We have no present plans to extend these age limits. The estimated cost of abolishing them altogether is £340 million a year.

Private Patient Changes

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether Bloomsbury health authority was one of those where the handling of private patient charges was examined by his Department's auditors.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The examination of the handling of private patients charges in Bloomsbury was carried out by the authority's own internal auditors with the assistance of guidance provided by our Department's auditor. He was satisfied with this review and the remedial action taken. The examination formed part of the wider review by our Department's auditors.

Overseas Patients

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of any actions taken by his Department or any health authority in order to encourage patients to come from overseas to receive private or other fee-paying treatment from the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There has been no such action by our Department nor, as far as we are aware, by any health authority.

Overseas Medical Services

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of any involvement by his Department or any health authority in medical services in Egypt, Saudi Arabia or elsewhere overseas.

Mr. John Patten: North-East Thames regional health authority provides administrative advice to the Ministry of Defence in connection with the agreement between the Government and Saudi Arabia under which the Ministry of Defence has appointed contractors to manage the King Khalid National Guard hospital in Jeddah. I am not aware of any other existing contracts.

Doddington Hospital

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what would be the effect on the local family

practitioner services of general practitioners providing medical cover if the proposal to convert Doddington hospital into a unit for geriatrics goes ahead;

(2) whether the Peterborough health authority will pay general practitioners to provide medical cover if the Doddington hospital becomes a unit for geriatrics;

(3) whether the proposed transformation of Doddington hospital into a unit for geriatrics can take place without local general practitioners expressing their willingness to provide medical cover; whether the family practitioner committee's approval for this plan is needed; and whether the family practitioner committee has been consulted.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The proposal to change the use of Doddington hospital was one of several options canvassed by Peterborough health authority prior to finalising its strategic plan.

Health authority proposals including the manpower implications of planning options which involve family practitioner services must be pursued in collaboration with the family practitioner committee and the associated local representative committees. The hon. Member may care to contact these bodies concerning such arrangements at local level. I understand that no decisions have been taken regarding medical cover associated with the proposed change of use, nor concerning any possible effects on general medical services if this were provided by general practitioners. But if cover is to be provided in this way, I would expect the health authority and the family practitioner and local medical committees to continue to work together so that a conclusion is reached that takes hospital and family practitioner service needs into account.

If the proposed change took place it would be possible for Peterborough health authority to make arrangements for general practitioners to be paid for providing medical cover.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the proposal to convert Doddington hospital into a unit for geriatrics represents a change of policy by the Peterborough health authority.

Mr. John Patten: The hon. Member may care to contact the Peterborough health authority direct on their policy, as it is responsible for the management of services locally.

Registered Mental Nurses

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether Peterborough health authority has any difficulty in recruiting registered mental nurses;

(2) whether the savings calculated to accrue from the closure of the operating theatre facilities at Doddington hospital took into account the costs of transporting to Peterborough those needing surgery.

Mr. John Patten: We do not collect this sort of detailed local information centrally. The hon. Member may care to contact the Peterborough health authority for details.

Mrs. Clarke (Attendance Allowance)

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement as to the progress of the application received on 13 August by his Department at Bristol relating to a request for an attendance allowance by Mrs. Clarke, now aged 80 years, of Hotel Chateau Bellevue, Newton road, Totnes, Devon.

Mr. Newton: A decision, together with payment of arrears for the due period, was sent to Mrs. Clarke on 31 January. I am writing to my hon. Friend about the circumstances of this case.

Heating Allowance

Mr. Walters asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to allow claims for heating allowance by pensioners and other benefit recipients to be considered when the claimant is not in receipt of supplementary benefit.

Mr. Whitney: No. It would cost well over £500 million just to give basic rate supplementary benefit heating additions to pensioners not in receipt of supplementary benefit. The best way to use the available resources is to concentrate on helping those most in need by maintaining or increasing so far as possible the value of supplementary benefit rates. Between November 1978 and November 1984 the real value of the main rates of supplementary benefit increased by about 6 per cent. and over the same period the basic rate of heating addition increased by about 147 per cent. compared with an increase in fuel prices of about 108 per cent. We expect to spend some £400 million on heating additions this financial year, which is about £140 million more in real terms than was spent in 1978-79.

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the daily temperature in the city of Aberdeen during the period 21 January to 28 January as reported to his Department for the purpose of assessing eligibility for single payment heating allowance.

Mr. Whitney: The information provided for the chief adjudication officer by the Meteorological Office for the purpose of operating regulation 26 of the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations is expressed in degree days for calendar weeks ending on Saturday. A degree day is the daily difference in degrees between a base temperature level at which it is estimated a building requires heating (15·5°C) and the 24 hour mean outside temperture. It is widely used as a measure of temperature over time. The total of degree days for the week ending Saturday 26 January for the weather station at Aberdeen (Dyce) was 110·2. This represents an average temperature over the week of −0·24°C.

Pharmaceutical Industry Branch

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the total annual cost of the pharmaceutical industry branch of his Department;

(2) if he will give a breakdown by grade and by salary of the numbers of staff in the pharmaceutical industry branch of his Department;

(3) what is the purpose of the pharmaceutical industry branch of his Department;

(4) when the pharmaceutical industry branch of his Department commenced work at 14 Russell Square; and where they were based before then;

(5) if he will show in diagramatic form the administrative structure of the pharmaceutical industry branch of his Department;

(6) what is the position, grade and salary of Mr. A. R. Long of the pharmaceutical branch of his Department; and what are his duties and responsibilities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Department's pharmaceutical industry branch, headed by Mr. J. R. Long, assistant secretary, has in addition 4 principals, 4 higher executive officers, 1 executive officer, 2 clerical officers and a personal secretary. The salaries for the various grades are set out in the Civil Service pay and conditions of service code, a copy of which is in the Library: the total annual salary cost is £173,264. The main functions of the branch are, under the direction of Ministers, to run the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme and to exercise the Department's responsibilities for sponsorship of the pharmaceutical industry. The branch draws, as necessary, on other parts of the Department for accountancy, legal and other advice. In its existing and previous forms, the branch has been located at Russell square for over 20 years.

Population and Pensioners (Statistics)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* an outline of the considerations which led to the ratio of contributors to pensioners published in the Government Actuary's contribution to "Population, Pension Costs and Pensioners' Incomes" being revised to 2·3 in 1984-85 and 1·8 in 2025-26 from the figures of 2·4 in 1985-86 and 2·1 in 2025-26, as given in the 1982 Review.

Mr. Whitney: The difference between the two sets of estimates is almost entirely due to the revision of projections of the number of people over pension age to reflect a fall in mortality rates which took place between the mid-1979 official projections used in the report of the Government Actuary on the long-term financial estimates for the national insurance fund published in 1982, and the mid-1981 official projections used in "Population, Pension Costs and Pensioners' Insurances" published in 1984 (see paragraph 4 of that report).

Employment Offices (Computers)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people will be employed by Honeywell to supply terminals and microcomputers for employment offices under the £33 million order which it won from his Department.

Mr. Whitney: This is a matter for Honeywell Information Systems Ltd.

Computerisation (Staff Losses)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what provisions he will make for present employees of his Department who will lose their jobs resulting from computerisation of the employment benefit and social security system.

Mr. Whitney: We do not at present anticipate that the computerisation of social security operations will result in any compulsory redundancies. Any staffing implications in the Department of Employment are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

"Poverty"

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his response to the publication entitled "Poverty", a copy of which has been sent to him, by the Child Poverty Action Group, on proposals for child benefit improvement in the event of possible direct taxation cuts in the forthcoming budget.

Mr. Whitney: The views expressed in the publication will be considered along with the representations which are usually received by the Government prior to the Budget and prior to the subsequent announcement of the future levels of social security benefits.

Doctors (Medical Experience)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to ensure that sufficient experienced doctors are available to deal with acquired immune deficiency syndrome, Legionnaires' disease and Lassa fever infections.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There is an adequate supply of appropriately trained doctors nationally to treat patients with these diseases and it is for health authorities to determine their medical staffing levels in the light of local needs and priorities. Developments in patient care for those suffering from these conditions, and dissemination of good clinical practice, rest largely with the medical profession. However, we are taking a keen interest in developments and will take any steps we consider necessary to ensure that health authorities have access to the best advice available.

Supplementary Benefit

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which categories of supplementary benefit claimants will be receiving reduced allowances within the next two years resulting from his recent proposals to amend allocations.

Mr. Whitney: I assume the hon. Member is referring to our proposals to control supplementary benefit expenditure on people in board and lodging accommodation. We are not at this stage in a position to say how categories of claimants will be affected because we have yet to receive and consider the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee following its consultation on the proposals.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of all abortions were performed under the National Health Service in each of the following years: 1968, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is shown in the table.

Abortions performed under the National Health Service as percentage of all abortions in England and Wales, 1968, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1982 and 1983

Percentages

Year	*Residents*	*Non-Residents*	*Total*
1968*	64·9	5·2	61·6
1970	62·4	2·9	55·1

Year	Residents	Non-Residents	Total
1975	48·0	0·6	36·6
1980	47·0	0·7	37·8
1982	48·5	0·4	38·4
1983	49·2	0·6	38·7

* 27 April to 31 December.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of all maternal deaths resulted from *(a)* abortion and *(b)* sepsis which may have arisen from either legal or illegal abortions, in each of the following years: 1950, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is shown in the table.

Number of deaths from (a) abortion and (b) abortion with sepsis, and as percentages of all maternal deaths in the years 1950, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1983 in England and Wales.

Year	Abortions total		With Sepsis		All maternal deaths
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	
1950	103	16·6	64	10·3	620
1960	62	20·0	33	10·6	310
1965	52	23·5	29	13·1	221
1970	32	21·9	21	14·4	146
1975	8	10·4	1	1·3	77
1980	3	4·8	2	3·2	62
1983	2	4·2	1	2·1	48

The figures do not distinguish between spontaneous and other forms of abortion.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many discharges from hospitals there were following diagnosis of septic abortion in each of the following years: 1967, 1968, 1969, 1975, 1980, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total number of abortions performed in the private sector in each of the following years: 1968, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1982 and 1984; and what percentage of this total was performed by *(a)* the Pregnancy Advisory Service and *(b)* the British Pregnancy Advisory Service in each of those years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of abortions notified as performed in non-NHS premises is shown in the table. It is not possible to determine the percentage performed by the Pregnancy Advisory Service and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service from the notifications.

Number of abortions performed in non-NHS premises, residents and non-residents for 1968, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1982 and 1984, England and Wales

Year	All cases	Residents	Non-Residents
1968	9,081	7,840	1,241
1970	38,887	28,592	10,295
1975	88,555	55,283	33,272
1980	100,085	68,333	31,752
1982	100,513	66,144	34,369
1984*	53,214	36,068	17,146

* 1984 figures are for the March and June quarters only.

Merseyside Take-up Campaign

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he can now provide detailed statistics for each local office of his Department within Merseyside on the results of the 1983 Merseyside county council take-up campaign; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The following information is now available for the local offices in the Merseyside area:

Number of postcards received

	Pensioners	Unemployed	Others	Total
Belle Vale	405	317	489	1,211
Birkenhead North	844	631	927	2,402
Birkenhead South	671	438	620	1,729
Bootle	647	724	555	1,926
Breckfield	680	396	689	1,765
Liverpool City	238	396	288	922
Crosby	533	366	376	1,275
Edge Hill*	329	260	327	916
Garston	140	260	781	1,181
Huyton	554	560	615	1,729
Kirkby	668	759	923	2,350
Norris Green	320	265	426	1,011
St. Helens	575	517	984	2,076
Southport	440	124	483	1,047
Toxteth	441	391	624	1,456
Wallasey	618	454	559	1,631
Warrington	178	180	142	500
West Derby	407	275	531	1,213

Claims for weekly payments of benefit (new and repeat claims only)

	Awarded	No entitlement
Belle Vale		
Pensioners	28	183
Unemployed	2	45
Others	6	78
Total	36	306
Birkenhead North		
Pensioners	60	461
Unemployed	6	177
Others	22	312
Total	88	950
Birkenhead South		
Pensioners	43	538
Unemployed	2	69
Others	8	313
Total	53	920
Bootle		
Pensioners	42	191
Unemployed	8	132
Others	9	163
Total	59	486
Breckfield		
Pensioners	47	249
Unemployed	6	82
Others	6	117
Total	59	448

	Awarded	No entitlement
Liverpool (City)		
Pensioners	9	71
Unemployed	1	12
Others	3	93
Total	13	176
Crosby		
Pensioners	25	83
Unemployed	8	29
Others	7	70
Total	40	182
*Edge Hill**		
Pensioners	23	154
Unemployed	2	31
Others	4	118
Total	29	303
Garston		
Pensioners	28	215
Unemployed	3	39
Others	5	138
Total	36	392
Huyton		
Pensioners	37	152
Unemployed	1	25
Others	12	219
Total	50	396
Kirkby		
Pensioners	39	210
Unemployed	9	91
Others	17	316
Total	65	617
Norris Green		
Pensioners	20	125
Unemployed	1	24
Others	3	151
Total	24	300
St. Helens		
Pensioners	44	303
Unemployed	4	302
Others	11	225
Total	59	830
Southport		
Pensioners	27	256
Unemployed	3	138
Others	4	202
Total	34	596
Toxteth		
Pensioners	17	114
Unemployed	1	79
Others	—	81
Total	18	274
Wallasey		
Pensioners	73	405
Unemployed	18	252
Others	28	146
Total	119	803
Warrington		
Pensioners	10	58
Unemployed	—	34
Others	4	68
Total	14	160
West Derby		
Pensioners	19	213
Unemployed	2	64
Others	8	245
Total	29	522

Successful Claims for one-off payments (Not collected according to client groups)

	Belle Vale	Birkenhead North	Bootle	Garston	Kirkby	Norris Green	St. Helens
Pensions	1	1	—	1	—	—	—
Unemployed	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Others	—	—	2	—	1	1	2
Total	1	1	3	1	1	1	2

Note: No successful claims for one-off payments occurred at any of the other Merseyside offices

Claims for Single Payments

	No. Awarded	Amount
Belle Vale		
Pensioners	79	3,303
Unemployed	164	10,281
Others	127	8,116
Total	370	21,700
Birkenhead North		
Pensioners	172	5,472
Unemployed	410	22,143
Others	242	11,215
Total	824	38,830

	No. Awarded	Amount
Birkenhead South		
Pensioners	102	4,257
Unemployed	227	16,856
Others	132	7,063
Total	461	28,176
Bootle		
Pensioners	160	5,234
Unemployed	341	18,639
Others	219	11,742
Total	720	35,615
Breckfield		
Pensioners	92	3,473
Unemployed	130	8,670
Others	84	5,732
Total	306	17,875
Liverpool (City)		
Pensioners	65	3,026
Unemployed	143	10,663
Others	77	6,036
Total	285	19,725
Crosby		
Pensioners	105	3,748
Unemployed	187	13,270
Others	99	6,173
Total	391	23,191
*Edge Hill**		
Pensioners	67	3,833
Unemployed	151	16,624
Others	85	10,811
Total	303	31,268
Garston		
Pensioners	47	1,543
Unemployed	142	8,861
Others	80	5,473
Total	269	15,877
Huyton		
Pensioners	143	5,382
Unemployed	323	23,081
Others	217	11,415
Total	683	39,878
Kirkby		
Pensioners	210	10,582
Unemployed	626	60,280
Others	368	28,517
Total	1,204	99,379
Norris Green		
Pensioners	69	2,345
Unemployed	208	14,361
Others	136	9,301
Total	413	26,007
St. Helens		
Pensioners	146	4,209
Unemployed	647	36,147
Others	233	12,136
Total	1,026	52,492
Southport		
Pensioners	12	435
Unemployed	30	793
Others	19	658
Total	61	1,886
Toxteth		
Pensioners	109	6,669
Unemployed	277	20,913
Others	219	15,832
Total	605	43,414
Wallasey		
Pensioners	118	3,739
Unemployed	225	16,603
Others	186	10,836
Total	529	31,178
Warrington		
Pensioners	18	449
Unemployed	56	4,328
Others	42	2,186
Total	116	6,963
West Derby		
Pensioners	74	3,889
Unemployed	201	23,642
Others	141	12,443
Total	416	39,974

* Formerly known as Wavertree office.

Total Number of successful claims for an increase of Benefit for additional requirements

	Number
Belle Vale	63
Birkenhead North	192
Birkenhead South	107
Bootle	113
Breckfield	103
Liverpool (City)	50
Crosby	91
Edge Hill*	96
Garston	51
Huyton	138
Kirkby	157
Norris Green	73
St. Helens	130
Southport	56
Toxteth	115
Wallasey	143
Warrington	32
West Derby	92

* Formerly known as Wavertree office.

Single Payments

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will arrange for tables showing the single payments made by each local office in December 1984 to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Whitney: I am arranging for the information to be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

Drug Prescribing (Policy Revision)

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why a revision of the policy in relation to drug prescribing was not identified as a policy task in the document, "The Function, Staffing and Management of the DHSS", issued in August 1984.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The policy tasks referred to in the document were intended to be an illustrative selection. As the document points out, we have been undertaking a comprehensive re-examination of the programmes for which ny right hon. Friend is responsible. General medical practitioners' prescribing is shown as one of the main responsibilities of the divisions concerned in their management accounts for the current period, copies of which were placed in the Library in July 1984

General Practice Finance Corporation

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from the chairman of the General Medical Services Committee expressing concern about the Government's decision on the General Practice Finance Corporation's net borrowing in 1985-86.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I met representatives of the General Medical Services Committee on 16 January to discuss this subject amongst others. The corporation's net borrowing for 1985-86 is fixed at £22·5 million compared with £12·5 million as recently as 1983-84. I agreed to take note of the points made by the General Medical Services Committee in considering the position for future years.

West Midlands RHA (Review)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which official of his Department will sit on the steering committee which will guide the review by outside consultants of the functions and working of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our representative will be a member of our regional liaison division.

NHS (Drugs Bill)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what recommendations have been made to him by the British Medical Association to reduce the size of the National Health Service drugs bill; and what response he has made.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In my recent meeting with the British Medical Association, its representatives stated that they share the Government's aim of encouraging economic prescribing. They are now proposing a scheme of voluntary generic substitution but this would not produce such immediate and worthwhile savings on the drugs bill as our limited list proposals.

Surrogate Motherhood Agencies

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress he has made in developing policy on surrogate motherhood and surrogate agencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 14 January at column *63*.

Portable Cordless Telephones

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department will seek to obtain details of the findings of recent research done in the United States of America into the effects on hearing of portable cordless telephones.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *53*]: I understand that the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission carried out an investigation into the possible hearing hazards of cordless telephones. There had been 20 specific complaints up to October 1983 reporting painful ringing headaches and disorientation. Complaints about hearing losses were sometimes associated with them. Laboratory tests on five models of cordless telephones determined the damaging sound levels to be in a range of 123dB to 135dB.

There has been some evidence that problems may result from improper use of the equipment and, in America, some warning literature and stickers have been instituted. British Telecom claims that its cordless telephones avoid these problems of acoustic shock.

Prescribed Medicines

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the National Health Service budget was represented by the cost of prescribed medicines in 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1984, respectively.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *57*]: The proportion of total National Health Service expenditure attributable to the cost of drugs (excluding the cost of dispensing) was :

Year ended 31 March	*Per cent.*
1965	10·1
1970	10·9
1975	7·8
1980	9·6
1984	10·9

Note: Over the period there were small differences in the way the basic information was assembled.

AIDS (Nurses)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service nurses have contracted acquired immune deficiency syndrome resulting from close contact with hospital patients suffering from this disease.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 1 February 1985, c. *363*]: None.

Drug Prescriptions and Hospital Treatment

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what studies he intends to conduct to examine the correlation of drug prescribing levels with delays in hospital treatment for patients within the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 1 February 1985, c. *365*]: We see no need to mount such a study.

General Practitioner Surgeries

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what resources he intends to make available to general practitioner surgeries to improve ease of access to premises, consulting room facilities, internal waiting areas and seating and standards of lighting, heating and ventilation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 1 February 1985, c. *365*]: Financial assistance is available to general practitioners making such improvements to their premises under the improvement grant scheme. Under this scheme eligible doctors receive by way of grant one third of the actual cost to them of approved work and associated statutory and professional fees.

A temporary scheme for enhanced improvement grants was introduced on 1 November 1983, which will run until 31 October 1986. Additional funds have been made available under this scheme to enable doctors in selected inner city areas of England to receive improvement grants amounting to 60 per cent. of the cost of approved work and related fees. It is intended that the higher level of grants should be used to assist general practitioners in premises where the basic facilities (for example toilet and washing facilities, waiting room, heating, lighting and ventilation) are in greatest need of improvement.

Amenity and Pay Beds

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what was the number of National Health Service amenity beds, deaths and discharges of patients and average daily occupancy, giving numbers and percentages, for each region for each of the last five years;

(2) what is the number of authorised National Health Service pay beds, deaths and discharges of patients, average daily occupancy, giving numbers and percentages, for each region for each of the last five years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 1 February 1985, c. *359*]: The available information is given in the tables. Percentage occupancy is not a useful statistic in this context as amenity and pay beds can also be occupied by patients who are not amenity or private patients. It has therefore not been included.

Number of authorised amenity beds on 31 December each year in NHS hospitals
Table 1

*Region**	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	**1982*	*1983*
Northern	216	230	219	215	290
Yorkshire	262	264	282	256	327
Trent	283	306	280	288	198
East Anglian	49	59	50	53	54
North West Thames*	88	111	108	92	96
North East Thames*	163	127	127	116	86
South East Thames*	140	143	189	160	183
South West Thames*	328	190	167	173	110
Wessex	177	157	146	144	144
Oxford	103	79	85	79	79
South Western	136	131	200	129	190
West Midlands	291	207	203	177	173
Mersey	200	198	223	185	172
North Western	194	169	167	122	115
Special Health Authorities and Boards of Governors*	49	55	58	54	36
England†	2,679	2,426	2,504	2,243	2,253

Table 2
Average daily number of beds occupied by amenity patients in NHS hospitals

*Region**	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	**1982*	*1983*
Northern	8·7	12·5	17·2	9·0	7·8
Yorkshire	55·7	51·1	54·4	39·5	35·8
Trent	25·8	34·2	17·6	17·5	10·5
East Anglian	3·0	1·8	5·0	1·2	1·1
North West Thames*	11·1	26·8	21·3	4·9	13·2
North East Thames*	29·1	10·0	11·2	20·9	11·5
South East Thames*	8·5	7·9	3·1	2·6	4·4
South West Thames*	53·4	58·4	35·5	52·9	27·8
Wessex	15·1	11·5	11·6	10·5	8·5
Oxford	12·6	4·6	7·1	5·6	4·0
South Western	8·7	11·4	5·6	5·3	5·2
West Midlands	8·4	8·7	9·4	4·1	4·0
Mersey	16·9	15·8	13·4	9·8	9·6
North Western	12·1	19·3	20·3	12·3	9·4
Special Health Authorities and Boards of Governors*	10·5	12·3	12·9	7·7	7·5
England†	279·6	286·3	245·6	203·8	160·3

Table 3
Discharges and deaths of amenity patients in NHS hospitals

*Region**	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	**1982*	*1983*
Northern	444	625	484	516	414
Yorkshire	1,485	1,495	1,638	1,280	1,311
Trent	272	299	265	202	279
East Anglian	125	119	108	85	71
North West Thames*	467	580	743	375	360
North East Thames*	1,180	470	547	463	283
South East Thames*	271	277	152	166	235
South West Thames*	512	613	394	640	462
Wessex	411	429	412	338	293
Oxford	247	218	266	206	171
South Western	358	337	204	269	264
West Midlands	233	255	247	205	230
Mersey	657	645	595	489	447
North Western	735	1,128	1,375	879	723
Special Health Authorities and Boards of Governors*	475	530	542	492	501
England†	7,872	8,020	7,972	6,605	6,044

* Because of NHS restructuring in 1982 the regional figures are not strictly comparable over the whole period.

† Regional figures may not sum exactly to the England total because of rounding.

Table 4

Number of authorised pay beds on 31 December each year in NHS hospitals

*Regions**	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982**	*1983*
Northern	56	56	78	103	103
Yorkshire	140	140	154	182	199
Trent	130	130	150	143	143
East Anglian	90	90	94	106	106
North West Thames*	339	339	352	292	292
North East Thames*	278	278	286	398	404
South East Thames*	263	263	302	332	337
South West Thames*	156	156	168	180	182
Wessex	99	99	106	117	120
Oxford	164	164	180	180	180
South Western	78	78	82	102	104
West Midlands	181	181	217	258	267
Mersey	67	67	92	112	123
North Western	170	170	214	231	244
Special Health Authorities and Boards of Governors*	194	194	202	183	183
England†	2,405	2,405	2,677	2,919	2,987

Table 5

Average daily number of beds occupied by private patients in NHS hospitals

*Region**	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982**	*1983‡*
Northern	26	31	35	19	28
Yorkshire	85	87	89	68	76
Trent	69	68	62	54	52
East Anglian	57	58	64	47	55
North West Thames*	230	225	210	155	138
North East Thames*	165	158	154	198	186
South East Thames*	190	197	184	155	144
South West Thames*	88	90	87	75	81
Wessex	60	69	69	58	57
Oxford	103	103	85	84	81
South Western	46	46	49	43	53
West Midlands	109	109	108	80	82
Mersey	38	40	47	42	44
North Western	105	106	111	74	84
Special Health Authorities and Boards of Governors*	136	126	117	107	103
England†	1,508	1,514	1,469	1,259	1,264

Table 6

Discharges and deaths of private patients in NHS hospitals

*Region**	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982**	*1983‡*
Northern	2,812	2,901	3,704	1,555	2,382
Yorkshire	5,606	6,229	6,049	4,008	4,462
Trent	4,795	5,065	4,584	3,834	3,976
East Anglian	3,401	3,923	4,425	3,136	3,617
North West Thames*	11,699	12,395	12,357	9,331	8,891
North East Thames*	9,229	9,787	9,441	11,412	11,170
South East Thames*	10,087	11,107	10,925	9,309	9,080
South West Thames*	5,545	5,819	6,156	5,103	5,638
Wessex	4,462	4,947	5,306	4,425	4,395
Oxford	6,110	6,587	5,412	5,607	5,927
South Western	2,962	3,352	3,492	3,333	3,038
West Midlands	7,356	8,011	7,876	5,597	6,015
Mersey	2,333	2,770	3,156	2,370	2,651
North Western	8,313	9,293	9,203	5,878	5,946
Special Health Authorities and Boards of Governors*	6,418	6,379	5,653	5,788	5,740
England†	91,128	98,565	97,739	80,686	82,938

* Because of NHS restructuring in 1982 the regional figures are not strictly comparable over the whole period.

† Regional figures may not sum exactly to the England total because of rounding.

‡ Provisional.

Ex-prisoners (Accommodation)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has received any applications from the National Association of Probation Officers for financial assistance in providing accommodation for rehabilitating ex-offenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

No, but the association has made representations about the decision not to provide additional resources for new after-care accommodation places in 1985-86 and possibly thereafter, and it has also submitted comments on the current review of the voluntary after-care accommodation scheme. These will be taken into account in the review.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 5 February 1985

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Privy Council Office

Mr. Proctor asked the Lord Privy Seal what has been the cost of administration of the Privy Council Office expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Biffen: The cost of administration of the Privy Council Office expressed in 1983-84 prices in the last five years was as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	1·0
1980-81	1·2
1981-82	1·0
1982-83	1·0
1983-84	1·0

Parliamentary Journalists

Mr. Madden asked the Lord Privy Seal what is the latest figure for journalists accredited to work within the House; how many are employed by newspapers; and how many are employed by broadcasting organisations.

Mr. Biffen: There are at present 301 journalists accredited to the Parliamentary Press Gallery to work within the House. Of these, 187 are employed directly by newspapers and 54 are employed by broadcasting organisations. The balance are employed by news agencies.

PRIME MINISTER

Hatfield

Q37. **Mr. Murphy** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay a visit to the parish of Hatfield.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Clachan of Campsie

Q67. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Clachan of Campsie.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

War Widows

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Prime Minister what recent representations she has received from British war widows and associates; what reply she is sending about the particular case raised; if there is any action she will be taking; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received a letter from the president of the British War Widows Associates about one of their members. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Services has replied and a copy has been sent to the right hon. Member.

Engagements

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

Mr. Beith asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 5 February.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 5 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Oil Prices

Sir David Price asked the Prime Minister whether she will have talks with the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries with a view to stabilising world oil prices.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy maintains frequent contacts with representatives of other oil producing countries, including members of OPEC.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Aerospace Industry

81. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about employment prospects within the aerospace industry.

Mr. Butcher: Employment prospects in the aerospace industry depend primarily on the industry's own ability to compete effectively in domestic and international markets. The industry has a successful record in this respect, and I hope that it will build on this in the future.

82. **Mr. John David Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the number of people employed in the aerospace industry.

Mr. Butcher: Is is estimated that there were, in November 1984, 163,600 employees in the United Kingdom aerospace industry (as defined by activity heading 3640 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification). This figure does not include employment on aviation electronics, which the Society of British Aerospace Companies has estimated at some 35,000.

Teaching Company Scheme

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will bring forward proposals for the development of teaching company schemes within the tourist industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: A major review of the teaching company scheme is now being undertaken under the direction of the Teaching Company Management Committee. One of the

issues which will be considered is the scope and growth prospects for the scheme. The case for an extension of the scheme into new industrial and commercial sectors, including the tourism sector, will be examined as part of the review.

Cleveland

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the number of public limited companies with a turnover of £1 million per annum which have their headquarters in Cleveland.

Mr. Fletcher: According to the records held by the Registrar of Companies, three public limited companies have their registered offices in Cleveland. They, and their most recent notified turnovers, are Amos Hinton & Sons PLC (£125 million), E Upton & Sons PLC (£5·7 million) and Marlborough Technical Management PLC (£7·6 million for eight months ended 31 March 1984 only). Records are not maintained, however, to identify any company operating in Cleveland whose registered office is elsewhere.

Kettering (Industrial Assistance)

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what grants under section 8 of the Industry Act 1972 have been made since that date in the borough of Kettering.

Mr. Trippier: The total assistance which has been offered under section 8 of the Industry Act 1972 and the Industrial Development Act 1982 (which consolidated the earlier legislation and subsequent amendments) to firms in the borough of Kettering is approximately £1·2 million. This total comprises offers made under the following section 8 schemes:

	£000
Investment Incentive Scheme for the UK Instrumentation and Automation Industry	59
Clothing Industry Scheme	135
Energy Conservation Scheme	6
Ferrous Foundary Industry Scheme	24
Footwear Manufacturing Industry Scheme	470
Computer-Aided Design and Test Equipment Support	35
Machine Tool Industry Scheme	57
Assistance to the Non-Ferrous Foundary Industry	55
Assistance to the Printing Machinery Industry	254
Redmeat Slaughterhouse Industry Scheme	13
Small Engineering Firms Investment Scheme	21
Small Engineering Firms Investment Scheme (2)	90

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his forecast of the percentage increase in manufacturing output in 1984; and how this compares with the percentage increase in imports of manufactures.

Mr. Channon: My Department does not provide economic forecasts. Published figures indicate that the index of output of manufacturing industries was 3 per cent. higher in the first 11 months of 1984 than in the corresponding period a year earlier. In 1984 as a whole the import volume index of manufactured goods was some 10 per cent. higher than in 1983.

Manufacturing Industry (Statistics)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing United Kingdom imports from the EEC in 1983 as a proportion of the output of United Kingdom manufacturing industry for each standard industrial classification class and the corresponding figure for 1975.

Mr. Channon: What information is available is given in the following table:

	Standard Industrial Classification	*Ratio of imports from EC to sales by UK manufacturers (per cent.) *†*	
	class	1975	1983
Metals	21 and 22	13	22
Other minerals and mineral products	23 and 24	8	10
Chemicals and man-made fibres	25 and 26	11	21
Metal goods	31	4	7
Mechanical engineering	32	11	17
Office machinery and data processing equipment	33	39	75
Electrical and electronic engineering	34	10	18
Motor vehicles and parts	35	13	50
Other transport equipment	36	15	13
Instrument engineering	37	20	25
Food, drink and tobacco	41 and 42	7	7
Textiles	43	9	27
Leather and leather goods	44	9	18
Clothing and footwear	45	8	18
Timber and wooden furniture	46	5	10
Paper, printing and publishing	47	3	6
Rubber and plastics	48	8	17
Other manufacturing industries	49	23	46

Notes

* UK manufacturers' sales are of the principal products of each class, excluding where possible sales of waste products and receipts for work done.

† The information shown in the table is not comparable with the import penetration ratios published by the Department of Trade and Industry in *Business Monitor* MQ12. The Department's ratios show imports as a proportion of UK home demand, defined as sales by UK manufacturers plus imports less exports.

Cornwall

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total amount of regional development grants paid to companies in Cornwall during the financial year 1983-84.

Mr. Trippier: £2,252,000. This figure includes all amounts over £25,000 paid in Cornwall in the financial year 1983-84. Grant payments of £25,000 or less cannot

be attributed to any unit smaller than a planning region. Figures are not available for grant paid only to companies by county.

EC (Cinematograph Films)

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which members of the European Community have failed to enact legislation equivalent to the provisions of section 8 of the European Communities Act 1972 relating to cinematograph films; what action has been taken by him to achieve uniformity in that respect; and whether he intends to seek a revision of the legislation following the abolition of the Eady levy on the exhibition of films in United Kingdom cinemas.

Mr. Trippier: Section 8 of the European Communities Act 1972 permitted films from other member states to qualify as British quota films for the purposes of the Films Acts, amended the definition of British films and introduced a new category of "Community Films" in the films register. The Films Bill at present before the House will remove the legislative basis of the quota (which was suspended on 1 January 1983) and the Eady levy. Section 8 of the 1972 Act will therefore in these respects be redundant and the Films Bill proposes its repeal.

The EC Commission takes the view that some aspects of the films legislations of Denmark, France, Italy and West Germany are, variously, incompatible with those states' treaty obligations, and there are cases against them. I understand that the Commission is continuing its discussions with the states concerned and United Kingdom officials are in touch periodically with the Commission about these cases.

WALES

Departmental Costs

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total cost of administration of his Department expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: It is estimated that the departmental running costs (including notional pensions liability) of the Welsh Office in real terms for the last five years have been as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	34·0
1980-81	34·0
1981-82	33·4
1982-83	32·5
1983-84	34·8

The real terms figures are those for cash outturn adjusted to 1983-84 price levels by excluding the effect of general inflation as measured by the GDP deflator.

The increase shown for 1983-84 is largely accounted for by a change in the method of assessing accommodation expenditure from 1 April 1983.

Key Workers (Houses)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his estimate of the number of key workers' houses which are owned by *(a)* the Mid-Wales Development Agency, *(b)* the Welsh Development Agency and *(c)* local authorities in Wales; and how many of these are currently standing empty;

(2) what is his estimate of the annual cost to public authorities in Wales, in terms of loss of rent, in holding key worker houses empty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The ready availability of houses for key workers is important for industrial development and job creation. At 31 December 1984 the Development Board for Rural Wales owned 49 houses specifically for key workers, of which 17 were empty, though seven of these had been allocated. It is estimated that the loss of rent during the current financial year will be £15,000. In addition, housing associations and local authorities in Mid Wales identify houses to which, for a limited time and in return for a guarantee of rent, they give the board nomination rights for key worker tenants. There were 35 such houses at 31 December 1984, of which 15 were empty. Rent guarantee payments made by the board are estimated at £16,000 in the current financial year.

The Welsh Development Agency does not provide housing for key workers. It owns a small number of houses originally provided for key workers but no longer used for that purpose.

Information on key worker dwellings owned by local authorities throughout Wales is not collected centrally.

Electronics (Qualifications)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people obtained a Technical Education Council certificate in electronics in each year since 1980 in Wales; of these what proportion subsequently obtained employment within *(a)* six months and *(b)* 12 months; and how many are currently unemployed.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The information is not available centrally.

Hilldene Clinic and Grosvenor House Hostel

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what inspections have been carried out by health authorities of the Hilldene clinic and the Grosvenor house hostel in north Wales concerning hygiene and safety; and if he is satisfied with such inspections;

(2) if he is satisfied that circular HN(84)22 is being operated by Hilldene clinic and Grosvenor house hostel in relation to spending money of residents.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The power to register and inspect private nursing homes and mental nursing homes has been delegated to health authorities. The hon. Member should direct any inquiries about the Hilldene clinic in the first instance to the Clwyd health authority, which is its registering authority.

I am unaware of the existence of a Grosvenor house hostel in north Wales, but a Grosvenor house old people's home is registered as a private residential care home by Clwyd county council, which is responsible for the registration, inspection and monitoring of such establishments. Inquiries concerning this home should be directed in the first instance to the council.

I shall write to the hon. Member about the administration of patients spending money as set out in Welsh Office health notice WHN(84)21.

Welsh Water Authority

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether any of the Welsh water authority's 940 jobs whose incumbents have been given voluntary redundancy over the past five years have subsequently been left vacant and how many have been filled; and whether any of the persons granted voluntary redundancy have subsequently been re-employed into these or other jobs with the authority.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I regret that the information requested is not held in central records. The question is one for the chairman of the Welsh water authority. I am asking the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Authorities (Pensions)

Mrs. Currie asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police authorities of England and Wales, showing which allow national service and cadet service to count towards pensions.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I do not have the information requested, but I shall be writing to my hon. Friend.

Drug Addicts, Warwickshire

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of registered drug addicts in Warwickshire.

Mr. Mellor: The latest available information on narcotic drug addicts notified to the Home Office in Warwickshire relates to 1983 and is given in tables 3.11-3.13 of "Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs, United Kingdom, Supplementary Tables, 1983", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Interpol

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the liaison of British police forces with Interpol in the fight to combat crimes involving narcotics, is proving effective.

Mr. Giles Shaw: International police co-operation through Interpol is one means whereby the United Kingdom is tackling international traffic in illicit drugs. I understand that co-operation through Interpol has led to an increased number of arrests and of seizures of illicit drugs and we are satisfied that it provides a valuable source of assistance to the police. The international problem cannot be tackled by the police through Interpol alone: the Government's strategy involves activity on a broad front in which Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has a valuable contribution to make in combating illegal importation.

TV Licence Fee

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many convictions for television licence fee evasion there have been in each calendar year for the past five years; and how many cases were dismissed;

(2) in each of the past five calendar years, how many people have been successfully prosecuted for television licence fee evasion; and if he will break this figure down on a regional basis.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The number of convictions and acquittals was as follows:

	Convictions	*Acquittals*
1980	61,417	941
1981	67,299	504
1982	80,979	268
1983	93,827	284
1984	108,830	313

The regional distribution of convictions was:

Region	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
London	10,382	11,470	13,194	14,461	16,721
South East	3,349	4,469	5,442	6,594	7,392
South West	6,986	6,923	9,792	9,925	10,732
Eastern	3,072	3,851	4,803	6,755	8,499
Midland	7,569	8,668	10,947	13,860	18,577
North East	12,556	13,941	15,901	16,006	17,936
North West	8,403	9,315	10,395	11,529	12,938
Wales and Marches	4,354	4,434	5,582	7,527	7,788
Scotland	4,726	4,148	4,628	6,643	7,619
Northern Ireland	20	80	295	527	628
	61,417	67,299	80,979	93,827	108,830

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of those convicted of television licence fee evasion during the last five years had been unemployed for over one year;

(2) how many of those prosecuted in each of the past five calendar years for alleged television licence fee evasion have been retirement pensioners.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information of this kind about the circumstances of persons convicted of television licence evasion is not available.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in each of the past five years, what has been the average fine imposed on people convicted of television licence fee evasion.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information about the level of fines imposed for the special offence of television licence evasion is not kept routinely and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much income the Post Office has received in payment for collecting television licence fees in each of the past five calendar years; and how much this was in each year as a percentage of the full amount of fees collected.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Payments to the Post Office for television licensing work in the last five financial years, including VAT and adjustments for under or overpayments in previous years, and the proportion these payments represent of the total licence fee revenue in each year are as follows:

Year ended 31 March	*Payments £ million*	*Percentage of total revenue*
1980	31·5	7·3
1981	28·8	5·4
1982	38·8	6·4
1983	54·3	7·3
1984	49·8	6·5

Immigrants Advisory Service

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisfied that his Department's level of funding to the United Kingdom immigrants' advisory service is sufficient to enable that organisation to operate a translation service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I am satisfied that the grant-in-aid to the United Kingdom immigrants advisory service is sufficient to enable it to provide advice or assistance for, or other services for the welfare of, persons who have rights of appeal under part II of the Immigration Act 1971. This includes the cost of translations necessary in pursuit of these functions.

Citizenship

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were granted British citizenship in 1984; and how this compares with the last 10 years.

Mr. Waddington: The information for 1984 is not yet available but will be published in the form of a Home Office statistical bulletin later in the year. Figures for 1983 and previous years were published in table C of the White Paper "Tables of Persons Acquiring British Citizenship 1983", (Cmnd. 9331).

Polling Stations

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requirements he prescribes for providing and operating a polling station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The various requirements concerning the provision and operation of polling stations with which returning officers and their staff must comply at parliamentary elections are prescribed by schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983. Similar requirements are prescribed for local government elections by the Local Elections (Principal Areas) Rules 1973 and the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) Rules 1973 (as amended).

Passport Offices

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the plans to reduce staff at the Liverpool passport office.

Mr. Waddington: There are no immediate plans to reduce the number of staff at the Liverpool passport office. The hon. Member will be aware from my right hon. and learned Friend's statement on 24 July 1984, at column 567, of the decision to accept the recommendation of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the subsequent Rayner review of the passports offices, to computerise the issue of passports. As well as providing a speedier service to the travelling public, computerisation is expected to show some staff savings, but these cannot yet be quantified.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed in the Liverpool passport office in May 1979; what were the figures at the latest date; and what is the proposed establishment.

Mr. Waddington: On 1 May 1979 there were 209 staff (including 29 casuals) in post at the Liverpool passport office; on 1 February 1985 the figure was 192 (including five casuals). The authorised complement of 206 is unlikely to change in the immediate future unless there is a significant change in demand for passport services.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations have taken place with the Civil Service unions concerning proposed reductions in staff employed in passport offices.

Mr. Waddington: The Home Office trade union side has been consulted about the full computer study now in progress. It has been assured that further discussions will take place before any implementation programme is considered.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were employed in the passport offices in England and Wales in May 1979; and what was the figure at the latest available date.

Mr. Waddington: On 1 May 1979 there were 941 staff (including 156 casuals) in post at passport offices in England and Wales; on 28 January 1985 the figure was 831 (including 19 casuals).

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* applications for passports and *(b)* other items of business transacted at the Liverpool passport office in each of the past five years.

Mr. Waddington: The following table gives statistics of the passport services provided by the Liverpool passport office in each of the past five years.

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Standard passports issued	571,799	429,969	538,855	489,775	478,887
94 page passports issued	3,213	2,984	3,557	3,126	2,653
Renewals and extensions	14,730	14,043	17,233	17,652	20,304
Amendments	24,946	20,739	27,021	30,054	28,952
Child additions	23,215	19,268	25,632	23,655	26,019
Collective passports issued	4,143	3,557	4,231	3,872	4,048
Re-entry visas granted	5,784	3,328	5,547	6,000	5,261

Prison Visits Scheme

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department who decides the amounts to be paid for meals and overnight accommodation under the assisted prison visits scheme.

Mr. Mellor: The Department of Health and Social Security administers this scheme on behalf of the Home Office and its local offices determine subsistence payments in individual cases. I understand that the rates are broadly the same as for similar claims under the supplementary benefit scheme.

EMPLOYMENT

GCHQ

11. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with the International Labour Organisation over the most recent industrial dispute involving employees at the Government Communications Headquarters and their conditions of service.

Mr. Tom King: The Government responded on 4 January to the International Labour Organisation's invitation to comment on the report of the Committee on the Freedom of Association.

Parental Leave

13. **Ms Richardson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will take steps to implement the European Economic Community proposals on parental leave.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The proposals—in the form of a draft directive on parental leave and leave for family reasons—are under consideration within the European Community Council of Ministers. The Government have made clear their serious reservations about this and some other Commission proposals in the employment field.

Labour Statistics

15. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what new initiatives he is considering to reduce the level of youth unemployment.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government are considering a number of options for the enhancement of provision for young people, including the possibilities of extending training opportunities.

16. **Mr. Clay** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been out of work for more than two years.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 10 January 1985, a total of 761,000 claimants had been unemployed in the United Kingdom for more than two years.

25. **Mr. Park** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been out of work for over 12 months to the latest available date; and what were the comparable figures in May 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: The following table gives the available information for the United Kingdom. Figures are given for registered unemployed in April 1979 (not available for May) and in October 1982, and for unemployed claimants in October 1982 and January 1985.

The comparison is affected by the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982 and by the 1983 Budget provisions which mean that some men mainly aged 60 years and over, not longer need to sign on in order to receive supplementary benefit or national insurance credits.

Unemployed for over 52 weeks—United Kingdom

	Number
Registered unemployed	
April 1979	366,711
October 1982	1,169,558
Unemployed claimants	
October 1982	989,306
January 1985	1,316,074

36. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been unemployed for more than 12 months; and what were the comparable figures for January 1979, January 1980, January 1981, January 1982, January 1983 and January 1984.

42. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been unemployed for more than 12 months; and what were the comparable figures in January for each of the past six years.

Mr. Alan Clark: The following table gives the figures at January of each year for Great Britain. The comparisons are affected by the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982 and also by the 1983 budget provisions which mean that some men, mainly aged 60 and over, no longer need to sign on at an unemployment benefit office in order to receive supplementary benefit or national insurance credits.

Unemployed over one year

		Number
Registered unemployed		
	January 1979	334,800
	January 1980	335,128
	January 1981	430,260
	January 1982	862,543
	October 1982	1,118,157
Unemployed Claimants		
	October 1982	942,006
	January 1983	1,058,611
	January 1984	1,131,966
	January 1985	1,136,074

37. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of unemployed young people under the age of 25 years in the European Economic Community as a whole; and how this compares with the figure for 1978.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In November 1984 39·6 per cent. of those unemployed in the European Community (excluding Greece) were aged under 25 years, as estimated by the statistical office of the European Communities. Comparable figures are not available for 1978.

50. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been unemployed for over 24 months; and what were the comparable figures for April 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: The following table gives the available information for the United Kingdom. Figures are given for registered unemployed in April 1979 and October 1982, and for unemployed claimants in October 1982 and January 1985.

The comparison is affected by the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982 and by the 1983 Budget provisions which mean that some men, mainly aged 60 years and over, no longer need to sign on in order to receive supplementary benefit or national insurance credits.

Unemployed for over 24 months—United Kingdom

	Number
Registered unemployed	
April 1979	179,784
October 1982	476,268
Unemployed Claimants	
October 1982	433,984
January 1985	761,425

65. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current percentage of people unemployed; and what are the numbers involved.

74. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the present numbers of unemployed in the United Kingdom; and what percentage this is of the work force.

75. **Mr. McKelvey** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest level of unemployment.

76. **Mr. Jim Callaghan** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for the number of unemployed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 10 January 1985, the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom was 3,341,000, which represents an unemployment rate of 13·9 per cent.

70. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what conclusions he has drawn from the unemployment statistics since the last quarter commenced for the calendar year 1984.

Mr. Alan Clark: Recent statistics, including those for January, indicate that unemployment continues to rise. The seasonally adjusted level of unemployment rose by an average of 9,000 a month in the three months to January 1985. This compares with an average monthly increase of 15,000 in the previous three months.

56. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the trend in unemployment.

Mr. Alan Clark: Recent figures indicate that unemployment continues to rise. The latest statistics indicate that the seasonally adjusted level of unemployment rose by an average of 9,000 a month in the 3 months to January.

Community Programme

17. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any proposals to extend the provisions of the community programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The community programme has now reached its target for providing 130,000 jobs for long-term unemployed people. We will continue to review its operation and make whatever changes are necessary.

21. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will include private street works in the eligibility criteria for the Manpower Services Commission's community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: All proposals to fund community programme projects are considered in the light of guidance about priorities for selection, the number of places available in each area and the local needs of long-term unemployed people. Projects must provide practical benefits for the community and involve work which would not otherwise be done, but there is no specific restriction preventing private street works.

47. **Mr. Lewis Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently employed under the community programme.

63. **Mr. Rowe** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of adults at present on the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: On 14 December, the latest date for which figures are available, 130,027 people were in jobs funded under the community programme. All were aged 18 or over.

67. **Mr. Prescott** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what further representations he has received about the recently announced changes in the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: During the six months since my right hon. Friend announced the changes to the community programme, on 30 July 1984 at cols. *121-2*, we have received some 350 letters. I have also met Lady Platt, Chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Youth Training Scheme

18. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the expected level of take-up of the youth training scheme for 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Our current forecast is that there will be about 380,000 entrants to the youth training scheme in 1984-85.

22. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers have been found to be at fault in cases involving youth training scheme trainees; and how many have been informed that they will not be allowed to participate further within the scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Information is not available centrally on the number or providers and sponsors whose continued participation in the youth training scheme was considered inappropriate.

31. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future financial arrangements under the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend is currently considering the recommendations submitted to him by the Manpower Services Commission about the financial arrangements for the scheme in 1985-86.

Job Release Scheme

19. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the operation of early job release schemes.

Mr. Alan Clark: As my right hon. Friend announced to the House on 12 November 1984, the full-time job release scheme will continue on the present basis for a further year. The part-time job release scheme is being revised to make it more attractive to both employers and employees, and details will be announced shortly.

34. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently taking advantage of the job release scheme; and what was the comparable figure for each of the past six years.

Mr. Alan Clark: At 2 January 1985, 78,642 people were in receipt of an allowance under the job release schemes.

The comparable January figures requested are as follows:

Job Release Scheme

	Number
1984	88,305
1983	76,876
1982	53,878
1981	61,451
1980	57,158
1979	42,871

Job Applicants (Age Limits)

20. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to introduce legislation to make it illegal to impose age limits on job applicants.

Mr. Alan Clark: None. We do not believe that legislating against age discrimination would be beneficial or practical.

Privatisation

23. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current estimated savings of his Department for 1984-85 as a result of privatisation schemes.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No function performed by this Department has been transferred to the private sector during 1984-85. However, a number of support services are currently contracted out to private enterprise and scope for extending the range is regularly reviewed. Savings are estimated to be not less than £500,000.

Skillcentres

24. **Mr. Soley** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what recent representations he has received over the proposed closure of skillcentres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Since my right hon. Friend's statement in the House about the skillcentre proposals made to the Manpower Services Commission by the skillcentre training agency, my right hon. Friend and I have received some 120 letters on the subject and met four delegations.

55. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the present proposals for the skillcentre network.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The proposals in the Manpower Services Commission paper, MSC/84/66, a copy of which is in the Library, were endorsed by the Commission on 24 January. My right hon. Friend and I are considering the Commission's conclusions and will of course keep the House informed.

77. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to confirm the decision over the future of Manpower Services Commission skillcentres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend and I are considering the conclusions of the Manpower Services Commission on the future of the skillcentre network, and we will of course keep the House informed.

Bradford

26. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what he is doing to reduce unemployment in Bradford.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government are concerned about the level of unemployment in Bradford and a substantial number of people in the area are benefiting from our special employment and training measures. We are committed to maintaining our economic policies, which are directed at holding down inflation and public borrowing, while encouraging enterprise, flexibility and competitiveness in industry and the labour market. That is the only way to generate lasting jobs in Bradford and elsewhere.

Training Schemes

27. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is *(a)* the latest figure of unemployed, *(b)* the number of those unemployed for over one year and *(c)* the number of people on Government training schemes.

Mr. Alan Clark: At 10 January 1985 there were 3,341,000 unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom of whom, 1,316,000 people had been unemployed for over one year.

At 31 December the provisional figure for people in training on the youth training scheme was 301,896. At 30 November, the latest date for which figures are available 33,335 people were in training on the training opportunities scheme.

It is estimated that for 1984-85 as a whole, around 132,000 people will be helped through the Government's adult training schemes (including the training opportunities scheme).

Married Women

28. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the approximate increase in the employment of married women for the past year.

Mr. Alan Clark: I regret that this information is not available. An estimate of the change between the spring of 1983 and the spring of 1984 will be made when the results of the 1984 labour force survey become available.

Youth Training Scheme (Allowances)

29. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the extent to which managing agents are topping up youth training scheme allowances.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I regret that comprehensive information is not available. Such information as is available indicates that only a small number of managing agents top up the level of the youth training scheme allowance.

Wages Inspectors

30. **Mr. Torney** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to increase the number of wages inspectors.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no plans for an increase.

New Technology (Training)

32. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will extend training opportunities in new technology for people made redundant from traditional industries.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As part of the Government's adult training strategy, our training programmes are being concentrated increasingly on skills which are likely to be in real demand, including new technology skills. Unemployed people and those who are about to be made redundant will benefit substantially from these changes.

Disabled People

33. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what recent reaction he has received to the code of practice for the employment of disabled people.

Mr. Alan Clark: Since the new code of practice was formally launched by the Prime Minister on 14 November, the Manpower Services Commission's disablement advisory service has been promoting it among employers throughout the country. Initial indications are that it is being favourably received both by employers and by organisations representing disabled people. In addition both my right hon. Friend and the chairman of the commission have received a very positive response from the chairmen of major companies to whom they wrote immediately following the launch, seeking support for the code.

The hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that the code has been endorsed by the Select Committee on Employment, the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Disabled People, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, the CBI and the TUC.

The Manpower Services Commission will continue closely to monitor the response to the code.

Employment Act 1982

35. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he is satisfied with the operation of section 1 of the Employment Act 1982 enjoining public companies to include in their annual reports a statement of their communication, consultation and involvement policy.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The reports which have been seen so far tend to confirm previous research evidence that employee involvement arrangements in companies are very widespread and take a great variety of forms. Some reports are however disappointing and the Government will continue to encourage companies to make full use of the opportunity which section 1 offers to review and, where necessary, improve their employee involvement arrangements.

Amble (Travel-to-Work Area)

38. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what advice he received from the centre for urban and regional studies at Newcastle university about the placing of Amble in a travel-to-work area extending across the whole of the Alnwick district council area.

Mr. Alan Clark: The centre for urban and regional development studies collaborated with the Department in last year's review of the travel-to-work areas and in developing the methodology described in the supplement to the September 1984 edition of Employment Gazette, a copy of which is in the Library. The new travel-to-work area of Alnwick and Amble is smaller than the previous travel-to-work area of Alnwick which also contained the Amble area.

Minimum Weekly Wage

39. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to provide for a statutory minimum weekly wage.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. A national minimum wage would raise employers' costs and threaten jobs, including the jobs of those it was designed to help.

Strike Ballots

40. **Mr. Andy Stewart** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will initiate discussions with trade union leaders on the balloting of members before strike action.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Statutory provisions governing the holding of secret ballots before the calling of strikes or other industrial action were introduced by the Trade Union Act 1984 following the failure of most trade unions to adopt this practice voluntarily. These provisions have been in force since 26 September 1984 and are described fully in the Department's booklet "A guide to the Trade Union Act 1984". Moreover, the well publicised legal proceedings arising from the recent industrial action at Austin Rover will have left trade union leaders in no doubt about the potential consequences of failing to ballot their members before instructing them to strike.

Manpower Services Commission

41. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what have been the total wage costs of the Manpower Services Commission in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Wage costs for the last three years were:

	£ million
1981-82	195·2
1982-83	207·3
1983-84	216·5

Wage costs include staff salaries, the employer's share of earnings-related national insurance and superannuation costs.

These wage costs represent 17·6, 15·5 and 12·3 per cent. respectively of the total Manpower Services Commission expenditure.

Homeworkers

43. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current average rates of pay for homeworkers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Information from a survey carried out in 1981 suggests that median gross hourly earnings for people working at home were 180p an hour.

Youth Training Scheme and Further Education

44. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of school leavers joined the youth training scheme or entered some form of further or higher education during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Morrison: About 29 per cent. of young people leaving school in Great Britain during the year ending August 1984 were expected to enter a full-time course of further or higher education. It is estimated that a further 38 per cent. have entered the youth training scheme.

Departmental Budget

45. **Mr. Hanley** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what action he is taking to secure better value for money from his Department's budget.

Mr. Tom King: I lose no opportunity to stress the importance I attach to securing the best possible value for money from available resources. My colleagues and I have this criteria in mind in all the decisions which we make about the Department's activities.

Reviews and scrutinies in the Department of Employment Group have made over 4,500 staff savings since 1979, including 1,350 following a study of the payment of benefits to unemployed people. The programme of scrutinies will continue.

Improvements in efficiency have contributed to a reduction in MSC permanent staff from 25,300 in April 1979 to 20,800 now, and further reductions will be made in the next few years particularly as a result of recently approved plans to improve the cost-effectiveness of the public employment service while increasing the number of jobcentres. The numbers of people trained under the Commission's adult training programmes will be doubled, within existing resources, by concentrating on more cost-effective and flexible forms of provision. The skillcentre training agency has operated as a trading account since April 1984 and is charged with covering all its costs from receipts. The professional and executive recruitment service also now operates on a self-financing basis.

I expect increased efficiency to yield significant savings of over 2,000 posts by 1988 following the planned installation of visual display units in unemployment benefit offices. There has already been a substantial improvement in the ratio of claimants to staff in the unemployment benefit service, from 85:1 in 1979-80 to 114:1 in 1983-84.

The top management review systems now operating in all parts of the Department of Employment group under the financial management initiative will be an important means of setting targets relevant to better value for money. The Manpower Services Commission has recently published an account of its top management review process in 1984, and I expect to issue a report this month which will describe the activities of the Department's senior management group in 1984.

Industrial Disputes

46. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many days were lost due to industrial disputes in 1984; and how many of those were due to the dispute in the coalmining industry.

52. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many days were lost due to industrial disputes in 1984, not counting days lost directly in connection with the present coal industry dispute.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is provisionally estimated that 26·6 million working days were lost through stoppages of work due to industrial disputes in 1984. Included in the total is an estimated total of 22·3 million working days lost due to disputes in the coal extraction industry, of which 21·9 million is due to the strike which began on 12 March 1984.

West Midlands

48. **Mr. John M. Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Employment which initiatives have been most successful in generating new employment in the west midlands.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government are committed to maintaining their economic policies which are directed at holding down inflation and public borrowing, while encouraging greater enterprise flexibility and competitiveness in industry and the labour market. This is the only way to generate lasting jobs in the west midlands and elsewhere. Telford and the West Midlands metropolitan county have recently been designated intermediate areas to attract industry and investment, and thus improve job prospects. And we are encouraging the growth of employment through initiatives such as the enterprise allowance scheme which is currently helping some 4,500 people in the west midlands to set up their own businesses, and by establishing enterprise zones in Dudley and Telford.

Correspondence

49. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to reply to the letter he received from the hon. Member for Rother Valley dated 8 January, concerning the stopping of unemployment benefit to his constituents.

Mr. Alan Clark: I replied to the hon. Member on 31 January.

Leicester

51. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the unemployment rate for Leicester.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. and learned Member to my reply of 18 December 1984 at column *104*.

Leisure, Tourist and Catering Industries

53. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the change in the level of employment in the leisure, tourist and catering industries since 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: Estimates of the numbers of employees working in industries selected as being in large part related to leisure, tourism and catering are given in the following table. Many other industries (for example, transport, banking, and general retailing) also in part support leisure activities and tourism, but the proportion of an industry's employment which arises from supporting such activities cannot be identified from the Department's statistics.

Employees in employment in selected industries in Great Britain
Thousand

Activity heading, class or group as in SIC 1980	*Industry*	*June 1979*	*June 1984*	*Change*
	Manufacturing industries			
424	Spirit distilling	27	22	− 5
426/427	Wines, cider and perry/ brewing and malting	71	58	−13
428	Soft drinks	28	25	− 3
429	Tobacco industry	32	22	−10
4751/2/3	Printing and publishing of newspapers, periodicals and books	138	137	− 1
492/495	Musical instruments, miscellaneous stationers' goods and other miscellaneous manufactures	33	22	−11
4930	Photographic etc. processing laboratories	13	13	—
494	Toys and sports goods	38	26	−12
	Service industries			
6420	Confectioners, tobacconists, newsagents and off licences	166	159	− 7
66	Hotels and catering (excluding canteens and messes)	938	1,008	+70
8460	Hiring out of consumer goods	28	29	+ 1
969	Tourist Offices and other community services	32	39	+ 7
97	Recreational services and other cultural services	422	426	+ 4
9820	Hairdressing and beauty parlours	104	88	−16

EC Commissioners

54. **Mr. Corbyn** asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he next expects to meet the new European Economic Community Commissioner with responsibility for employment to discuss measures to reduce unemployment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend expects to meet Commissioners Pfeiffer and Sutherland at an informal meeting of Social Affairs Ministers on 8 February. At the meeting there will be a discussion on the creation of new employment opportunities resulting from the modernisation of industry and the introduction of new technology.

Trade Unions (Ballots)

57. **Mr. Hayward** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many trade unions have indicated their intention to accept public money to conduct ballots of their members.

61. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for Employment which unions have indicated their intention to use public funds to undertake ballots of their members.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am informed by the certification officer that at the latest available date 28 trade unions have applied for public money since the inception of the scheme. The 28 unions, including two which are affiliated to the TUC are:

Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (Engineering, Foundry & Construction Section)
Assistant Masters & Mistresses Association
Association of Education Officers
Association of Managerial and Professional Staffs
Association of Optical Practitioners Ltd
Association of Public Service Finance Officers
Association of Public Service Professional Engineers
Barclays Group Staff Union
British Association of Occupational Therapists
British Medical Association
British Orthoptic Society
Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
Clearing Bank Union
Coventry Economic Building Society Staff Association
Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union
Guinness Brewing Staff Association (UK)
Immigration Service Union
Institute of Journalists
Ministry of Defence Staff Association
National Association of Fire Officers
National Association of Head Teachers
National & Provincial Building Society Staff Association
Nat West Staff Association
Professional Association of Teachers
Retail Book, Stationery & Allied Trades Employees' Association
Royal College of Nursing of the United Kingdom
Society of Radiographers
The Society of Chiropodists

Reports in the press have suggested that a number of other TUC affiliated Unions are changing their attitude to accepting public funds for ballots. The British Airline Pilots Association has indicated that it will seek public funds for ballots and the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs and the United Road Transport Union are reported to be pressing the TUC to lift its boycott.

Factory Inspectors

58. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to increase the number of factory inspectors.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Decisions on the staffing of the factory inspectorate are a matter for the Health and Safety Executive, subject to the overall financial allocation and staff ceiling given to the Health and Safety Commission by the Government. The Executive plans to maintain the

factory inspectorate at roughly its present strength in 1985. It is currently recruiting up to 30 general factory inspectors, in addition to the 25 recruited last year.

Health and Safety Executive

59. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to increase the field staff of the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Decisions on staff allocations to its field force are a matter for the Health and Safety Executive, subject to the overall financial allocation and staff ceiling given to the Health and Safety Commission by the Government. The executive hopes to maintain its field force at roughly the present level in 1985.

Job Creation

60. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any new initiatives to place before the European Economic Community Employment Ministers to reduce unemployment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend will be meeting colleagues from other member states later this week. He will be suggesting that in the social affairs field the Community should concentrate on proposals directly relevant to the task of job generation.

Manufacturing Industry (Apprenticeships)

62. **Mr. Foster** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current number of apprenticeships in manufacturing industry; and what was the comparable figure in May 1979.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The most recent estimate of the number of people employed as apprentices in manufacturing industries is 82,000 at March 1984, and the earliest comparable figure available is 124,000 at March 1982.

The numbers entering traditional apprenticeships will become increasingly irrelevant as a measure of the real level of skills training being undertaken by industry because of both the reform of existing training arrangements and the substantial provision of initial skills training now taking place under the youth training scheme.

Jobcentres

64. **Mr. Ashton** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the future size of the jobcentre network; and how many were in support of the Manpower Services Commission proposals.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission consulted some 4,000 organisations and individuals about its proposals for the jobcentre network. Replies were received from almost 3,000 of them.

There was substantial support for the expansion of the network through the addition of 82 new jobcentres and for plans to make better and more extensive use of new technology. Many of the responses expressed concern at the extent of the proposed centralisation and of the scale of the proposed staff reductions. The revised proposals approved by the Commission in December and subsequently endorsed by the Government contain changes to meet the views expressed during consultation, including a less extensive centralisation of services and a smaller manpower saving.

Job-splitting Scheme

66. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently taking advantage of the job-splitting scheme; and what are the comparable figures for each year since its inception.

Mr. Alan Clark: In the current financial year, 187 applications for support have been approved under the job splitting scheme up to the end of December, creating 374 part-time jobs. In 1982-83, from January when the scheme opened, 180 applications were approved creating 360 part-time jobs. In 1983-84, 656 applications were approved creating 1,312 part-time jobs.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

68. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have entered the enterprise allowance scheme since it started.

Mr. Alan Clark: Up to the end of December 1984 just under 62,000 unemployed people had entered the enterprise allowance scheme since it was introduced nationally on 1 August 1983.

Minimum Rates of Pay

69. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce new measures to enforce legal minimum rates of pay.

71. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce new measures to enforce legal minimum rates of pay.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Current enforcement measures are considered to be adequate. In 1983, 6·3 per cent. of workers whose pay was checked were found to be underpaid.

72. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the average minimum rates of pay of people covered by wages councils.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Statutory minimum full time rates of pay for adults in the main negotiating grades of the seven largest wages councils range from around £63 to £72 per week.

Closed Shop

73. **Mr. Wood** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of employees estimated to be covered by closed shop agreements protected by law.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend for Buckingham (Mr. Walden).

Job Creation

Mr. Fisher asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to introduce new special employment measures specifically to cater for the long-term unemployed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: All our employment and training measures, apart from those for young people, provide considerable help for long-term unemployed people. In particular, the community programme has now reached its target of providing 130,000 filled places. We continue to review how the employment and training measures might be improved further.

Manpower Boards

Mr. John Evans asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of young people's representatives that have been co-opted to the area manpower boards since the beginning of the youth training scheme in April 1983.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Two, both of whom are still serving.

Benefit Applications

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases his Department has rejected for unemployment benefit on the basis of declared part-time employment.

Mr. Alan Clark: No claims to benefit have been rejected by my Department.

During 1983, the latest period for which information is available, 12,171 claims by people undertaking employment of fewer than six days a week were disallowed by the independent adjudicating authorities for the days on which they did not work because they were considered to be employed to their full normal extent (Social Security (Unemployment, Sickness and Invalidity Benefit) Regulations 7(1)*(e)*.).

Notifiable Installations

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his assessment of the number of the United Kingdom's hazardous sites, of comparable potential danger to Union Carbide's factory at Bhopal, which will not be covered by the European Economic Community's Seveso directive.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: All sites in the United Kingdom with a comparable potential danger to Union Carbide's factory at Bhopal will be covered by the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations, which implement the European Economic Community Seveso directive.

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report*, for the most recent available date, for each local authority area in Scotland, the number of notifiable installations constituting a major hazard.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of installations in each county notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Notification of Installations Handling Hazardous Substance Regulations 1982.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I shall reply to the hon. Members as soon as possible.

TRANSPORT

Highway Corridors (London)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he had with London boroughs and the Greater London council before letting the contracts for studies of new highway corridors in London.

Mrs. Chalker There are no such studies. Our assessment studies of traffic movement are looking at four existing corridors where there are great problems. They follow on from the proposals in our consultation documents sent to the GLC and all London boroughs in 1983 and 1984, and reflect their comments.

Traffic Signing

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the timetable for the experimental traffic signing campaign; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Experimental signs are usually specially authorised for a year in the first instance, further authorisation depending on their effectiveness. In general results have been satisfactory and some of the schemes have now been authorised on a permanent basis. Other experiments are still in progress.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost of the current experimental traffic signing campaign.

Mrs. Chalker: Local highway authorities meet the cost of experimental signs. Information on costs is not available centrally.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the areas presently the subject of experimental traffic signing.

Mrs. Chalker: Zonal signing of entry and waiting restrictions have been authorised at the request of the local highway authorities in many parts of the country, including Chester, Nantwich, Shrewsbury, Kettering, Weston-super-Mare, Middleton, Newark, Swadlincote, Chesterfield, Alfreton, Lincoln, Retford and various sites in and around Nottingham. Special experiments are also taking place in several places in Cornwall, Cockington in Devon and at Leigh on Sea in Essex.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received concerning the experimental traffic signing campaign.

Mrs. Chalker: Experimental signs for pedestrian zones are being tried out in a number of towns, including Shrewsbury. They are designed to make signing less obtrusive in environmentally sensitive areas. Two representations have been received about the effects of the pedestrian zone in Shrewsbury which I have drawn to the attention of the local highway authority.

Channel Crossing

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport if the studies undertaken by his Department into the possible construction of a Channel road bridge and tunnel have arrived at any conclusions as to the side of the road on which motorists should drive; whether there will

be a change-over half way across; and whether any common position on this issue has been arrived at with the French authorities.

Mr. David Mitchell [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1985, c. *437*]: No conclusions have been reached on this matter.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Marginal Land

Mr. Wigley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the definition of dwindling population which is used for the purposes of defining marginal land.

Mrs. Fenner: EC directive 75/268 on the less favoured areas requires areas designated under article 3(4) to meet several criteria, one of which is that they must have a low or dwindling population. The European Commission has defined this as being a population density no greater than 50 per cent. of the national average, or no more than 75 persons per square kilometre. The latter test was applied in the United Kingdom's case to Brussels which resulted in the designation of our marginal land areas as less favoured.

Untreated Milk

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about sales of untreated milk.

Mr. Jopling: In March 1980 my predecessor announced that sales of untreated milk to outlets such as shops, schools, hotels and other catering establishments and institutions would no longer be permitted in England and Wales and Northern Ireland with effect from 1 May 1985. I remain committed to these additional restrictions and copies of proposals for the necessary amendment regulations are being issued today to interested parties for comment.

However, I recognise that the operation of the supplementary levy system and especially the lack of flexibility between wholesale and direct sales quota may pose problems for producers affected by the changes.

In view of this my right hon. Friends and I propose that the changes originally planned for 1 May 1985 should be postponed for six months to allow time for further negotiation in Brussels on quota flexibility and that existing licences should be extended by a similar period.

EC (Agricultural Production)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total European Economic Community agricultural production for cereals, milk, meat, sugar beet, wine and olive oil, respectively, in the first year of United Kingdom membership; and what has been the percentage change in production for each sector up to the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is as follows. It should be noted that agricultural production fluctuates from year to year and a comparison between individual years is not necessarily a reliable indicator of the underlying trend in production. Wine production exhibits particularly marked seasonal fluctuations.

EC 10 Usable Production

	*1973-74** *'000 tonnes*	*Percentage change 1973-74 to 1984-85* forecast*
Cereals (total, excluding rice)	107,979	+ 39
Milk†	91,927	+ 20‡
Meat (total)	19,230	+ 27‖
Sugar (white equivalent)	9,315	+ 31
Olive Oil	758	+ 32
	'000 hectolitres	
Wine	175,665	− 15

Notes:
* EC Marketing years except where stated.
† Production of milk from dairy herds, excluding suckled milk; this is not the same definition as it used for the calculation of production quotas.
‡ Calendar year 1973 to calendar year 1984.
‖ Calendar year 1973 to calendar year 1983.
Sources: EUROSTAT, EC Commission; Oil World.

Grants and Aid

Mr. Speller asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list all forms of grant or other aid that are available through his Department to areas which do not qualify for assisted or intermediate status;

(2) if he will list all forms of grant or other aid available through his Department to areas that qualify for assisted or intermediate status.

Mrs. Fenner: The various types of aid which are available from my Department do not differ as between areas of assisted or intermediate status. There are, however, differences in the grants available to less favoured areas (as defined under EC Directive 75/268) compared with other areas.

Dutch Growers (Gas Prices)

Mr. Lyell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response has been received from the European Commission to his representations that the European Commission should take all possible steps against the Dutch Government under article 93.2 of the treaty of Rome in relation to the granting of preferential gas prices to Dutch growers.

Mrs. Fenner: The European Commission has instituted proceedings under article 93(2) of the Treaty of Rome in relation to the preferential gas price to Dutch horticulturists. This article gives the Commission powers to abolish or alter a state aid within a specified period of time if, after receiving comments from the parties concerned, it considers that the aid is not compatible with the common market or is being misused. The Commission is now considering what action to take in the light of comments received.

Land Drainage

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he had with representative bodies from the land drainage industry or the National Farmers' Union before announcing the recent reductions in capital grant for land drainage.

Mrs. Fenner: The grant rate changes were made as a result of the latest public expenditure survey. Bearing in

mind the confidential nature of this Survey, it was not appropriate to consult organisations outside Government about the options being considered under it.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Small Claims Courts

Dr. Godman asked the Attorney-General what has been the total number of cases heard in small claims courts in England and Wales for each of the last five years.

The Attorney-General: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to cases which fall within the financial limit for the time being for small claims procedure in the county courts. I cannot give him precise figures, but the estimated numbers of such claims which were arbitrated in 1979-83 inclusive are shown in the following table.

Estimated number of money plaints for sums within the financial limit for the "small claims" procedure arbitrated in the years 1979 to 1983

	Numbers
1979	11,620
1980	11,530
1981	16,680
1982	21,470
1983	35,890

Notes:

(1) The financial limit for the small claims procedure was raised from £200 to £500 in April 1981.

(2) Figures in the table are estimates based on a two-month sample in each year.

(3) Figures are not yet available for 1984.

SCOTLAND

Skillcentres

78. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are being trained in skillcentres in Scotland; how many are sponsored; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: During December 1984, the latest date for which the information is available, 1,019 places were filled in skillcentres in Scotland, of which 41 were sponsored.

Outgoers Scheme

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received advocating that the outgoers scheme for dairy farmers should not be taxable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. Friend has received such representations from one hon. Member and from one branch of the National Farmers Union of Scotland.

In deciding the terms of the scheme, the Government considered that it would not be appropriate to exempt payments from taxation. However, special arrangements were introduced to allow applicants to choose whether these payments should be treated as income or capital gains for tax purposes.

Blood Products

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if Scotland is already self-sufficient in blood products; for how long the heat treating of all concentrates has been taking place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Scotland is self-sufficient in all normally required blood products. All factor VIII concentrate issued from the protein fractionation centre of the Scottish national blood transfusion service since 1 January 1985 has been heat treated.

AIDS

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether, in Scotland, all blood donors are required to sign a declaration that they are not in a high-risk group for acquired immune deficiency syndrome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Yes. The Scottish national blood transfusion service has issued a revised leaflet to donors setting out the groups which have a high risk of contracting AIDS and requesting donors in these groups not to give blood. Donors are required to sign a statement that they have read the leaflet and are not in one of the risk groups.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any evidence that blood from a patient in Scotland suffering from acquired immune deficiency syndrome has been used to make concentrated blood products which have subsequently been given to a number of haemophiliacs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: There is evidence that a batch of factor VIII produced in Scotland was made from a pool of plasma containing a contribution from an apparently healthy blood donor who must have been exposed to HTLV III, the virus which causes AIDS. This batch was used for the treatment of a number haemophiliacs, some of whom have developed antibodies to HTLV III. It does not follow that they have AIDS, nor that they will necessarily go on to get the disease. The batch was withdrawn from use on discovery of the evidence.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will be in a position to give details of the form which a super levy on dairy producers will take and as to whether quotas can be sold to other producers.

Mr. John MacKay: The arrangements for the payment of milk supplementary levy and for the transfer of quota are set out in Regulations EC Nos. 856/84, 857/84, 1371/84 and 1955/84 and in the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1984 (SI 1984 No. 1047).

Liability for levy payment on wholesale deliveries arises only when deliveries to purchasers of milk (in Scotland the three Milk Marketing Boards and Freefield Dairy, Shetland) exceed the total of quotas issued to producers in their collection areas. Deliveries so far are within these totals and it remains to be seen whether any levy will be due at 31 March 1985. In the event of a purchaser quota being exceeded, the legislation provides that the liability for levy due should fall on those producers who have contributed to the excess by producing over their

individual quotas. Producers who have direct sales quotas are liable to levy on an individual basis should they exceed their quotas.

The present Community legislation ties quota firmly to the land. A quota may not therefore be sold but may only be used by whoever occupies the land to which it is attached. The Government recognise the problems which the present arrangements may cause and have initiated consultations with interested parties to ascertain whether, and if so what, changes to Community rules need be sought.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many claims for secondary quotas have been submitted to tribunals; and how many have been reduced on the grounds that the present sales are unattainable because there is no evidence from historic yields to suggest that the present yield can be achieved.

Mr. John MacKay: The tribunal considered 1,394 claims for additional quota on grounds of investments made to increase milk production in the quota year 1984-85. After assessing all the information relating to historic performance, the tribunal judged that in 291 of these cases the claimed yield was unattainable.

Forestry (Grants)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the names and locations of areas of land of 10 hectares or more in Caithness and Sutherland which have received approval for planting grants under the forestry grants scheme since that scheme began, giving the acreage in each case.

Mr. John MacKay: The information covering the period from 1 October 1981 to February 1985 is as follows:

Name of Estate	*Location*	*Area approved for planting (hectares)*
Borrobol	Borrobol Forest	15
Coille a Druim	Overscaig	65
Coille Chaol	Overscaig	87
Coille Clais Charnach	Overscaig	408
Coille Linne	Overscaig	74
Coille Oisinn	Overscaig	57
Coille Righ	Overscaig	212
Grants Wood	Overscaig	53
Fiag A Tuath	Overscaig	54
Strath Duchally	Overscaig	116
Meall Odhar	Overscaig	46
Griamha	Overscaig	46
Tothel Gill	North of Keiss	163
Mireland	West of Keiss	164
Glebeland at Farr	East of Bettyhill	58
Coille am Bodach	Strathy Forest	453
Coille a Chailleach	Strathy Forest	220
Coille A Fhithich	Strathy Forest	189
Dubh Chlais	Strathy Forest	91
Phillips Mains	Near Mey	72
The Brig	Forsinard	230
Cross Lochs	Forsinard	427
The Dale	Forsinard	312
The Dyke	Forsinard	448
The Hope	Forsinard	1,107
Stroupster East	North west of Keiss	199
Stroupster West	North west of Keiss	198
Altnabreac	Near Altnabreac station	1,543
Jubilee Wood	North east of Loch Shin	50
Gordonbush	Strath Brora	14
Blindburn	West of Keiss	99
Bhrochain	West of Invercassley	140
Brae	West of Invercassley	148
Buillsgean	West of Invercassley	42
Carn Bheag	West of Invercassley	42
Carn Mor	West of Invercassley	255
Dhonnadh	West of Invercassley	154
Innis Beithe	West of Invercassley	102
Oisean	West of Invercassley	49
Rosail	West of Invercassley	148
Thurnaig	West of Invercassley	40
Tutim	West of Invercassley	130
Bhaird	Forsinard	97
Crubag	Forsinard	78
Fasach	Forsinard	146
Fideag	Forsinard	52
Leir	orsinard	80
Talaheel	Forsinard	373
Casan	Forsinard	74
Imriche	Forsinard	156
Baronaheigh	Near Shebster	16
Rosehall Hill	West of Lairg	665
Merkland	North east of Loch Skin	59
Coille Nam Breac	Forsinard	53
Cutting	Forsinard	176
Loch Dubh	Forsinard	39
Theararg	Forsinard	50
Abhainn Bheag	Forsinard	55
Gleann Nam Beist	Forsinard	58
The Gunn	Forsinard	225
Mackay A' Tuath	Forsinard	110
Bad Coille	Strathy Forest	179
Coille Buidhe	Strathy Forest	298
Coille Nan Clach	Strathy Forest	161
Coille Fada	Strathy Forest	166
Coille Meadhonach	Strathy Forest	99
Coille An Reidhe	Strathy Forest	226
Coille Am Sealbach	Strathy Forest	264
Coille A Saobhaidhe	Strathy Forest	309
Lochdhu	Near Altnabreac station	989
TOTAL AREA APPROVED FOR PLANTING		13,773

To date, grants have been paid in respect of a total of 4,136 hectares of planting on these properties.

Islands Councils (Inquiry)

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received on the report of the committee of inquiry into the functions and powers of the islands councils of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend has received representations from a total of 43 organisations and individuals in response to his invitation to submit views on the report of the Committee of Inquiry. The committee's recommendations have also generated other correspondence since its publication.

The recommendations, and the views received on them, are being considered, and we shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Draft Deer (Firearms etc.) (Scotland) Order 1984

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress of the Draft Deer (Firearms etc.) (Scotland) Order 1984.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. Friend expects to lay a draft Order before Parliament shortly.

Community Nursing Services

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was spent in the last three years on the community nursing services in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *16*]: The following table gives the amount of money spent on nursing staff and the overall expenditure on community health services in the last three financial years.

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*£000 1983-84*
Nursing staff expenditure	35,343	39,360	42,201
Community health services expenditure	84,227	93,941	101,293

West of Scotland Science Park

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to the answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *206-7*, regarding the development of the west of Scotland science park, he will state the basis for the statement that the park has been operating for two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1985, c. *429*]: My answer referred to the two-year period beginning in October 1982 when the science park began to operate, with the appointment of a development manager. Marketing began nearly a year before the opening of the first units in September 1983.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Costs

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the total cost of administration of his Department expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Dr. Boyson: Figures are only available on a consistent basis from 1981-82. The figures given below are expressed in real terms at 1983-84 prices and cover both the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments:

	£ million
1981-82	350·4
1982-83	349·7
1983-84	360·0

Job Creation

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many of the new jobs created in Northern Ireland during 1984 were located in the Newry and Armagh constituency;

(2) how many of the new jobs created in the Newry and Armagh constituency during 1984 were *(a)* in the Armagh district council area and *(b)* in the Newry and South Mourne district council area;

(3) how many jobs were created in the Newry and Armagh constituency during 1984 by the Local Enterprise Development Unit;

(4) how many of the jobs created by the Local Enterprise Development Unit during 1984 were *(a)* in the Armagh district council area and *(b)* in the Newry and Mourne district council area;

(5) how many jobs were created in the Newry and Armagh constituency by the Industrial Development Board during 1984;

(6) how many of the jobs created by the Industrial Development Board during 1984 were *(a)* in the Armagh district council area and *(b)* in the Newry and Mourne district council area.

Dr. Boyson: The available information, which relates to job promotions, is as follows:

(a) Job promotions during 1984

	IDB	*LEDU*	*Total*
Northern Ireland	5,189	3,721	8,910
Newry and Armagh parliamentary constituency	282	296	578

(b) The 578 jobs promoted during 1984 in the Newry and Armagh parliamentary constituency were located in the following District Councils:

District Council	*IDB*	*LEDU*	*Total*
Armagh	24	89	113
Newry and Mourne	258	207	465

(c) The total number of job promotions in the Armagh and Newry & Mourne District council areas during 1984 were as follows:

District	*IDB*	*LEDU*	*Total*
Armagh	24	89	113
Newry and Mourne	316	283	599

Department of the Environment (Water Service)

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what has been the cost to the Department of the Environment (Water Service) for *(a)* legal fees and *(b)* other costs concerned with contracts that have gone to arbitration since 1976;

(2) how many companies have been unable to fulfil contracts awarded by the Department of the Environment (Water Service) and have subsequently gone into voluntary liquidation since 1976;

(3) how many contracts awarded by the Department of the Environment (Water Service) since 1977 which are now complete *(a)* have final payments still not made to the contractor and *(b)* are the subject of arbitration;

(4) how many contracts awarded by the Department of the Environment (Water Service) since 1977 have been forwarded to arbitration and have been resolved; and what has been the cost to the Department on each contract over the agreed tender price.

Mr. Chris Patten: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Housing Executive

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what has been the cost to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for *(a)* legal fees and *(b)* all other costs concerned with sending contracts to arbitration since 1976;

(2) how many companies have been unable to fulfil contracts awarded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and have subsequently gone into voluntary liquidation since 1976;

(3) how many contracts awarded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive since 1976 and now complete *(a)* have final payments still not paid to the contractor and *(b)* are subject to arbitration;

(4) how many contracts awarded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive since 1976 have been through either arbitration or litigation and have been resolved; and what has been the extra cost to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on each contract over the agreed tender price;

(5) in how many cases companies on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive list of companies suitable to tender have gone into voluntary liquidation and some or all of the directors have then formed another company which is now on the same list, since 1976.

Mr. Chris Patten: These are matters for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. However, I understand from the chairman that the information is not readily available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applicants there were at the latest available date in Northern Ireland for Housing Executive accommodation in each council area; how many empty Housing Executive dwellings and units of accommodation there were in each area on the same date; how many of such dwellings or units of accommodation in each such area had been vacant for more than three months; and how many of the applicants have applied for accommodation in more than one council area.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January 1985, c. *131*]: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I understand from the chairman that the information is not readily available in the form requested. The information which is available is as follows:—

District Council Area	*Number of First preference applicants on the waiting list*	*Number of vacant properties*	*Number vacant over 14 weeks*
Derry	1,360	228	177
Limavady	250	24	15
Coleraine	599	192	122
Ballymoney	266	23	17
Moyle	148	6	3
Larne	389	45	28
Ballymena	464	152	114
Magherafelt	293	14	1
Cookstown	289	5	—
Strabane	373	20	15
Omagh	560	22	13
Fermanagh	524	45	27
Dungannon	472	94	44
Craigavon	1,043	886	808
Armagh	313	61	44
Newry and Mourne	890	193	144
Banbridge	301	52	27
Down	561	66	40
Lisburn	1,470	60	30
Antrim	627	253	137
Newtownabbey	936	107	58
Carrickfergus	493	45	17
North Down	1,004	48	34
Ards	784	43	25
Castlereagh	1,077	29	16
Belfast	8,777	739	539
Total	24,263	3,452	2,495

Footnotes:
(a) the figures quoted are for 31 December 1984.
(b) the number of vacant properties in Redevelopment Areas has been excluded.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Pensions

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the position with regard to pension claims by British nationals who have served with the East African Land Forces Organisation;

(2) what is the total number of pension arrangements registered with Her Majesty's Government relating to service with the East African Land Forces Organisation.

Mr. Raison: It has recently been established that pensions deriving from service with the East African Land Forces Organisation (EALFO) by certain officers who transferred to public service in Kenya, Tanzania or Uganda after the organisation was disbanded in 1960 are eligible for inclusion in the British Government's pensions take-over programme. Four officers' pensions and 24 contingent widows' pensions are affected. The necessary arrangements are in train.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries with which Her Majesty's Government have an agreement to honour pre-independence pension arrangements.

Mr. Raison: Under the programme announced on 11 March 1970, at column 1344-49, Her Majesty's Government have entered into agreements with the following countries under which certain pension entitlements have been or are being taken over:

Antigua
Barbados
Belize
Botswana
Burma
Cyprus
Dominica
Fiji
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Guyana
Jamaica
Kenya
Kiribati
Lesotho
Malawi
Malaysia
Malta
Mauritius
Nigeria
St. Kitts
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Solomon Islands
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Uganda
Zambia

Afghanistan

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has yet received a copy of the report "The Threat of Famine in Afghanistan" financed by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mr. Raison: Yes.

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is prepared to make a grant of public money for humanitarian purposes inside Afghanistan to Afghan Aid in London on the same terms as he made a grant via the Afghanistan Support Committee in London to the Swedish Committee for a Free Afghanistan.

Mr. Raison: We have received a request from Afghan Aid for emergency relief to destitute Afghans and this is under active consideration.

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conditions were attached to the grant of £50,000 made to the Afghanistan Support Committee in 1982; what arrangements were made to secure satisfactory accounting for these funds from the Swedish Committee for a Free Afghanistan, to which the funds were transferred on his instructions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The grant was to be used for the immediate purchase and supply of foodstuffs and medical supplies for humanitarian relief to Afghans through the auspices of Swedish Aid for Afghanistan. If at the end of three months from the date of issue, the contribution had not been used for the purpose set out above, the unspent balance would be refunded unless otherwise agreed with the Overseas Development Administration. The Afghanistan Support Committee was informed that the Overseas Development Administration would require a copy of the audited accounts of Swedish Aid for Afghanistan showing the Afghanistan Support Committee contribution as a clearly identified item. Such accounts have been received.

UNESCO

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what effect the proposed British withdrawal from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation will have on the employment of British employees currently working for the organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: There is nothing in UNESCO's existing rules and regulations to suggest that the situation of individual staff members and the rights arising out of their contracts of employment are affected by the withdrawal of the member state of which they are citizens.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the financial implications of Britain's proposed withdrawal from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Mr. Raison: UNESCO's budget is calculated in dollars. The United Kingdom pays an assessed contribution of 4·61 per cent. of the total. At current rates of exchange the cost of our membership for 1985 will be about £7 million.

Should the United Kingdom withdraw from UNESCO at the end of 1985, no further subscriptions would be due.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the current amount spent by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in Britain.

Mr. Raison: UNESCO make available this information on a two-yearly basis. In the two-year period 1982 and 1983 the estimated expenditure in the United Kingdom from the regular programme and extra budgetary sources was approximately $16·7 million.

CIVIL SERVICE

Contract and Procurement Procedures

Mr. Thurnham asked the Minister for the Civil Service when the Government will be announcing measures to implement the conclusions of the report by the Management and Personnel Office on Government contract and procurement procedures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Departments have the primary responsibility for implementing the recommendations in the report "Government Purchasing". All Departments have been asked to prepare action documents by 1 April and are doing so in consultation with the Management and Personnel Office. In addition, the Government have put in hand arrangements to identify suitable candidates for the post of head of the proposed central unit on purchasing.

Joint Management Unit

Mr. Eggar asked the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list the names, position, and relevant experience of the members of the Joint Management Unit.

Mr. Hayhoe: Head of the joint management unit is Mrs. Valerie Strachan. She entered the Civil Service in 1961 and has served in a number of Government Departments. In 1980 she was appointed a commissioner of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise (Under Secretary). In this capacity she has served as director of VAT Control, a large line management operation. More recently she was director of organisation which includes responsibility for the Department on finance and manpower and implementation of the financial management initiative in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

The deputy head of the joint management unit is Mr. William St. Clair (Assistant Secretary) who entered the Civil Service in 1960. He served with the Ministry of Defence and in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office before moving to Her Majesty's Treasury in 1970 where he has had experience of a wide range of subjects including public expenditure control and overseas finance. Most recently he was the head of a sizeable division dealing with superannuation arrangements in the public services.

Support to the Head and Deputy is provided by Mr. Michael O'Connor (Higher Executive Officer (Development)) who entered the Civil Service in 1982 and has served in the Department of Health and Social Security as a member of the Management Accounts Unit working on the implementation of the Financial Management Initiative.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Minister for the Civil Service how many registered disabled people are currently employed by each Government Department; and in each case what percentage the number represents of the total number of employees.

Mr. Hayhoe: The numbers of registered disabled people employed by Government Departments are collected once a year, as at 1 June. The most recent figures, and the percentage of all employees who are registered disabled, are as follows:

Numbers and percentages of registered disabled people employed by Government departments (as at 1 June 1984)*

Department	*Number of RDPs Employed*	*Per cent. of Total employees*
Agriculture, Fisheries & Food, Ministry of	174½	1·53
Cabinet Office (inc MPO)	20	1·22
Charity Commission	5	1·50
Crown Estate Office	—	—
Crown Office Scotland	3	0·32
Customs & Excise	308	1·26
Defence, Ministry of	2114	1·14
Education and Science, Department of	48	2·01
Employment Group	1388½	2·48
Energy, Department of	8½	0·79
Environment (incl PSA) & Transport	607	1·21
Export Credits Guarantee Department	24	1·34
Fair Trading, Office of	2	1·22
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	49½	0·86
Friendly Societies Registry of	3	2·47
General Register Office (Scotland)	7	2·77
Government Actuary's Department	2	3·23
Health and Social Security, Department of	1357½	1·50
Home Office	96½	0·53
Information Central Office of	15	1·60
Inland Revenue	1083½	1·57
Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce	10	1·56
Land Registry	141	2·10
Law Officers' Department	—	—
Lord Advocate's Department (Scotland)	—	—
Lord Chancellor's Department	157	1·57
National Investment and Loans office	3	5·66
National Savings Department for	231	2·91
Northern Ireland Office	—	—
Ordnance Survey	43	1·41
Overseas Development Administration	28	1·61
Paymaster General's Office	22½	2·78
Population, Censuses and Surveys, Office of	46	2·22
Privy Council Office	2	6·25
Public Prosecutions Director of Department of the	5	1·30
Public Record Office	16	4·00
Registers of Scotland	12	1·59
Royal Mint	32	3·35
Scottish Courts Administration	5	0·57
Scottish Office (inc Scottish Prison Service)	114½	1·18
Scottish Record Office	1	0·81
Stationery Office	87	2·45
Trade and Industry Department of	151	1·20
Treasury	49½	1·42
Treasury Solicitor's Department	9½	2·17
Welsh Office	40	1·81

* Full-Time Equivalents—part-time staff are counted as half units.

Questions (Cost)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Minister for the Civil Service what are his latest estimates of the cost of answering *(a)* an oral parliamentary question, *(b)* a priority written parliamentary question and *(c)* an ordinary written parliamentary question; and how these compare with the figures for (i) five years ago and (ii) 10 years ago, respectively.

Mr. Hayhoe: The costs of individual questions vary considerably, but the current average cost is estimated at £67 for oral answers and £41 for written answers. It is not possible from the information held centrally to distinguish between the costs of answering ordinary written and priority written questions.

In May 1980 the average cost for oral answers was estimated at £50 and for written answers at £30. In April 1975 the average cost for oral answers was estimated at £26 and for written answers at £16.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong (Civil Service Pensions)

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any proposals for ensuring stability in the value of the pensions earned by members of the Overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong when converted to sterling.

Mr. Luce: As I told my hon. Friend on 3 December, at column 26-27, we acknowledge that the resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong by the People's Republic of China raises similar issues in respect of members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong as independence has in other dependent territories. Active consideration is being given to these issues.

Gothenburg Consulate

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for the future of the consulate in Gothenburg, Sweden; and what representations he has received that it should remain open.

Mr. Renton: As part of the package of measures which my right hon. and learned Friend announced to the House on 22 November 1984 the British consulate in Gothenburg, Sweden is to be closed. Arrangements are in hand to appoint an honorary consul, who will be assisted by one locally engaged member of staff on a full-time basis.

We have received a number of representations that the consulate should remain open. These have come largely from the city authorities in Gothenburg and from Swedish business men.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the number of staff currently in post at the consulate in Gothenburg, Sweden; what was the total cost of this post in the 12-month period most readily identifiable; and what was the income received in fees or other charges.

Mr. Renton: The consulate currently has one United Kingdom-based officer and three locally-engaged employees (one part-time). The cost of the post in the 12 months ending 31 March 1984 was £46,146. Consular, passport and visa fees received in the same period totalled £574·18; postage and telex fees totalled £245·57.

Iraq (British Detainees)

Mr. Nelson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the prospects for the release of Mr. John Smith, currently serving a prison sentence in Iraq.

Mr. Walters asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the prospects for the release of Mr. Donald Hagger currently serving a prison sentence in Iraq.

Mr. Luce: We have raised these cases regularly with the Iraqi Government and they are fully aware of our deep concern. During my visit to Baghdad in November I repeated our appeals to Iraqi Ministers to release the two prisoners on humanitarian grounds. Unfortunately, we have received no assurance that either prisoner will be released in the near future. We shall, however, continue to take every opportunity to press for their release.

Hong Kong (Remanded Persons)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the length of time that each of the 12 women on remand in custody in Hong Kong on 17 December 1984 have been in prison;

(2) what is the length of time spent in prison by each of the three girls aged 14 to 20 years on remand in custody in Hong Kong on 17 December 1984; and what are their ages and the offence with which they are charged;

(3) how many *(a)* men, *(b)* women, *(c)* boys and *(d)* girls were on remand in custody in Hong Kong at the latest available date; and how many in each category have been in custody for *(a)* one to two months, *(b)* two to three months, *(c)* three to four months, *(d)* four to five months, *(e)* five to six months, *(f)* six to nine months, and *(h)* over one year, respectively;

(4) what are the ages, offences with which charged and the length of time in custody of each of the 59 14 to 20-year-old boys in custody on remand in Hong Kong on 17 December 1984;

(5) what were the ages, offences and sentences of each of the 348 14 to 20-year-old boys in prison in Hong Kong on 17 December 1984;

(6) if 14 to 20-year-old *(a)* girls and *(b)* boys in prison in Hong Kong are kept separate from adult prisoners;

(7) if he will list all the penal establishments in Hong Kong, indicating in each case the category, the number and type of prisoner it is designed for and the number it accommodates;

(8) what facilities exist in Hong Kong for mentally-disturbed offenders;

(9) what were the ages, offences and sentences of the nine 14 to 20-year-old girls in prison in Hong Kong on 17 December 1984;

(10) why a prisoner in Hong Kong has waited for 327 days to come to trial.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *311*]: The information requested has now been compiled by the Government of Hong Kong, but in view of its length I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library.

DEFENCE

Arms Exports

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence what safeguards exist to ensure that arms exports to non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation states are not subsequently used against the United Kingdom.

Mr. Butler: Each arms sale overseas requires an export licence. All applications for export licences are very carefully considered on a case by case basis. In order to ensure that it is, in every respect, in the national interest, a wide range of political, strategic, economic and security factors are taken into account before any licence is granted.

Greenham Common

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any British military personnel have been involved in an incident involving ionising radiation at Greenham common.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the nearest which unauthorised personnel have got to the silos at Greenham common.

Mr. Stanley: It would not be in the public interest to provide information that could enable the position of specific cruise missiles to be pinpointed. There have been isolated instances of unauthorised people reaching the fences around the main secure area.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Defence which yards will be invited to tender for the third type 23 which he announced on 28 January, *Official Report*, column 21.

Mr. Lee: I have at present nothing to add to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 28 January, at column 21.

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department started to negotiate a tender for a new type 23 frigate with Swan Hunter.

Mr. Lee: No negotiations have yet taken place. As my right hon. Friend said on 28 January, at column 21, Swan

Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd. will be invited to tender for the type 23-O2 frigate as soon as this can sensibly be done and the order will be placed subject to satisfactory agreement on price and other contract terms.

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence for which reasons he has decided to allocate the second order for the type 23 frigate to Swan Hunter without offering the order to open tender.

Mr. Lee: I have nothing to add to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 28 January, at column 21.

Type 22 Frigates

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are penalty clauses in the two contracts for type 22 frigates awarded to Cammell Laird and Swan Hunter in respect of late delivery and of exceeding contract prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Contracts for T22 frigates 13 and 14 were placed with Cammell Laird Shipbuilders and Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd. respectively on 28 January 1985 at fixed prices and delivery dates. The contracts include liquidated damages clauses covering damages to be paid to MOD in respect of late delivery.

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department obtained a no-strike guarantee from the Cammell Laird yard of British Shipbuilders before taking its decision to place an order for a type 22 frigate with that yard.

Mr. Lee: No. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has made clear, the deplorable and unnecessary industrial action which occurred last summer at Cammell Laird would, had it continued, have excluded the yard from further consideration in the competition.

Ship Construction Orders

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances he will in future use open tendering procedures for orders for naval ships; and in what circumstances he will personally allocate orders.

Mr. Lee: Orders will normally be placed as a result of competitive tendering. However, if there are special circumstances, these will be taken into account at the appropriate time.

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement as to how far he takes regional considerations into account in the placing of orders for ships with British industry.

Mr. Lee: Orders will normally be placed on the basis of best price and delivery terms following competitive tendering. Other relevant factors will, however, be taken into account accoring to circumstances.

Hunt Class Mines Countermeasure Vessels

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to announce orders for two further Hunt class mines countermeasure vessels.

Mr. Lee: tenders have been received from Vosper Thornycroft (UK) Ltd. and Yarrow Shipbuilders Ltd. These are being considered. No decisions have yet been taken.

General Belgrano

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he intends to take following the public statements made by former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Lewin, on 29 June 1984 concerning the use of towed arrays in detecting the General Belgrano.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend does not consider that any response by himself to the public statements referred to is required at the present time in view of the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to the hon. Gentleman on 1 February, at column 350.

Towed Sonar Array Systems

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether Lord Lewin consulted his Department before giving details of towed sonar array systems in an interview published in *The Guardian*.

Mr. Stanley: I understand not.

Polaris

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the costs of the Chevaline improvement to the Polaris system.

Mr. Butler: The Ministry provided the Public Accounts Committee in 1981 (ninth report, 1981-82 Session) with an estimate for the Chevaline programme of about £1,000 million (including actual sunk costs and projected costs at September 1980 price levels). On a similar basis, but with projected costs at current prices, the estimate is now about £1·030 million.

Defence Costs

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the Defence Estimates the cost of each major defence project.

Mr. Butler: It is already the practice to include in the annual "Statement on the Defence Estimates" a list of selected major projects which have started development during the preceding year, with estimated programme costs.

Departmental Staff (Outside Appointments)

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's and armed services' staff have applied for positions in defence industries in the United Kingdom and the United States of America by year from 1979 to the present; how many were successful; and if he will list in the *Official Report* the organisations or industries to which they moved.

Mr. Butler: I shall answer shortly.

Medical Services (Privatisation)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to privatise part of the armed forces medical service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: While we are committed to maintaining three uniformed medical services, we are examining

greater involvement of outside agencies in some medical areas, and indeed elsewhere in the MOD. It is too early to anticipate the outcome of this work.

Princess Alexandra Hospital, Wroughton

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many patients are in the Princess Alexandra hospital at Wroughton as a result of *(a)* industrial injury, *(b)* criminal injury and *(c)* psychiatric problems incurred in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Lee: The number of patients at present in the Princes Alexandra hospital, RAF Wroughton, in the categories requested is as follows:

	Number
a) Industrial injury	6
b) Criminal injury	1
c) Psychiatric problems incurred in the Falkland Islands	Nil

Trident

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Defence within the total Trident costing,announced by him on 29 January, what percentage, and what actual sum of money has been set aside as the contingency reserve.

Mr. Butler: The overall provision for contingency is a little under 20 per cent. of the basic costs, or approximately £1·5 billion.

Defence Orders

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the in-service dates currently assumed for planning purposes for *(a)* EH101, *(b)* MCV80, *(c)* AST404, *(d)* the type 23 frigate and *(e)* AST412.

Mr. Butler: For reasons of security, it is not normal practice to publish detailed in-service dates. However, a broad indication of when these equipments will enter service is given below:

a. The EH101 will enter service in the early 1990s.

b. MCV80: the first unit will be equipped well before the end of the decade.

c. AST404: Decisions have yet to be taken on a replacement light support helicopter.

d. Type 23 Frigate: HMS Norfolk, the first of class, is planned to be accepted from the shipbuilders early in 1989.

e. AST412: It is expected that, if a new aircraft is ordered in preference to refurbishing the Jet Provost, it will be in service with the Royal Air Force before the end of the present decade.

Cash Limits

Mr. John Browne asked the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made in current defence cash limits for 1984-85.

Mr. Heseltine: There are the following changes which are subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary spring Supplementary Estimates. None of the changes adds to the planning total of public expenditure.

£000s

Class I	*Current cash limit*	*Increase/decrease*		*Revised cash limit*
I, 1	6,367,775	−12,697	reduced provision	6,344,258
		−9,364	transferred to I, 3	
		−1,000	transferred to XII, 1	
		−360	transferred to XII, 2	
		−46	transferred to Northern Ireland X, 2	
		−150	transferred to IX, 3	
		+100	provision within agreed Defence Public Expenditure Programme 1 hitherto unallocated to Votes	
I, 2	8,329,907	−300	reduced provision	8,329,607
I, 5	460,372	−10,000	transferred to XIV, 2	450,372

The £12,997,000 reduced provision reflects surrender of VAT refunds on services contracted-out before 1 September 1983 and of excess provision following lower than anticipated take-up of the armed forces youth training scheme.

Other changes are in respect of transfers to other Departments' Votes towards improved age allowances for war widows—18 June 1984, column 21—changes in benefit disregard for unemployed UDR members and territorial reservists—column 415—the costs of British representation at the hearings of the Australian Royal Commission on British nuclear tests; increased expenditure, borne on XIV, 2, on consultants' fees for design of defence works projects; and in respect of increased expenditure on Defence Vote, Class I, 3, retired pay and pensions.

Service Personnel (Drugs)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish figures of the numbers of service personnel convicted of offences connected with drugs for each year since 1980, by service, rank and type of drug concerned.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January 1985, c. *159*]: The number of British armed forces personnel convicted in military and civilian proceedings on drug-related offences in the years in question is as follows:

	Royal Navy/ Royal Marines	*Army*	*RAF*
1980	100	39	14
1981	100	70	32
1982	36	69	17
1983	61	114	15
1984 (to 30 September)	32	118	109

Details of types of drugs involved in the above cases are not available; however, more than 90 per cent. of the RAF's and some 80 per cent. of the Navy's convictions were for offences involving cannibis only. A detailed breakdown of ranks is not available as such statistics are not

kept; however, only one officer (Army 1982) has been convicted during the period.

Notes:

1. The Royal Navy's figures are not directly comparable to those of the other two services because:
   (a) they do not include convictions in civilian courts for which records are not readily available, and
   (b) the Royal Navy's policy is to try almost all drugs cases whilst the other two services have tended to deal with very minor cases administratively.
2. The RAF figure for 1984 reflects the fact that from the beginning of that year all minor offences have been subject to formal disciplinary action rather than being dealt with administratively as previously.
3. All Royal Navy figures and RAF figures for 1984 include convictions for minor drug-related offences charged respectively under section 39 of the Naval Discipline Act or section 69 of the Air Force Act. The Army does not produce a breakdown of offences charged under section 69 of the Army Act which is used for a wide variety of misdemeanours, and no section 69 offences are therefore included in the Army's figures.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teaching Hours (Universities)

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what statistics are held by his Department pertaining to the average number of hours per annum spent on teaching by those responsible for this duty in universities.

Mr. Brooke: None.

Impaired Hearing (Microcomputers)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provisions he intends to make for promoting the use of microcomputers in educating pupils with learning impediments.

Mr. Dunn: The Government have made provision for the promotion of microlectronics in special education within the microelectronics education programme (MEP). Four regional centres (SEMERCs) have been established, at Newcastle upon Tyne, Manchester, Bristol and Redbridge. The programme began in 1981 and has been extended to March 1986; further development beyond that time is at present under discussion.

The MEP has produced a number of programmes for children with learning difficulties. The Government are also making available, through MEP, free software packs for use by children with special educational needs. These packs were developed initally by the Scottish Council for Educational Technology.

Under the education support grants programme for 1985-86, £2·25 million has been allotted to local education authorities for the provision of microelectronic equipment designed or adapted for pupils with special educational needs.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make resources available to enable primary and secondary school teachers to instruct pupil groups of smaller numbers.

Mr. Dunn: Average sizes of classes as taught in primary and secondary schools in England have been reducing steadily in recent years. The Government's expenditure plans should permit nationally a continuing modest improvement in pupil to teacher ratios provided the cost of employing staff can be contained. It is, however, for local education authorities to assess, in the light of their own circumstances, what priority should now be given to further reductions in class sizes and to time for teachers to develop and plan the curriculum, to undertake further training, and to assess and review the progress of their pupils.

Local Education Authorities (Property Sales)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of school sites and quantities of acreage which have been sold off by local education authorities to private entrepreneurs in each single year since 1982 and the amount received in each case.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not collected by the Department.

Academic Tenure

Mrs Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his response to the University Grants Committee's memorandum on academic tenure.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend is considering the University Grants Committee's memorandum on academic tenure. He has published it to encourage debate and has, in particular, sought the views of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Association of University Teachers.

Natural Environment Research Council (Chairman)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he plans to appoint a successor to Mr. Hugh Fish as chairman of the Natural Environment Research Council.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) on 4 February at column 390.

Haemophiliacs

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what Medical Research Council funds are devoted to research into the problems of haemophiliacs at the Royal Free hospital in London; what is his estimate for spending in 1985-86 at the Royal Free hospital unit; and if he will make a statement on general expenditure on research to help haemophiliacs.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that the Medical Research Council's expenditure on research projects relevant to the problems of haemophiliacs amounted to £50,000 in the 1983-84 financial year, but that the council is not currently funding any work on this subject at the Royal Free hospital.

Work on the important problem of haemophilia is part of the council's total research effort in the field of blood and blood disorders, to which field the council contributed funds totalling £1·94 million in 1983-84. Research relevant to haemophilia may also be carried out in universities and medical schools using funds allocated for teaching and research on the advice of the University Grants Committee.

Meniere's Disease and Tinnitus

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied with the level of funding at the university of Keele and other research centres for research to combat Meniere's disease and tinnitus.

Mr. Brooke: The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid through the Department, is the main Government agency for the promotion of medical research in the United Kingdom. It is for the council to decide on the distribution of the resources available to it between research in the various areas of medical science. I understand that the MRC is providing grant support to the department of communication and neuroscience at the university of Keele and to other centres for research into Meniere's disease and tinnitus. The MRC is always ready to consider soundly based research proposals for support through its grants schemes in competition with other applications.

Research work relevant to Meniere's disease and tinnitus is also being conducted in universities and medical schools. It is likely that such work is financed in part from the block grant to universities allocated for teaching and research on advice from the University Grants Committee.

Children (Special Educational Needs)

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) whether he will list the information and statistics relating to the education of children with special educational needs *(a)* of statutory school age and *(b)* between the ages of 16 and 19 years which is known to be collected by local education authorities but is not collated centrally by his Department;

(2) whether he will list the information and statistics relating to pre-school educational provision, including pre-school playgroups, which is known to be collected by local education authorities but is not collated centrally by his Department.

Mr. Dunn: The collection of information other than that required by the Department is a matter for individual local education authorities, and the Department has no information about the practices which they adopt.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what statistics relating to the education of children now designated as having special educational needs his Department has ceased collecting since the introduction of the Education Act 1981.

Mr. Dunn: The Department no longer requires these statistics to be analysed into the 10 statutory categories of handicap which applied before the Education Act 1981 came into force. Information previously collected from local education authorities about children with special educational needs educated under arrangements made by authorities under section 56 of the Education Act 1944 has now been replaced by the collection of data relating to arrangements made in accordance with section 3 of the 1981 Act. The Department has also ceased to collect details of children boarded in homes. Additionally, the Department no longer asks for information about children over the age of five for whom no education is being provided on the day that the return is made.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the integration of children with special educational needs since the Education Act 1981 in relation to the figures given as projections of the school population in the "Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 and 1987-88", volume II, table 3.10.3.

Mr. Dunn: The projected number of pupils in special schools set out in table 3.10.3 of the "Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 and 1987-88" assumes that a constant proportion of pupils with special educational needs will continue to be educated in special schools over the next three years. The drop in numbers between 1982-83 and 1983-84 represents a transitional year and is not regarded as a good indicator of future trends.

Teachers (GCSE)

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to help teachers in secondary schools and colleges to prepare for the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education.

Sir Keith Joseph: I wrote on 21 December 1984 to the chairman of the Secondary Examinations Council, Sir Wilfred Cockcroft, setting out proposals for a special programme of in-service support and training for teachers of General Certificate of Secondary Education examination courses. The aim is to give teachers as much help as possible in preparation for the introduction of the new examination.

The programme will concentrate on the national criteria, subject by subject, techniques of differentiated assessment, and the setting and assessment of course work, practical and oral work. It will require close co-operation between all the partners concerned — the examining groups, the Secondary Examinations Council, local education authorities and schools and colleges.

The intention is that the examining groups should conduct seminars of two or two and a half days for subject representatives nominated by local education authorities, schools and colleges, and that these subject representatives should then conduct similar seminars for all other teachers of GCSE courses. I see these seminars as the first step in a continuing programme of in-service support for GCSE teachers. To ensure that they derive maximum benefit from the seminars, the Secondary Examinations Council will arrange, in collaboration with the examining groups, for the preparation of GCSE teacher manuals, subject by subject, and of videos where appropriate. The manuals and videos will be available to all teachers of GCSE courses and will be designed to be of continuing value to teachers as works of reference when teaching GCSE courses.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I propose, subject to the approval of Parliament, to make an additional grant to the Secondary Examinations Council of £675,000 in 1985-86 and £185,000 in 1986-87. This will enable the council to co-ordinate the preparation and dissemination of the GCSE teacher manuals and videos and to make a substantial contribution towards the costs of the examining groups in providing the seminars for subject representatives. I also propose, again subject to the approval of Parliament, to extend the in-service teacher training grants scheme to support expenditure of £6 million on the cost to LEAs of sending subject representatives from schools and colleges to attend the seminars provided by the examining groups.

Copies of my letter to Sir Wilfred Cockcroft have been placed in the Library.

Inner London Education Authority (Staff)

Mr. Moynihan asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what statistical information and controls are available to him as to the total number of staff employed in the Inner London education authority; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: Information is collected annually from all LEAs as to the numbers of teachers, and quarterly through the Joint Manpower Watch from all local authorities—including the ILEA separately—as to total full-time and part-time employees. The ILEA also publish in its annual capital and revenue estimates details of the number of posts in the authority.

As to controls, the new ILEA would fall within the scope of the provisions of clause 80 of the Local Government Bill. These are intended to give Ministers the necessary powers to forestall any expansion in bureaucracy, and to ensure that services are efficiently and effectively provided, when the new authorities proposed in the Bill come into being. They are essentially a transitional measure, intended to promote the efficiency of the new structures when they are established. In the case of the ILEA, however, an administrative structure is already in existence; and the authority will not be facing the prospect of rate limitation for the first time. In the circumstances, therefore, the Government would not at present propose to apply the controls to the new ILEA. It should be clearly understood, however, that if there are indications that decisions taken by the ILEA will have implications for manpower that are not in accordance with the objectives of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, regulations under clause 80 will be made. The content of any such regulations would depend on the circumstances they were intended to meet.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Privatisation

Mr. Merchant asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the levels of balance sheet debt at the date of sale or last year end of those public sector enterprises of which the Government prior to sale owned 51 per cent. or more and after sale owned less than 50 per cent.

Mr. Moore: Balance sheet debt in the form of medium and long-term group liabilities was as shown in the following table:

Sale	*Date of sale*	*Capital debt* £ million*	*Capital debt* at*
British Aerospace	February 1981	35·5	14 June 1980
Cable and Wireless	†October 1981	20·7	31 March 1981
National Freight Company	February 1982	1·0	13 June 1981
Amersham International	February 1982	‡10·5	30 September 1981
Britoil	November 1982	‖256·1	1 August 1982
Associated British Ports Holdings	February 1983	82·0	30 June 1982
Enterprise Oil	June 1984	Nil	31 December 1983
British Telecom	November 1984	¶3,251	31 March 1984

* Medium and long-term group liabilities.

† After the October 1981 sale, the Government's residual shareholding remained marginally above 50 per cent. It was reduced to 23·1 per cent. in December 1983.

‡ Includes lease finance of £1·7 million.

‖ Includes a debenture of £80·2 million issued to BNOC as part consideration for transfer of business.

¶ Includes lease finance of £148 million.

Source: Accounts published in sale prospectuses.

Trident

Mr. O'Neill asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will include in his commentary on defence public expenditure programmes in the public expenditure White Paper an indication of the impact of the cost of the Trident project at the date of publication of the White Paper on the future composition of the remainder of the defence budget.

Mr. Butler: I have been asked to reply.

Pursuant to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on 21 January, at column 321, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 29 January, at columns 134-37, his revised cost estimate for the Trident programme. This will represent on average about 3 per cent of the defence budget over the period of its procurement.

Government Expenditure

79. **Mr. Strang** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies he has conducted into the relative labour intensity of different forms of Government expenditure.

Mr. Peter Rees: Detailed information on the labour intensity of government spending is not readily available. The 1985 public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9428) contains information on the composition of public expenditure, including the proportion expected on present plans to go directly in pay. Input-output tables for 1979, prepared by the Central Statistical Office may be used to obtain information on the average labour intensity of different categories of expenditure, and output in different industrial sectors.

Exchange Rates

80. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the likely change in the level of unemployment caused by recent falls in the value of the pound sterling on the exchange rates.

Mr. Peter Rees: There is no presumption that the recent falls in the value of the pound sterling will increase unemployment at all.

EC (Own Resources)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in *(a)* the European Economic Community own resources base and *(b)* the European Economic Community income from own resources in the latest three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The figures for changes in the European Economic Community own resources base, reflecting actual payments for duties and levies and VAT as estimated for Budgets, together with the figures for Own Resources income received in the latest three available years are given below. The definition of Own Resources used is that in the Own Resources Decision.

	1981 Per cent.	*1982 Per cent.*	*1983 Per cent.*
EEC Own Resources Base†	12·1	11·4	4·4

	1981 Per cent.	1982 Per cent.	1983 Per cent.
EEC income from all own resources*†‡	16·8	17·4	9·7

* Actual revenue for years in question.
† Greece paid a financial contribution based on its GNP.
‡ Including the balances and adjustments of previous financial years.
Source: Reports of the Court of Auditor's and Community Budgets for the years in question.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Holt asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new firms registered to pay value added tax in Cleveland in each of the past five years; and how many of these firms have survived for two years or more.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that records are not maintained in this form. Only the total number of new registrations for VAT is centrally recorded, no distinction being made between new and existing firms who register. Also, the statistics of persons deregistering from VAT makes no distinction between firms going out of business and those deregistering for other reasons. The available information, for the past five years, for those traders whose local VAT office is situated in Cleveland, is as follows:

	New registrations	*Deregistrations*
1980	1,986	1,801
1981	1,666	1,304
1982	1,965	1,780
1983	2,122	1,792
1984	2,029	1,748

Mr. Cohen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Government propose to comply with the draft 18th Council directive of the Commission of the European Communities, document, reference COM(84) 649 final, of 30 November 1984, in respect of requiring Britain to impose value added tax by 1 January 1986 on *(a)* supplies linked to sport or physical education made by non-profit-making organisations, *(b)* cultural supplies made by bodies governed by public law, *(c)* supply of transport by ambulance for sick or injured persons, *(d)* supplies by intermediaries relating to transactions in transferable securities and *(e)* management of investment funds, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: This draft directive has yet to be discussed in the Council of Ministers and unanimous agreement would be required for it or any amended version to be adopted. In its present form it would not have the effect of requiring the items mentioned to be taxed. Under the sixth VAT directive they are exempt but there is a derogation allowing member states to continue to tax them as a transitional measure. The new proposals would end that derogation. An explanatory memorandum on the draft directive will shortly be deposited in the Library in the normal way.

Mr. Cohen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proposal in the draft 18th Council directive of the Commission of the European Communities, document reference COM(84) 649 final, of 30 November 1984, whereby the European Economic Community will require Britain to impose value added tax by 1 January 1988 on *(a)* supplies by undertakers and cremation services, *(b)* transactions carried out by hospitals and *(c)* passenger transport.

Mr. Hayhoe: This draft directive does not contain proposals to apply value added tax to these items. An explanatory memorandum will shortly be deposited in the Library in the normal way.

Mr. McTaggart asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take the necessary steps to ensure the zero rating of value added tax for the supply to eligible bodies of computer systems, purchased with funds provided by a charity or from voluntary donations, and used in medical research, treatment or diagnosis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have nothing to add to what I told the hon. Member in my letter to him of 21 January.

Civil Service Pensions

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average weekly Civil Service pension; and what percentage of Civil Service pensioners are on or below this average.

Mr. Hayhoe: The average pension in payment to retired civil servants is just under £48 a week. It is not possible to calculate from the available statistics what percentage of retired civil servants are on or below this average. However, taking retired civil servants together with the dependants of ex-civil servants the average weekly pension is £41. Some two-thirds of Civil Service pensioners on that definition are on or below this average.

Taxation

Mr. Silvester asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his current estimate of the loss of tax revenue if the investment income of husband and wife were taxed independently;

(2) by how much the abolition of the investment income surcharge has reduced the cost of taxing the investment income of husband and wife independently.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his replies*, 21 January 1985, c. *319*]: On the basis of the recorded distribution of investment income between husband and wife, the latest estimate of the overall cost in 1984-85 of the income election described in paragraphs 46 to 50 of the Green Paper "The Taxation of Husband and Wife" (Cmnd. 8093) is about £320 million. If the investment income surcharge had been retained the cost would have been about £50 million greater.

The estimates do not reflect the possible rearrangement of income between husband and wife which might occur in response to the change.

Capital Transfer Tax

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to the Exchequer since 1980-81 of the alteration in the rates of capital transfer tax.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 31 January 1985, c. *314*]: If capital transfer tax had been charged at 1980-81 rates, indexed after 1982-83 in accordance with the provisions of the Finance Act 1982, it is estimated that receipts in subsequent years would have been greater by the following amounts:

	£ million
1981-82	2
1982-83	40
1983-84	60
1984-85	50

No allowance has been made for the possibility that the difference in tax rates would have affected the amounts chargeable.

Value Added Tax (Publications)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the implications of the imposition of value added tax on the level of purchases of books and other publjcations by students.

Mr. Hayhoe: [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1985, c. *391*]: I have been asked to reply.

These implications are among the many factors that would need careful consideration if books and other publications were to the be brought into tax.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the implications of the imposition of value added tax on books and other publications on *(a)* public library usage and *(b)* book provision.

Mr. Hayhoe: [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1985, c. *390-91*]: I have been asked to reply.

On part *(a)* I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) on 25 October 1984 at column *658*.

On part *(b)* of the question, representations have been made by trade and educational interests and are being carefully considered.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which regional health authorities have now indicated that they will be unable to comply with the timetable for drafting their outline regional policy report.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: All regions have now drafted their outline strategies as a first step to preparation of their regional strategic plans. The following dates have been agreed for submission of completed plans to our Department and, as far as we are aware, all regions are intending to meet their dates.

Northern—31 May
Yorkshire—30 June
Trent—6 April
East Anglian—31 March
North West Thames—30 June
North East Thames—Already submitted; cleared at June 1984 Ministerial Regional Review
South East Thames—31 May
South West Thames—30 June
Wessex—31 March
Oxford—Already submitted; cleared at December 1984 Ministerial Regional Review
South Western—31 March
West Midlands—31 March
Mersey—31 March
North Western—31 March

Homeless Persons

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many single homeless people are on Merseyside; what are the numbers of *(a)* reception centres, *(b)* resettlement units, *(c)* hostels, *(d)* lodging houses and *(e)* hotels and so on, catering for them on a temporary basis; how many beds are in each; and how many individuals by sex there are in each facility, in each case, for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Whitney: No figures are available to show how many single homeless people there are on Merseyside. There is one resettlement unit (formerly a reception centre) which has 57 beds for men but none for women. The average occupancy level during the 12 months ended 20 November 1984 was 48 (84·2 per cent.). Such information is not available in respect of the other types of accommodation specified.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many single homeless persons by sex were received into the Fazakerley reception centre and resettlement unit in the last year for which figures are available; how many of these fell within priority need, as defined in section 2 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977; how many of the latter were rehoused by local housing authorities, listing the housing authorities and the number each housed; and if any Merseyside local housing authorities refused to take single homeless persons from the centre unit.

Mr. Whitney: 843 men but no women were admitted to the Fazakerley resettlement unit (formerly a reception centre) during the period 12 months ended 20 November 1984. There are no figures available to show how many of these fell within priority need as defined by section 2 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Nor are there figures available to show how many people in this category were rehoused by local housing authorities.

We are not aware that any single homeless men referred from the unit have been refused accommodation by the local housing authority.

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of those currently living in reception centres are entitled to immediate housing from local authorities; how many are men and how many are women; and what instructions are given to hostel staff concerning assistance with rehousing.

Mr. Whitney: There are no figures available which show how many people living in resettlement units (formerly reception centres) are entitled to immediate housing from local authorities. Staff in these units are instructed to give all possible help to residents to find suitable accommodation and this includes liaising with local authorities to provide rented accommodation in appropriate circumstances.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of those in employment now receive family income supplement: and what was the comparable figure in 1979.

Mr. Whitney: Of the total number of those in employment at September 1979 and September 1984, the

number in receipt of family income supplement (FIS) at those dates represent 0·3 per cent. and 0·8 per cent. respectively.

It should be noted that the numbers in employment include categories who would not be eligible for FIS, for example part-time workers and people without children. The numbers in these categories are not separately available. The numbers of those in employment also include separately husbands and wives where both are working, whereas the couple represent a single family unit for FIS purposes.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has received about the effect on the availability of analgesics under the National Health Service of the proposed limited list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received a number of comments about the analgesics to remain available on National Health Service prescription under our limited list proposals. We are carefully considering these comments.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a detailed report or summary of the responses against his proposal for a limited list: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 4 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) at column *448*.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice he plans to give to doctors in completing prescription forms so that they may take account of the psychological attachment to the shape and colour of particular medicines that may be withheld from the National Health Service list of approved drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am confident that doctors are well able to overcome any difficulties which might arise from changing the shape and colour of patients' drugs without any special advice from our Department.

Heat-treated Factor IX

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will bring forward proposals to ensure that the heat-treated factor IX is made freely available on the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No product licences have been issued for heat-treated Factor IX. The Blood Products Laboratory is developing such a product, but it has not yet reached a stage where it is ready for clinical trials. Commercially-produced, unlicensed heat-treated Factor IX is however available and can be prescribed by clinicians on a 'named patient' basis.

AIDS

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has received any evidence which suggests that the acquired immune deficiency syndrome virus HTLV-III may be transmissible through saliva; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There is limited scientific evidence to show that the AIDS associated virus (HTLVIII) can be transmitted in saliva. However, epidemiological evidence indicates that AIDS is usually transmitted through sexual contact (predominantly homosexual intercourse), sharing unclean intravenous needles or through transfusion of AIDS infected blood or blood products.

Benefits

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the cost of all benefits paid to the unemployed in the United Kingdom in the years 1974-75 to 1983-84 (i) excluding men over 60 years not required to sign on and (ii) including such men.

Mr. Whitney: Estimates of the cost of benefits paid to the unemployed (unemployment benefit, supplementary benefit and housing benefit) in the United Kingdom are shown in the table. These figures include estimated amounts for rent and rate rebates paid under the scheme operating prior to the introduction of housing benefit 1983.

£ million

Year	*Cost of benefits to the unemployed not required to sign on*	
	Excluding men over 60	*Including men over 60*
1974-75	470	
1975-76	910	
1976-77	1,230	
1977-78	1,470	
1978-79	1,450	
1979-80	1,540	
1980-81	2,640	
1981-82	4,210	4,260
1982-83	5,270	5,380
1983-84	5,950	6,290

Part-time Work

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes he has introduced, or plans to introduce, arising from the proposals of the European Community Commission to the Council of Ministers concerning part-time work, as outlined in Council document 4138/83, published on 11 January 1983; and if he will make a statement about the implications for social security structures.

Mr. Whitney: The amended proposals of the European Community Commission to the Council of Ministers concerning part-time work to which the hon. Member refers have not yet been adopted by the Council. We have no plans, therefore, to make any social security changes at present to carry out what has been proposed.

The implications of the proposals are set out in the explanatory memoranda dated 3 February 1982, 29 November 1982 and 1 February 1983 presented to Parliament and relating to the Council document 4138/83 and to the earlier document 4053/82 which contained the Commission's original proposals.

Heating Allowances

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will take steps to introduce a weekly £7 heating allowance to all pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: No. It would cost about £3 billion to give a weekly £7 heating allowance to all pensioners

regardless of need. The best way to use the available resources is to concentrate on helping those most in need by maintaining or increasing so far as possible the value of supplementary benefit rates. Between November 1978 and November 1984 the real value of the main rates of supplementary benefit increased by about 6 per cent. and over the same period the basic rate of heating addition increased by about 147 per cent. compared with an increase in fuel prices of about 108 per cent. We expect to spend some £400 million on heating additions this financial year, which is about £140 million more in real terms than was spent in 1978-79. More than 90 per cent. of supplementary pensioners now have a heating addition, as well as getting the higher long-term rate of supplementary benefit which is worth £7·65 a week more for a single householder and £11·55 more for a couple than the ordinary rate.

Blood Products

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will issue regulations to require that anyone administering blood products should wear surgical gloves; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The precautions to be taken are a matter for the doctor responsible for individual patients.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) to what extent non-heat-treated blood products are still being used in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement;

(2) by which date British heat-treated factor VIII, free of acquired immune deficiency syndrome virus, will become available from the national blood products laboratory in Elstree; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he is satisfied that the output of heat-treated blood products from the national blood products laboratory in Elstree is sufficient to meet domestic demand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Information on the use of blood products is not available centrally. Heat-treatment can be applied only to certain blood products, of which factor VIII is one of the most important. At present the blood products laboratory, Elstree manufactures almost half of the National Health Service consumption of factor VIII. BPL has started to heat treat its factor VIII, and limited amounts will be distributed to the National Health Service for clinical trials within the next two weeks. Heat-treatment capacity is being increased, and it is hoped that, by April this year, all BPL factor VIII will be heat-treated.

The major redevelopment of BPL is on schedule to open in January 1986. This is intended to provide the capacity to meet the forecast demand on the National Health Service in England and Wales for factor VIII. The heat-treatment process however reduces product yield and the consequences of this for the timetable for achieving self-sufficiency in factor VIII is being examined.

Invalid Care Allowance

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate of the annual cost of extending the invalid care allowance to include married women.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 17 January at column *224*.

Blindness Allowance

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the annual cost of introducing a blind allowance for all registered blind persons at the same rate as the non-contributory invalidity allowance.

Mr. Newton: The cost of a blindness allowance at the same rate as non-contributory invalidity pension—now severe disablement allowance—is estimated to be £140 million a year.

Well Women Clinics

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will publish his Department's evaluation of the well women centre at Wythenshawe clinic;

(2) what is his policy on the development of well women clinics and centres;

(3) if he will list for each regional health authority area the number and location of well women clinics set up by health authorities or operating on National Health Service premises;

(4) what evaluation has been conducted by his Department on the role of well women clinics and centres;

(5) if he will issue national guidelines to all health authorities on the establishment and organisation of well women centres to provide a comprehensive medical screening and counselling service for women.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the number and location of well women clinics is not held centrally and no evaluation of the role of such facilities, or of specific clinics, has been carried out by the Department. The prevention of ill health and promotion of good health are among the Government's prime objectives and we take every opportunity to encourage the National Health Service to develop these aspects of its services. However, the provision of special facilities such as well women clinics is a matter for individual health authorities to decide in the light of local needs and priorities.

Rainhill Hospital

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the future of Rainhill hospital.

Mr. John Patten: The Mersey regional health authority is preparing costings and timetables for the closure of Rainhill hospital in the 1990s. This is in line with the region's strategy to devolve services for the mentally ill from large institutions to provide a more local, district based, service.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of hospital beds in Rainhill hospital in each of the past six years to the latest date

Mr. John Patten: The information is given in the table:

Average daily number of available beds in Rainhill Hospital

Year	Number
1978	1,768
1979	1,550
1980	1,440
1981	1,439
1982	1,440
1983	1,367

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current cost of maintaining patients transferring from Rainhill mental hospital to private hostels in North Wales.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally. Mersey regional health authority's general policy in respect of financing transfers from hospital to community settings is to arrange an individual payment in respect of each patient or group of patients depending on the cost of alternative care. Costs vary according to whether the transfer is to local authority, voluntary or private sector provision and is affected by such factors as eligibility for social security benefits.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many patients discharged from Rainhill hospital are now resident in hostels in north Wales at the latest date;

(2) how many patients and ex-patients from Rainhill hospital have been transferred to private hostels in north Wales in each of the past three years to the latest date.

Mr. John Patten: We do not collect detailed information centrally. The hon. Member may care to write to the chairman of St. Helens and Knowsley health authority for the information.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of staff employed at Rainhill hospital in each of the past six years.

Mr. John Patten: Information cannot be provided in the form requested except at disproportionate cost. The readily available information is given in the table.

Numbers of certain categories of staff (whole time equivalents) employed at Rainhill Hospital at 30 September

Year	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Consultants in mental illness	15·6	14·6	8·8	8·8	8·8	6·7
All medical staff	36·2	35·4	29·2	29·3	28·0	24·4
Qualified Nurses (Registered and Enrolled)	490	507	461	439	466	402
Other Nurses	392	425	447	474	493	491
Psychologists	6·0	6·0	3·0	3·0	3·0	4·0
Therapists	27·0	25·9	25·5	26·4	24·5	32·6
Chiropodists	*	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·3
Domestic Services Staff	194	196	171	171	187	165

* Not available

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why patients from Rainhill mental hospital have been discharged to private hostels in north Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is national policy to transfer patients from large mental illness institutions to community settings where this is in the interests of the patients concerned. The Rainhill patients transferred to north Wales are all patients who have no relatives or other links with Merseyside or who are known never to receive visitors. Placements are made only after careful multi-disciplinary assessment of the most suitable alternative accommodation.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if ex-patients of Rainhill hospital are given any choice of establishment when being sent to hostels in north Wales.

Mr. John Patten: Patients are transferred to the community only after individual multi-disciplinary assessment, which takes account of the patient's views. Liverpool social services department which arranged the placements in question have interviewed all the ex-patients, none of whom has expressed any desire to return to Merseyside.

Mental Patients

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what are the criteria for private hostels being accepted by his Department for receiving ex-mental hospital patients;

(2) if patients in mental hospitals or their families are consulted about transfers from hospitals to private homes.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current estimated weekly cost of maintaining a patient in a mental hospital.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The latest available figures are those derived from health authorities' costing returns for 1983-84, and are £232·26 for a patient in a mental illness hospital and £205·59 for a patient in a mental handicap hospital.

Abortions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many abortions have been performed in the United Kingdom since the enactment of the Abortion Act 1967.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of abortions performed under the Abortion Act 1967 in Great Britain from 27 April 1968 to 31 December 1983 was 2,234,326. The Act does not apply to Northern Ireland.

Mental Health Act 1983

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation to provide an appeal procedure whereby an aggrieved party under section 62(3) of the Mental Health Act 1983 may contest a judgment made under that section; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No. The enactment of the provisions in the Mental Health Act 1983 concerning consent to treatment and the related safeguards followed extensive debate in Parliament. These provisions are now being closely monitored by the Mental Health Act Commission who will no doubt bring to our notice any difficulties arising under this Section of the Mental Health Act.

If the hon. Member would care to let me have details of any specific matter which he believes may give cause for concern, I shall be glad to look into it.

NHS Assets (Disposal)

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether it is Her Majesty's Government's policy that funds generated by the disposal of assets by the National Health Service should accrue to the sole benefit of the National Health Service without any offsetting reduction in the departmental vote.

Mr. John Patten: The expenditure plans set out in the recent Public Expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9428) recognised that the National Health Service would have available all the funds released through sales of assets in addition to the sums allocated from central Government. The Government's policy is that the capital funding which health authorities have available to them should be adequate to meet their needs for investment in the maintenance, modernisation and necessary development of health infrastruture, including rationalisation, improved efficiency and lower running costs wherever attainable.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information has been sent by his Department to community health councils regarding the proposals to limit the range of medicines prescribable under the National Health Service; when such information was sent and by what means; how many councils have commented on the proposals; and what percentage of community health councils this number represents.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Community health councils have not been separately consulted on the limited list proposals, but their Association has submitted comments as has at least one individual Council.

Adoptions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many children have been adopted in each of the years since 1966; and how many of these children were males and how many were females.

Mr. John Patten: The information required is in the table:

Adoptions of children—England and Wales

Year	Males	Females	Total
1966	11,616	11,176	22,792
1967	11,553	11,249	22,802
1968	12,656	12,175	24,831
1969	12,102	11,606	23,708
1970	11,423	10,950	22,373
1971	11,013	10,482	21,495
1972	10,914	10,685	21,599
1973	11,474	10,773	22,247
1974	11,503	10,999	22,502
1975	10,786	10,513	21,299
1976	8,939	8,682	17,621
1977	6,548	6,200	12,748
1978	6,259	5,862	12,121
1979	5,593	5,277	10,870
1980	5,428	5,181	10,609
1981	4,799	4,485	9,284
1982	5,305	4,935	10,240
1983	4,640	4,389	9,029

Note: From 1973 onwards figures relate to persons under 18: previously they related to persons under age 21.

Social Security Reviews

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will agree to publish the individual reports of each social security review team;

(2) when he proposes to publish his report of the social security reviews; and whether it will take the form of a White Paper.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which social security benefits have now been examined by his Department; which benefits are now being examined; which of the reports on benefits are to be published; and when they will be available.

Mr. Newton: We are undertaking a wide-ranging review covering all aspects of social security, and in particular provision for retirement, supplementary benefit, housing benefit and benefits for children and young people. It is hoped that the Government's conclusions and proposals for change will be announced in the course of the next few months. A decision on the form and content of the publication will be taken nearer the time.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all the organisations that have submitted evidence to the social security reviews, indicating those which were invited to give oral evidence.

Mr. Newton: A list of the organisations which gave oral evidence to the social security review teams was included in my reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 31 October at columns *1081* and *1083*. The organisations which submitted written evidence were as follows:

Inquiry into provision for retirement:
Sub-group on personal pensions
Sir Alfred McAlpine & Son Ltd
Chevron Oil Service Company
The Palatine Graphic Arts Company Ltd
Pensions Associates Limited
Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
Geerings
The Mail Order Trader's Association
Aqua-Marine Manufacturing (UK) Ltd
Hymans, Robertson & Co, Consulting Actuaries & Statisticians
The Independent Order of Foresters
Duncan C. Fraser & Co, Actuaries

Glynwed Group Services Ltd
Clearing Bank Union
United Kingdom Federation of Business and Professional Women
Wimpey
Thorn EMI
The Committee of Scottish Clearing Bankers
LWP Financial Services Limited, Financial & Taxation Consultants
Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association
Antec Systems Ltd
Highlands and Islands Development Board
Millar, Boyd & Reid Limited, Whole Warehousemen
Association of Public Service Finance Officers
Ewing Gay Associates
Framlington Unit Management Limited
Electrocomponents Pension Trustees Limited
Minvercrest Ltd, Group Employee Benefit Consultancy
Moore, Stephens & Co, Chartered Accountants
Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff
John Lewis Partnership
Bass PLC
John Govett & Co Ltd
Ferranti
Pakcentre Ltd, Corrugated Products Ltd
Aitken Hume Ltd
Farr Insurance Brokers Limited
Brammer PLC
Institute of Personnel Management
Stephen P Rees & Co, Chartered Accountants
Trident Life Assurance Company Limited
AIB Trustees Ltd
Trafalgar House PLC
The Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors
Leonard Fletcher & Partner
R Watson & Sons, Consulting Actuaries
Parkland Manufacturing Company Limited
Whatman, Reeve, Angel PLC
Haggar Company Ltd
Shepard Associates Life & Pensions Limited
National Association of Fire Brigade Pensioners
Lower Sapey Pension Management Ltd
Parkdale Pensions Management Ltd
Frank Hine & Co Ltd
Scottish Widows' Fund and Life Assurance Society
The Building Societies Association
The Standard Life Assurance Company
James Robertson & Sons Preserve Manufacturers Ltd
Wigham Poland Employee Benefits Ltd
William M Mercer-Bowring
Halifax Building Society Staff Association
The Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies
Carnation Limited
Banyard, Induction Heating Specialists
Access Insurance Consultants Ltd
E. A. Clare & Sons Ltd
Marks & Spencer
Co-operative Union
ICI PLC
H. J. Heinz Company
Merchant Navy Pensions Administration
Stewart Wrightson Benefit Services Limited
Eaton Ltd
Bertlin & Partners (Consulting Engineers)
Pension Lawyers Informal Discussion Group
Sidwell & McGrath Ltd (Frozen Fish Factors)
Reward Regional Surveys Ltd
Sigma Ltd
Martin James & Co (Financial Consultants)
Pfizer Ltd
Linked Mortgage & Investment Co Ltd
Goodwood Estate (Pensions) Ltd
Wander Ltd
The Wellcome Foundation Ltd
CPC (United Kingdom) Ltd
Martin Paterson Associates Ltd
The National Chamber of Trade
NALGO Salisbury District Branch
London Borough of Hounslow Retired Staff Association
NEI (Pension Trustees) Ltd
BICC PLC
Paramount Printers BEB Ltd
The Nestle Company Ltd
The British Insurance Brokers Association
London Life
British Petroleum Co
Small Business Bureau
Police Negotiating Board
Ellison Westhorp
NPA Employee Benefits & Compensation Consultants
Office of the Bursar, The University of Leeds
T. G. Arthur & Co, Consulting Actuaries
Peter Provost (Financial Services)
Carreras Pension Fund
SMK Walker (Specialists in Pension & Benefits Planning)
Advisory Council for Applied Research
Owen Owen PLC
W. H. Smith Pension Trustees Ltd
TSB Group Pension Trust Limited
Hargreaves Group PLC
The Mersey Docks & Harbour Company
Aims of Industry
Emhart USMC International Ltd
Thos & Jas Harrison Ltd
Renault UK Ltd
Norrington (Insurance Consultants)
Policy Studies Institute
United Kingdom Steering Committee on Local Government Superannuation
Fidelity International
Hill Samuel Group Ltd
Reckitt & Colman Pension Fund
The Pensions Management Institute
C E Heath, Urquhart (Life & Pensions) Ltd
Henderson Pension Fund Management Ltd
Hickson International PLC
Yates Burgess Ltd (Insurance Brokers)
The National Union of Hosiery & Knitwear Workers
Roger Booth & Co Ltd (Insurance Brokers)
Macclesfield Insurance Bureau
The Business Graduates Association Ltd
Adam Smith Research
Mars Group of Companies
Beecham Group PLC
Managerial Professional & Staff Liaison Group
The Hundred Group
P F Craggs & Co Ltd
W S Atkins Group, Consultants
Borg-Warner Trustees Limited
C J Thacker (Pension Consultant)
Retired Management Staff Association
Bemrose Corporation PLC
Chloride Group PLC
The Association of British Chambers of Commerce
Rother Boiler Company Ltd
May & Hassell PLC
Equity & Law Group Pensions
Reed Stenhouse Financial Services Ltd
Murray Cowles Associates Ltd
Covey & Somerset Insurances
Higgins & Cattle Ltd
Brown Boveri Kent Retirement and Life Assurance Benefits Scheme
Wyatt Company (UK) Limited
Willis Faber Advisory Services Ltd.
Rodney Barnett & Co (Consulting Actuaries)
Legal & General Assurance Society Limited
BOC Limited
Federation of Master Builders
Yeneb Pattinson Computers Limited
Rowe & Maw (Solicitors)
London and Manchester Assurance
Ford Motor Co Ltd
Ecclesiastical Insurance Office PLC
Wider Share Ownership Council
Lawrence Prust & Co
Crown Life
Age Concern
Superannuation Arrangements of the University of London

Beaver Machine Tool Sales Ltd
Shucksmith & Co, Consulting Actuaries
The Solicitors Staff Pension Fund
The Institution of Mechanical Engineers
UK Provident
Rank Xerox Limited
Pensions Today
Pension Advisers
The Committee of London Clearing Bankers
Joint Boots Pharmacists Association
Providence Capitol
Britoil
The Nuffield Foundation
Trustees of Foster Wheeler Ltd Pensions Plan
Burco Dean Plc
Johnson and Johnson
Boosey and Hawkes
Boxfoldia Ltd
Age Concern
Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors
Senior Salesmans Association
Perchcourt Limited
Decision and Control Systems
Engineering Employers Federation
Conden International plc
Leisure Consultants
Port Employers and Registered Dock Workers Pension Fund Trustees Ltd

Inquiry into Provision for Retirement—Main Inquiry
Social Security Advisory Committee
Equal Opportunities Commission
Trades Union Congress
Confederation of British Industry
National Consumer Council
Stock Exchange
Age Concern
Centre for Policy Studies
National Pensioners' Convention
British Association of Social Workers
Institute and Faculty of Actuaries
National Association of Pension Funds
Society of Pension Consultants Life Offices Association
Legal and General Assurance Society Ltd
Association of Consulting Actuaries
Women's National Commission
Centre for Policy on Ageing
Liberal Party
Bow Group
British Institute of Management
The Association of British Chambers of Commerce
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Institute of Personnel Management
The Educational Institute of Scotland
Help the Aged
National Association Local Government Officers
National Union of Teachers
National Association of School Masters/Union of Women Teachers
Association of Magisterial Officers
National Association of Retired Police Officers
Association of Nurse Administrators
Royal College of Nursing
Fire Brigades Union
Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators
Confederation of Health Service Employees
United Kingdom Association of Professional Engineers
Managerial, Professional and Staff Liaison Group
Federation of Managerial and Professional Officers Union
United Kingdom Steering Committee on Local Government Superannuation
Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Engineering Employers Federation
General Council of British Shipping
British Federation of Hotel, Guest House and Self-Catering Associations
British Retailers Association
National Federation of Small Businesses
Association of Independent Businesses
Energy Industries Council
The National Council of Trade
Transport and General Workers Union Retired Members Association
British Venture Capital Association
Pensioners Voice
Abbeyfield Society
Soroptimist International Divisional Union of Scotland
Royal College of General Practitioners
The National Council of Women of Great Britain
Pensioners Link
Scottish Convention of Women
The Savers Union
Pension Lawyers' Informal Discussion Group
Philips and Drew
Herbert, Oppenheimer, Nathan and Vandyke
Lakes and Scottish Financial Services
Hay-MSL Management Consultants
Callund and Company
T G Arthur and Co
Shuksmith and Co, Consulting Actuaries
C Openshaw and Sons
Perchcourt Ltd
Electrowaves Ltd
Nabarro Nathanson
Marriott and Cave
Reed Stenhouse
Public Service Pensioners Council
Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme
Health Visitors' Association
British Association of Social Work
Grimsby and North Lincolnshire Electricity Board
Lancaster, University of
Social Security Advisory Committee
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Lovell White and King
Association of Consulting Actuaries
Monte Cassino Veterans Association
Glenwood Primary School, Belfast
Crittall Windows
National Council for Carers and their Elderly Dependants Ltd
Omagh District Council
Building Employers Confederation
Workers' Party
Federation of Independent Advice Centres
Labour Party
Basildon Council
Harlow Council
South Western Storage Ltd
National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Ltd
Family and Pension Research Project
Manganese Bronze Holdings PLC
Society of Civil and Public Servants
Civil and Public Services Association

Review of benefits for children and young people
Advice Services Alliance
Aims of Industry
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
Association of Charity Officers
Association of County Councils
Association of Directors of Social Services
Association of Directors of Social Work
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Association of Polytechnic Teachers
Association of Scientific and Technical Management Staff
Avon, County of

Basildon Council—Personal Services Department
Bedfordshire County Council
Birmingham, City of—Social Services Department
Birmingham, Tribunal Unit
Birmingham Welfare Rights Group
Blackbird Leys Neighbourhood Centre, Oxford
Bolton Metropolitan College
Bradford Advice Centres Group
Brent, London Borough of
Bristol University—Department of Extra-Mural Studies

British University—School of Applied Social Studies
British Association of Social Workers
British Council
British Youth Council
Buttle Trust

Camden Citizens Advice Bureau
Camden, London Borough of
Camden Tribunal and Rights Unit
Campaign for Single Homeless People (CHAR)
Catholic Child Welfare Council
Central Bureau for Education Visits and Exchanges
Central Regional Council
Centre for Policy Studies
Charter for the Unemployed
Child Poverty Action Group
Child Poverty Action Group, Darlington Branch
Child Poverty Action Group, Northern Ireland
Child Poverty Action Group, Oxford and District Branch
Childrens Legal Centre
Church Action on Poverty, Clydeside
Church Action on Poverty, Salford
Civil and Public Services Association
Claimants' and Unemployed Workers' Union
Cleveland, County of
Cleveland Welfare Rights Services
Clydeside Poverty Action Group
Coleford Quaker Meeting
Community Service Volunteers
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Coventry Social Services Department
Cowdenbeath and District Volunteer Branch
Crossroads Centre
Croydon Welcare (Croydon Deanery Association)

Darlington Community Health Council
Department of Education and Science
Derry Women's Aid
Derry Women's Centre
Disability Alliance
Dundee Advice Workers Group
Dundee Association for Social Services
Dundee Inner City Neighbourhood Action Centre Ltd.
Dundee Rights Office
Dunfermline Rights Office
Durham University

Easterhouse Federation of Claimants Union and Benefit Groups
Edinburgh University
Education for Enterprise Network
Equal Opportunities Commission
Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau

Fabian Society
Family Forum
Family Policy Studies Unit
Family Rights Group
Family Service Unit
Family Welfare Association
Federation of Independent Advice Centres
Fife Regional Council
Frenchay District Community Health Council

Gingerbread
Gingerbread Northern Ireland
Gloucester Preparative Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
Gloucestershire County Council
Greenwich, London Borough of
Gwent County Council

Hackney Centre for the Unemployed
Hackney, London Borough of
Hampshire Social Services
Happy Bus Association
Harlow Council
Health Visitors' Association
Hutchesonstown Tenants Association

Institute of Careers Officers
Institute of Directors
Institute of Fiscal Studies
Ipswich Housing Advice Centre
Irish Congress of Trade Unions—NI
Islington Social Security Monitoring Group

Labour Party
Lambeth Churches' Council for Welcare
Leeds City Council
Leeds Polytechnic
Leeds Trades Council
Leeds Women's Committee
Leicestershire Area of the National Union of Students
Leicester Welfare Rights Group
Lewisham, London Borough of
Liberal Party
Link Housing Association
Liverpool, City of
Liverpool, University of
London Advice Services Alliance
London Borough of Brent
London Borough of Camden
London Borough of Greenwich
London Borough of Hackney
London Borough of Redbridge—Careers Service
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Londonderry Community Advice Centre
Lothian Regional Council
Low Pay Unit

Magee Students Union
Malago Area Youth Committee, Avon
Manchester, City of
Manchester Social Services Department
Manpower Services Commission
Maternity Alliance
Merseyside Welfare Rights Resource Centre
Mode B Network

National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers
National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux
National Association of Head Teachers
National Association of Local Government Officers—Area Youth Committee
National Association of Probation Officers
National Association of Teachers—Banbury Branch
National Association of Young People's Counselling and Advisory Services
National Childrens Bureau
National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations
National Consumer Council
National Council for Civil Liberties
National Council for One Parent Families
National Council for Voluntary Youth Services
National Council of Women of Great Britain
National Federation of Sub-Postmasters
National Foster Care Association
National Institute for Economic and Social Research
National Schizophrenia Fellowship
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
National Union of Public Employees
National Union of Students
National Union of Students, Leicestershire Area
National Union of Teachers
National Youth Bureau
Newcastle Advice and Information Working Group
Newcastle Welfare Rights Service
Newport Resource Centre
Newport Voluntary Groups
Northamptonshire Advice Groups
Northern Ireland Poverty Lobby
North Oxfordshire Technical College and School of Art

Oxford Unemployed Group

Paddington Churches Housing Association Ltd
Perth Council for the Disabled
Policy Studies Institute
Pre-School Playgroups Association

Quakers (Stroud)
Queen Elizabeth Square Tenants Association
Queen's University Belfast Students Union

RADAR (Royal Association of Disability and Rehabilitation)
Reading Centre for the Unemployed
Redbridge Personal Services Directorate
Research on Ethnic Relations
Rights of Women

St Katherine's Centre—Welfare Rights Office
Salford, City of—Administration Department
Save the Children Fund
Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
Scottish Child and Family Alliance
Scottish Community Education Council
Scottish Council on Disability
Scottish Council for Single Homeless
Scottish Council for Single Parents
Scottish Council of Social Service
Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Scottish Spina Bifida Association
Scottish Women's Aid
Secondary Heads Association
Shawfield Area Stimulation and General Advice
Sheffield Advice Centres Group
Shelter, Edinburgh
Shrewsbury and Central Shropshire Citizens Advice Bureaux
Social Affairs Unit
Society of Civil and Public Servants
Southall Community Law Centre
Spastics Society
St Katherine's Centre
Stepfamily
Stirling District Council
Stroud Preparative Meeting of the Society of Friends
Strathclyde Regional Council
Suffolk County Council
Sunderland Industrial Mission

Teesside and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Three Tuns Neighbourhood Project
Trades Union Congress
Twins Clubs Association

UB40 Resources Centre for Unemployed Youth

Volunteer Centre
Voluntary Council for Handicapped Children

Wales Council for the Disabled
Wandsworth Rights Umbrella Group
Washington Child Benefit Centre
Waterside Rights Service
Welfare Rights Service
West End Community Project and Fosse Rights Centre
West London Social Security Forum
West Lothian Rights Association
West Midlands County Council
Wolverhampton, Metropolitan Borough of—Social Services Department
Worcester College for the Blind
Workers' Party (NI Regional Executive)
World Development Group

YMCA Special Programmes
Youth Action Charter
Youthaid

Supplementary Benefit Review
Christian Socialist Movement
Hampshire County Council
Hackney Forum
The Trades House of Glasgow
London Borough of Brent
University of Strathclyde—Department of Agriculture and Building Science
Dorset Association of Registered Rest Homes
Tenants Association, Southwark
The Parish of St. Berteline and St. Christopher, Norton
The Leonard Cheshire Foundation

Reigate Conservative Association
Advice and Information Working Group
London Borough of Hackney
Hackney Centre for the Unemployed
The Multiple Sclerosis Society
Thurso Community Council
Hammersmith Unemployed Workers' Centre
CHAR Campaign for Single Homeless People
The Magistrates' Association
Dundee and District Retirement Council

University of Bristol—Department of Extra-Mural Studies
London School of Economics — International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines
Cowdenbeath and District Volunteer Bureau
The Volunteer Centre
Turning Point
The Building Societies Association
Wales Council for the Disabled
Northern Ireland Consumer Council
Waterside Churches' Committee for Community Needs—Northern Ireland
Scottish Community Education Council

Coleford Quarter Meeting
Gloucester Preparative Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
Gloucestershire County Council
Bournemouth Association for the Care of the Elderly
Welfare Rights Service—City of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Clydeside Poverty Action Group
The Children's Family Trust
Stroud Preparative Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers)
Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland
Quaker Social Responsibility and Education

Unemployment Alliance
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
The Family Welfare Association
Network for the Handicapped
National Association for Mental Health
National Association of Youth and Community Education Officers
Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association
MENCAP — Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults
Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation
Equal Opportunities Commission
National Council for Civil Liberties
Pre-School Playgroups Association
The British Council
British Unemployment
Family Forum
National Foster Care Association
The Abbeyfield Society
The Civil Service Benevolent Fund
Church Action on Poverty
Gingerbread—For Lone Parents and Children
Family Rights Group
Birmingham Welfare Rights Group
Central Regional Council
Child Poverty Action Group
Northampton Advice Group
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
Citizens Advice Bureau, Stoke-on-Trent
Family Service Units
University of Birmingham — Social Administration Department
The National Federation of Post Office and British Telecom Pensioners
Child Poverty Action Group—Leicester Branch
Leeds Trades Council
Omagh and District Advice Centre
Central London Social Security Advisers Forum
City of Manchester—Social Services Department

Glasgow Council for Voluntary Service
Strathclyde Regional Council
Three Tuns Neighbourhood Project
Thurso and Wick Trades Council
South Western Storage Ltd.
Darnall Welfare Rights Service
Brunel University—Department of Government
County of Cleveland Welfare Rights Service
London Borough of Camden
Aireborough TUC Unemployment Advice Centre
Otley TUC Unemployment Advice Centre
City of Birmingham—Social Services Department
University of Surrey—Department of Sociology
Citizens Advice Bureau, Belfast
National Union of Public Employees
Islington Social Security Monitoring Group
Hampshire County Council
Centre for Neighbourhood Development, Belfast
Greater London Council
Thameside Welfare Rights Unit
Charter of the Unemployed
The Workers' Party—Northern Regional Executive
The Labour Party
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society
Sheffield Advice Centres Group, Grookesmoor Community Centre
Coventry Social Services Department, Wyken District Team
Walcot Community Association
Scottish Fuel Poverty Action Group
Scottish Council for Single Parents
Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
Resettlement of Offenders Co-ordinary Committee
St. Katherine's Centre—Welfare Rights Office
East Lothian Council for Voluntary Service
Scottish Spina Bifida Association
Youth Action Charter
West Lothian Rights Association
Dundee Inner City Neighbourhood Action Centre Ltd
Dundee Advice Workers Group
Dundee Association for Social Services
Magee Student's Union Committee
The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
London Borough of Hackney
Wandsworth Rights Umbrella Group
University of Durham
Windermere Advice Centre
Council of Tribunals
Haringey Disablement Association
The Sue Ryder Foundation
Rights of Women
London Borough of Greenwich — Community Affairs Section, Chief Executive's Department
Borough of Crewe and Nantwich
Stockwell and Clapham Law Centre
The Bethlem Royal Hospital
Bradford Resource Centre
Reading Centre for the Unemployed
Southwark Social Services
Easterhouse Federations of Claimant's Unions and Benefits Groups
Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau
Newport Resource Centre
Leeds Polytechnic
The Lane Neighbourhood Centre, Birmingham
Research Unit on Ethnic Relations
Age Concern, Brighton
Thamesdown Welfare Rights Forum
Devon Probation and After-Care Service
Brighton Rights Advice Centre
Harlow Council
Leicester Welfare Rights Group
London Advice Services Alliance
University of Liverpool — Department of Economic and Business Studies
North and South Areas Oxford City Social Services Department
The Royal Hospital and Home for Incurables, Putney
Cathedral Church of Saint Mary the Virgin
Cardiff Community Health Council
Redbridge—Personal Services Directorate
Social Service Department, Brompton Hospital
West Midlands Low Pay Unit
National Association of Probation Officers
The Family Welfare Association
Association of County Councils
Falls Community Council—Resource Centre
Adamsdown Community Law Centre
Prestwich Hospital—Salford Health Authority
The Park Home Residents Guild
Disablement Income Group
British Institute of Industrial Therapy
Electricity and National Gas Consumer Council
Royal National Institute for the Blind
The Spastics Society
Pensioners Link
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Croydon Welfare (Croydon Deanery Association)
Southall Community Law Centre
Camden Citizens Advice Bureaux Service
Crossroads Centre
Temporary Employment Scheme
Croydon Retirement Association
Association of Directors of Social Work
Family Service Units
Walnut Street Area Claimants Right Group
Trades Union Congress
Association of Charity Officers
Policy Studies Institute
National Consumer Council
House of Commons Social Services Committee
Claimant and Consumer Organisation
Teeside and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Gloucestershire County Council
Action in Retirement Centre
National Schizophrenia Fellowship
Federation of Independent Advice Centres
Basildon Council—Personal Services Division
Shawfield Area Stimulation and General Advice
Merseyside Welfare Rights Resource Centre
The Staff Team, Homeless Young People's Project
The West End Community Project and Fosse Rights Centre
Community Relations Outreach Project
The National Council of Women of Great Britain
Child Poverty Action Group
Association of Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus
The Law Society
Derry Women's Centre
Save The Children
National Children's Bureau
Paddington Churches Housing Association Limited
UB40 Centre for the Unemployment, Exeter
Metropolitan Borough of Wolverhampton, Social Services Department
Malago Area Youth Committee (County of Avon)
Derry Women's Aid
World Development Group
Oxford East Constituency Labour Party
Royal College of Nursing—Central Southern Area Office
Society of Civil and Public Servants
The Royal College of Psychiatrists
National council for One Parent Families
Board for Social Responsibility, Church of England

Gwent County Council
Morley Tamblyn Lodge—Parents Group
Sheffield Advice Centres Group
Lothian Regional Council
Stirling District Council
The Fife Regional Council—Social Work Department
Coventry Voluntary Service Council
The Civil and Public Services Association
St. Colin's—Church of Scotland Department of Education
Perth Council for the Disabled
Blackbird Leys
Right to Fuel
Ecology Party
Social Security Appeal Tribunals, the Office of the President
Shelter—National Campaign for the Homeless
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation

The President of Social Security Appeal Tribunals — Northern Ireland
Church of Ireland Social and Family Welfare Association
Scottish Child and Family Alliance
The Institute for Fiscal Studies
Leeds Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission
Bedfordshire County Council
Royal County of Berkshire—Department of Social Services
London Borough of Islington — Administrative Services Department
University of Sussex—Science Policy Research Unit
Dunfermline Single Homeless Service
Rights Office Dunfermline
London Borough of Lewisham
The Ark Housing Association Ltd
Irish Congress of Trade Unions — Northern Ireland Committee
Claimants and Unemployed workers' Union
Birmingham Tribunal Unit
The Happy Bus Association
Research Institute for Consumer Affairs
Rushcliffe Borough Council
City of Salford
MIND, Woking
Leeds City Council—Leeds Women's Committee
West Midlands County Council
Centre for Socio-Legal Studies
Counsel and Care for the Elderly
Glasgow Chamber of Commerce
Hutchestown Community Council
Association of District Councils
West Country Housing Association Ltd
Low Pay Unit
Federation of Bangladesh Associations
The Post Office

Housing Benefit Review
The Abbeyfield Society
Advice Services Alliance
Age Concern (England)
Age Concern (Scotland)
Advice and Information Working Group, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
All Party Parliamentary Group for Pensioners
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
Anchor Housing Association, Oxford
Anglesey Borough Council (Chief Executive)
Ark Housing Association Ltd, Edinburgh
Ashfield District Council (Chief Executive)
Association of Charity Officers
Association of Chief Housing Officers
Association of County Councils
Association of Directors of Social Services
Association of Directors of Social Work
Association of District Councils
Association of Housing Aid
Association of London Authorities
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs, Bradford
Association of University Accommodation Officers
Audit Commission
Banff and Buchan District Council (Housing and Property Department)
Barnet, London Borough of (Borough Treasurer)
Basildon Council (Personal Services Division)
Bassetlaw District Council (Finance Department)
Bath University Students Union
Belfast Housing Aid Society
Belfast Improved Houses Ltd
Berkshire Probation Service
Beverley Borough Council (Chief Finance Officer)
Birmingham Citizens' Advice Bureaux
Birmingham, City of (Housing Officer)
Birmingham, City of (Social Services Department)
Birmingham University Guild of Students
Blackbird Leys Neighbourhood Centre
Blackburn, Borough of (Housing Officer)
Blackfriars Advice Centre
BMSL Housing Benefits User Group
Bolsover District Council (Chief Executive)
Bournemouth, Borough of (Chief Executive)
Bradford Resource Centre
Breckland District Council (Treasurer)
Brent Community Law Centre
Brent Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations
Bridgeton and Dalmarnock Housing Association Ltd
Brighton Rights Advice Centre
British Association of Social Workers
British Pensioners and Trades Union Action Association—Welwyn Garden City Branch
Broxbourne, Borough of (Finance Department)
Brunel University Law Department

Camden, London Borough of (Chief Executive)
Caradon District Council (Finance Department)
Catholic Housing Aid Society
Cecil Houses
Central London Society Security Advisers Forum
Central Regional Council (Social Work Department)
Charter for the Unemployed
Centre of Urban and Regional Studies — University of Birmingham
Ceredigion District Council (Finance Department)
Charter Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
Cheltenham Labour Party
Chester City Council (Chief Executive)
Child Poverty Action Group
Church Action on Poverty
Church Commissioners
Church of Scotland, Committee on Church and Nation
Citizens' Rights Office, Edinburgh
Civil and Public Services Association
Civil Service Benevolent Fund
Claimants' and Unemployed Workers' Union
Cleveland County Council Welfare Rights Service
Clydeside Church Action on Poverty
Clydeside Poverty Action Group
Coleford Quarters
Commission for Local Administration in England
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Coopers and Lybrand Associates
Copec Housing Trust
Council on Tribunals
Cowdenbeath and District Volunteer Bureau
Crossroads Centre, Ilford
Croydon Welcare (Croydon Deanery Association)

Dacorum District Council (Finance Department)
Darlington Community Health Council
Derry Women's Aid
Derry Women's Centre
Disability Alliance
Duncan McCulloch & Co, Solicitors, Dingwall
Dunfermline Single Homeless Service
Dundee Advice Workers Group
Dundee Association for Social Service
Dundee Inner City Neighbourhood Action Centre Ltd

Easterhouse Federation of Claimants' Forum
Exeter Citizens' Advice Bureau

Fairhazel Cooperative Ltd.
Family Forum
Family Service Units
Family Welfare Association
Federation of Independent Advice Centres
First Hand (Southwell and District Housing Association Ltd.)
Forest Heath District Council (Chief Executive)

Gingerbread
Glasgow council for Voluntary Service
Glasgow District Council
Gloucester Quakers
Gloucestershire County Council (Social Services Department)
Great Grimsby Borough Council (Chief Executive)
Greater London Citizen's Bureaux Service
Greater London Council (Director-General's Department)
GLC Forum for the Elderly

Greenwich, London Borough of (Borough Treasurer)
Gwent County Council (Chief Executive)

Hackney, London Borough of (Comprehensive Consumer Affairs Service)
Hackney, London Borough of (Directorate of Finance)
Hampshire County Council (Social Services Department)
Hanover Housing Association
Happy Bus Association, Rosyth
Harlow Council (Community Services Department)
Hastings Borough Council (Borough Treasurer)
Health Visitors' Association
Hertfordshire War Pensions Committee
High Peak, Borough of (Chief Executive)
Holloway Tenant Co-operative
Horton Outreach Project, Bradford
Housing Centre Trust
Hove, Borough of (Borough Treasurer's Department)
Hyde Housing, London
Hutchesontown Tenants' Association, Glasgow

Institute of Fiscal Studies
Institute of Housing
Institute of Rent Officers
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Islington, London Borough of (Chief Executive)
Islington Social Security Monitoring Group
International Computers Ltd. (ICL)

James Butcher Housing Association (Northern Ireland) Ltd.

Kensington and Chelsea, London Borough of (Chief Executive)
Kensington Housing Trust
Kerrier District Council (Chief Executive)
Kingston Upon Hull, City of (Chief Executive)
Knowsley, Metropolitan Borough of (Borough Treasurer)

Lambeth Social Security Working Group
Langbaurgh, Borough of (Town Clerk)
Leeds Residential Property Association
Leeds City Council (Department of Finance)
Leeds City Council Women's Committee
Leeds Trades Council
Legal Action Group
Leicester Welfare Rights Group
Leonard Cheshire Foundation
Liberal Party
Link Housing Association Ltd, Edinburgh
LAMSAC
London Advice Services Alliance
London Boroughs Association
London Conservative Students
London Local Authorities Computer Managers Group
Lothian Regional Council (Regional Secretary)
Low Pay Unit

Magee Students Union Committee (New University of Ulster)
Malago Area Youth Committee, Bristol
Malvern Hills District Council (Secretary)
Manchester, City of (Chief Executive)
Manchester, City of (Social Services Department)
Manchester Housing Benefits Campaign
Maudsley Hospital Welfare Rights Office
Merseyside Improved Houses
Metropolitan Housing Trusts, Nottingham
Mid-Devon District Council (Treasurer)
MIND, Woking Branch
Montgomery District Council (Chief Executive)

National Association of Almshouses
National and Local Government Officers' Association (NALGO)
NALGO, Barnet Branch
National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux
National Association of Probation Officers
National Consumer Council
National Council for Civil Liberties
National Council for One Parent Families
National Council of Women of Great Britain
National Council of Voluntary Organisations
National Federation of Housing Associations
National Federation of Old Age Pensions Associations
National Federation of Post Office and British Telecom Pensioners
National Foster Care Association
National Housing and Town Planning Council
National Schizophrenia Fellowship
National Tenants' Organisation
National Union of Public Employees
National Union of Students
National Welfare Rights Officers Group
New Forest District Council (Chief Executive)
New Towns Association
Newcastle Welfare Rights Service
Newham, London Borough of (Housing Department)
Newport Resource Centre
North Bedfordshire Borough Council (Finance Department)
North Dorset District Council (Chief Executive)
Nort Housing Association
Northern Ireland Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux
Northern Ireland Child Poverty Action Group
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Trade Union Side
Northamptonshire Advice Groups
Notting Hill Housing Trust
Nottingham, City of (City Secretary's Department)
Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service/Radio Trent Careline

Old Common Council Tenants' Association (Cobham)
Orton Advice Service, Peterborough
Oxford City Council (City Secretary)

Paddington Churches Housing Association Ltd
Park Home Residents Guild
Pensioners' Link
Pensioners' Voice
Perth Council for the Disabled
Peterborough Child Poverty Action Group
Plymouth, City of (Chief Executive)
Policy Studies Institute
Poole, Borough of (Borough Treasurer)
Portsmouth, City of (Directorate of Housing and Health)
The Post Office

Queen Elizabeth Square Tenants Association, Glasgow
Queen's University Belfast: Students Union

Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)
The Rating and Valuation Association
Reading Centre for the Unemployed
Reading Borough Council (Housing Department)
Reading District Labour Party
Redbridge, London Borough of (Personal Services Department)
Reigate Conservative Association
Rent Assessment Panel for Wales
Restormel, Borough of (Treasurer)
Rights Against Homelessness
Rights Office, Dunfermline
Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
Runnymede Borough Council (Borough Treasurer)
Ryedale District Council (Treasurer)

Salford City Council (City Administrator)
School for Advanced Urban Studies, Bristol University
Scottish Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux
Scottish Council on Disability
Scottish Council for Single Homeless
Scottish Council for Single Parents
Scottish Council of Social Service
Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Scottish Fuel Poverty Action Group
Scottish Special Housing Association
SELCHA (South East London Consortium Housing Association)
SHAC (London Housing Aid Centre)
Shawfield Area Stimulation and General Advice, Glasgow

Sheffield Advice Centres Group
Sheffield University Students' Union
SHELTER
SHELTER (Scotland)
SHELTER (Northern Ireland)
Shepway District Council (Finance Department)
Single Homeless Group
Social Security Advisory Committee
Society of Civil and Public Servants
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
South Cambridgeshire District Council (Treasurer)
South Norfolk District Council (Housing Department)
South Shropshire District Council (Treasurer)
Southend Single Homeless Committee
Southall Community Law Centre
South Wales Housing Officers Group
Spina Bifida Association
St. Albans City and District Council (Chief Executive)
St. Katherine's Centre, Aberdeen
St. Pancras Housing Association
Stirling District Council (Chief Executive)
Stirling University (Department of Housing Administration)
Stoke-on-Trent, City of (City Treasurer)
Strathclyde Chief Officers Group
Strathclyde Regional Council (Chief Executive)
Strathclyde Regional Council (Social Work Department)
Stroud Preparative Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers)
Students Housing Association Co-op, Northern Ireland
Suffolk County Council (Education Department)
Sutton Housing Trust
Sutton, London Borough of (Borough Solicitor)

Tameside Metropolitan Borough (Finance Department)
Tameside Welfare Rights Unit
Thamesdown Welfare Rights Forum
Thanet District Council (Finance Department)
Three Rivers District Council (Housing Department)
Three Tuns Neighbourhood Project
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (Finance Department)
Trades Union Congress

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council (Chief Executive)
Wandsworth Rights Umbrella Group
Warrington Borough Council (Borough Secretary)
Waterside Churches' Community Advice Centre (Londonderry)
Watford, Borough of (Housing Department)
Waverley Borough Council (Chief Executive)
Welsh Consumer Council
Welsh Water
West Derbyshire District Council (Treasurer)
West Lindsey District Council (Finance Department)
West London Social Security Forum
West Lothian Rights Association
West Midlands County Council (Deputy Leader)
West Midlands County Probation and After-Care Service
Westcliff Baptist Church
Western Health and Social Services Board, Northern Ireland
Westminster, City of (Housing Department)
Willesden Free Church Housing Association
Windermere Advice Centre, Leicester
Wirral, Metropolitan Borough of (Finance Department)
Woking Borough Council (Chief Executive)
Wokingham District Council (District Secretary)
Wolverhampton, Metropolitan Borough of (Social Services Department)
Woodspring, District of (Chief Executive)
World Development Group, Derry
Workers Party (Northern Ireland)
Worthing Borough Council (Chief Executive)
Wyre, Borough of (Borough Treasurer)

Youth Action Charter, Edinburgh

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all those organisations which asked to give oral evidence to the social security reviews but were not called to do so.

Mr. Newton: The following organisations asked to give oral evidence but were not called to do so:

Supplementary Benefit Review: Oxford Unemployed Workers and Claimants' Union
Children and Young Persons Review: National Confederation of Parent-Teachers' Associations
Inquiry into Provision for Retirement: Pensioners' Link
Housing Benefit Review: None

West Midlands RHA (Review)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether any representatives of district health authorities will sit on the steering committee which will guide the review by outside consultants of the functions and working of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The detailed arrangements for this review have yet to be made.

Resettlement Units

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are his plans for the future of resettlement units and re-establishment centres.

Mr. Newton: The supplementary benefit division of the Department currently runs resettlement units which provide temporary board and lodging for people without a settled way of life with a view to influencing them to lead a more settled way of life. Alongside these, mostly on the same sites, it also runs re-establishment centres at which the long-term unemployed are given training to help to fit them for return to employment.

This provision, which is largely a relic of the Poor Law workhouses, has come to seem increasingly anomalous in the context of the responsibilities now exercised by local authority housing and social services departments, and the expanded training responsibility of the Manpower Services Commission. Since 1981 the Department has been carrying through a scheme to replace Camberwell resettlement unit, whose lease is due to expire at the end of this year. More recently we have been reviewing the future of the resettlement units and re-establishment centres generally. We have taken particular account of the fact that some of the units are in a state which would require significant capital expenditure if their present role were to continue, and of the evidence that, despite the conscientious and caring work of resettlement unit staff, the resettlement units have proved less successful in their stated role than voluntary hostels directed to the same end.

In the light of these considerations we have now decided to work towards the gradual closure of resettlement units, in association with measures to promote the development of better alternative arrangements to meet the needs of people without a settled way of life, and to close the re-establishment centres as soon as possible. There will be full consultation with the trade unions about the effect of these changes on the staff of the resettlement units and the re-establishment centres.

The initiatives in more detail are as follows:

Resettlement Units Outside London

Outside London, a process of regional consultation with voluntary organisations and local authorities is to be launched to identify alternative arrangements for resettling people without a settled way of life in accordance with my right hon. Friend's statutory obligation. The aim will be the closure of the most dilapidated units over the next three

years or so to avoid wasteful expenditure on them. The future of the other units outside London will be considered further in the light of proposals coming forward from the voluntary sector. The resources saved will be used to finance alternative schemes in the voluntary sector.

Resettlement Units in London

Until the Camberwell replacement scheme is further advanced, no action will be taken on the other seven London resettlement units and their future will be reviewed later.

Re-Establishment Centres

All re-establishment centres will be closed as soon as possible. Again, the resources saved will be used to finance resettlement schemes in the voluntary sector.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons stayed in the 23 resettlement units provided by his Department on the night of 30 November 1984; how many of those were eligible for housing accommodation from a local housing authority by virtue of being vulnerable through old age, mental illness or handicap, physical disability or pregnancy, under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977; and what arrangements exist between each of the 23 resettlement units and local housing authorities for the rehousing of those homeless people who are vulnerable under the Act.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January 1985, c. *165*]: A total of 1,578 persons stayed in the 23 DHSS resettlement units on the night of 30 November 1984. It is not known how many of them were eligible for housing under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Resettlement unit staff have formed close working relationships with local authority housing and social service departments in order to help such persons.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many beds were provided in each of the 23 resettlement units during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and what was the average rate of occupancy for each unit during the same period.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January 1985, c. *165-66*]: The table shows how many beds were provided in each of the 23 DHSS resettlement units during the 12 months ended 20 November 1984 and the average occupancy for each unit during that period.

Unit	*Beds available per night (averaged out where necessary)*	*Average occupancy level (per cent.)*
Alvaston (near Derby)	80	58·7
Brighton	38	76·3
Crown Quay Lodge (Sittingbourne)	66	63·6
Fazakerley (Liverpool)	57	84·2
Glasgow	77	81·8
Leeds	96	61·4
Leicester	95	84·2
Newbury	66	95·4
Plawsworth (County Durham)	118	47·4
Southampton	80	92·5
South Wales (near Bridgend)	64	60·9
Walkden (near Manchester)	82	97·6
West Mids (Lye)	123	50·4
Winterbourne (near Bristol)	77	71·4
Woodhouse (near Sheffield)	96	70·8
Bridge House (North Kensington)	114	83·5
Camberwell	300	82·2
Camden	38	85·8
Cedars Lodge (Clapham)	100	76·0
Lancelot Andrewes House (Southwark)	48	80·1
Pound Lodge (Willesden)	79	70·8
Spur House (Lewisham)	149	86·0
West End House (Soho)	70	89·0

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available, how many individuals were provided, when leaving each of the 23 resettlement units, with accommodation under the following categories: *(a)* local authority tenancies, *(b)* housing association tenancies and *(c)* local authority part III accommodation.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January 1985, c. *165-66*]: The following table shows the number of individuals provided with various categories of accommodation on leaving the resettlement units during the 12 months ended 20 November 1984.

Unit	*Local authority tenancies*	*Housing Association tenancies*	*Part III Accommodation*
Alvaston (near Derby)	2	—	1
Brighton	1	—	—
Crown Quay Lodge (Sittingbourne)	1	—	4
Fazakerley (Liverpool)	37	8	—
Glasgow	29	—	1
Leeds	7	14	3

Unit	Local authority tenancies	Housing Association tenancies	Part III Accommodation
Leicester	4	15	—
Newbury	1	—	4
Plawsworth (County Durham)	8	—	—
Southampton	1	—	1
South Wales (near Bridgend)	2	—	—
Walkden (near Manchester)	17	—	1
West Mids (Lye)	13	4	—
Winterbourne (near Bristol)	—	2	—
Woodhouse (near Sheffield)	4	1	2
Bridge House (North Kensington)	24	6	12
Camberwell	7	22	12
Camden	10	8	4
Cedars Lodge (Clapham)	19	10	5
Lancelot Andrewes House (Southwark)	10	13	4
Pound Lodge (Willesden)	20	9	10
Spur House (Lewisham)	32	15	63
West End House (Soho)	—	—	—
	249	127	127

Ex-prisoners (Accommodation)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to enable ex-prisoners to be allocated accommodation or lodgings soon after being released.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

Arrangements already exist to assist prisoners to find accommodation on release. As I stated in my reply to a question from the hon. Member on 22 November at column *263* we are reviewing the voluntary after-care scheme, which provides accommodation for ex-prisoners, with a view to assessing need and effectiveness more accurately.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Anderson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what information he has on the numbers of supplementary benefits claimants of 25 years or under who have moved from their parents' homes in the most recently available period, broken down into the following categories: *(a)* those who were treated as non-householders in their new accommodation, *(b)* those who were treated as boarders in their new accommodation and *(c)* those who were treated as householders or joint householders in their new accommodation;

(2) what are the most recently available figures for the numbers of young supplementary benefit claimants who are living in their parents' homes, broken down into the following categories: *(a)* 16 and 17-year-olds, *(b)* 18 to 20-year-olds and *(c)* 21 to 25-year-olds; and what was the average amount of benefit paid for each of these groups;

(3) what are the most recently available figures for the numbers of young supplementary benefit claimants who are treated as boarders, broken down into the following categories: *(a)* 16 and 17-year-olds, *(b)* 18 to 20-year-olds and *(c)* 21 to 25-year-olds; and what was the average amount of benefit paid to each of these groups.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November 1984, c. *469*]: The latest information we have comes from the annual statistical inquiry of December 1983. It is provisional and not exactly in the form requested. In particular we have no information about young people who have moved from their parents' homes. The figures are as follows:

Type of accommodation	Claimants by age ranges		
	16 to 17	18 to 20	21 to 25
Board and lodging and hostel	6,700	13,300	17,200
Average amount of supplementary benefit	£45·29	£47·49	*
All non-householders	158,300	334,100	206,000
Average amount of supplementary benefit	£16·95	£24·18	*
Householders	8,100	75,400	232,400
Average amount of supplementary benefit	£27·62	£31·30	*

* Not available.

We would expect most young claimants who are non-householders to be in their parents' households. The average benefit figures are net of other income such as unemployment benefit which falls to be taken into account in the supplementary benefit assessment.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many public sector tenants in Scotland are receiving housing benefit; of these how many are in receipt of full benefit; and what each of these figures represents as a percentage of the total number of public sector tenants in Scotland.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 December 1984, c. *223*]: It is estimated that in autumn 1983, the latest date for which estimates are available, about 650,000 public sector tenants were receiving housing benefit in Scotland, about 270,000 of whom were receiving full benefit. These figures represent broadly 64 per cent. and 27 per cent. respectively of the total number of public sector tenants in Scotland.

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to publish his circular on family practitioner committees.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *57*]: We are preparing a range of guidance for family practitioner committees to assist them

in developing their new independent role. Information on accountability and certain financial matters has already been issued.

ENVIRONMENT

Sports Office

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total cost of administration of the Sports Office within his Department, expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Macfarlane: The total administrative costs at 1979-80 prices of the Department's sports and recreation division over the last five years were as follows:

	£
1979-80	204,000
1980-81	195,000
1981-82	172,000
1982-83	173,000
1983-84	226,000

Metropolitan Counties (Land Banks)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet been able to establish the extent and approximate value of the land banks held by the metropolitan counties; and if he will publish a summary of the information currently available to him in respect of such land holdings and his intentions regarding their disposal.

Mr. Macfarlane: Details of vacant and under-used land owned by the metropolitan county councils are already publicly available in the registers established under part X of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. We intend shortly to seek such further information from these councils as is needed to prepare for the proposed transfers of property consequential upon the enactment of the Local Government Bill. Those proposals were set out in paragraph 3.3 of the document "Abolition of the GLC and MCCs: the Government's proposals for transferring functions to London boroughs and metropolitan districts", published by my Department in July 1984.

Council Houses

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the number of homes managed by each district council within the metropolitan county and Greater London council areas; how many voids awaiting repair there are in each district and what was the number of voids brought back into habitation in the last year and the number of years at current rates that it will take to bring all voids in each district back into a habitable condition.

Sir George Young: Each local authority reported in its 1984 housing investment programme return the number of dwellings which it owned within its own area, and, of these, the numbers which were undergoing repair or improvement and those awaiting repair or improvement at 1 April 1984: copies of these returns are in the Library. Information is not collected by the Department on the number of vacant dwellings becoming available for letting after repair.

Local Authorities (Rates and Employment)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the report on local authority rates and employment carried out for his Department by the department of land economy at Cambridge university; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) on 31 January, at column 282.

Plutonium

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to the answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *556*, he will explain why *(a)* plutonium-240 is included in the plutonium-239 figure, *(b)* plutonium-242 has never been analysed separately and *(c)* how his Department judges or estimates the mass of the plutonium discharged to sea from the Sellafield Windscale plant in the light of the lack of these separate analyses.

Mr. Waldegrave: The analytical technique employed cannot distinguish between plutonium-240 and plutonium-239 which in any case have similar radio toxicities. Plutonium-242 has never been analysed separately since the quantities involved are negligible being less than one-thousandth part of the sum of plutonium-239 and plutonium-240. My Department is concerned primarily with the radiological effects of discharges which are related to radioactivity rather than mass. If necessary, the mass of plutonium discharged can be calculated from the known relationship between the radioactivity, which is measured, and mass. In the case of the mixture of plutonium-239 and plutonium-240, a ratio of the two may be calculated for this purpose using the principles of nuclear physics.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *484*, if he will give the date of the meeting of the London Docklands Development Corporation at which the application for a grant or contract to Inter-Action was approved; and what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that that decision was in accordance with the recommendation of the House of Lords Select Committee on the London Docklands Development Corporation Order, paragraph 8.7 (HL 198 of 1980) and with his reply to the hon. Member for Newham, South of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *473*.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1985, c. *172*]: My Department is now considering an application which was approved by the LDDC board at its last meeting in January, but no decision has yet been made. The board first considered a project application in May 1984.

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire

Mr. Brandon-Bravo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the special grants to the city of Nottingham over the past two years.

Mr. Macfarlane [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1985, c. *422*]: Grants under my Department's special

grants programme are paid to voluntary bodies only. Grant of the sort I believe my hon. Friend had in mind was paid to Nottingham city council as follows:

	1982-83 £	*1983-84* £	*1984-85 (to date)* £
Grants under the urban programme (including urban development grant)	900,112	1,538,816	989,479
Derelict land grant	109,554	63,900	31,260

Where grant is paid on a loan charge basis, the amount paid each year represents only a small proportion of the total expenditure approved for grant.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the special grants to the Nottinghamshire county council over the past two years.

Mr. Macfarlane [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 February 1985, c. *422*]: Grants under my Department's special grants programme are paid to voluntary bodies only. Grant of the sort I believe my hon. Friend had in mind was paid to Nottinghamshire county council as follows:

	1982-83 £	*1983-84* £	*1984-85 (to date)* £
Grants under the urban programme	1,205,787	1,540,339	719,366
Derelict land grant	562,550	1,786,012	696,182

Where grant is paid on a loan charge basis, the amount paid each year represents only a small proportion of the total expenditure approved for grant.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 6 February 1985

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Admiral of the Fleet

Mr. Dalyell asked the Attorney-General what plans he has to prosecute the Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Lewin, for revealing information about the operation of Her Majesty's submarines, contrary to section 2 of the Official Secrets Act.

The Attorney-General: I refer to my reply of 1 February 1985 to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). He has now written to me with some information and I am having inquiries made.

Supreme Court Rules

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Attorney-General when section 6 of the Administration of Justice Act 1982 will be implemented.

The Attorney-General: The draft rules of court which accompanied the consultation paper on awards of provisional and further damages issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department on 20 September 1984 are being revised in the light of responses received to that paper, which reflected differing opinions and conflicting interests. This matter is being pressed forward as quickly as possible. I can give no specific promises as to timing, but the Lord Chancellor expects to place proposals before the Supreme Court rule committee in the near future with a view to bringing section 6 into force as soon as possible.

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Attorney-General when proposed amendments to the Supreme Court rules making provisions for awards for provisional damages will be laid before the House.

The Attorney-General: I refer to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member's question on this subject earlier today. The statutory instrument amending rules of court is subject to negative resolution and will accordingly be laid before Parliament once it has been made.

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Attorney-General if he will make it his policy in the forthcoming amendments to the Supreme Court rules making provisions for awards of provisional damages not to impose a time limit within which application for further awards must be made.

The Attorney-General: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member's question on this subject earlier today. The question of a time limit for claims for further damages is one of the matters the rule committee will consider in the light of the responses that have been received.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dumping at Sea

71. **Mr. Hill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what controls exist at present to monitor licensed applications for dumping at sea.

Mr. MacGregor: In accordance with a predetermined programme, regular checks are made of both the materials to be dumped and the vessels to be used in connection with licences issued under the Dumping at Sea Act 1974. Similarly, the state of the marine environment, both at the dumping site and elsewhere, is kept under regular scientific surveillance within the framework of defined monitoring programmes.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Jopling: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Farm Capital Grant

Mr. Chapman asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to extend a streamlined prior notification system for farm capital grant to cover the whole countryside in accordance with the recommendation in the Environment Committee report on the operational effectiveness of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Mrs. Fenner: This is one of a number of recommendations in the report which we are currently considering.

WALES

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department, which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the cost of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The nationalised industry, non-departmental public bodies and organisations for which my Department is responsible or to which it

provides funds of more than £100,000 per annum are as follows: categorised broadly as requested, though detailed information on particular services and charges is not held centrally for reasons of cost. No services provided by my Department for which charges are raised incur full costs of more than £100,000 per annum.

(a) Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales.
Housing Corporation.

(b) Cwmbran Development Corporation.
Development Board for Rural Wales.
National Library of Wales.
National Museum of Wales.
Sports Council for Wales.
Wales Tourist Board.
Welsh Development Agency.
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.
National Health Service related services.
Ancient Monuments—Admissions.

(c) Welsh Water Authority.
Ancient Monuments—Commercial Sales.

(c) Nil.

University Hospital of Wales

Mr. Grist asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will seek the agreement of the parties to publication of the terms of settlement reached in respect of defects in the construction of the University hospital of Wales, Cardiff.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The defects in question arose from construction between 1966 and 1969 and were of two main categories, mosaic cladding and structural defects. Counsel advised the Welsh Health Technical Services Organisation against pursuing a claim for the recovery of the cost of remedial measures in respect of the structural defects. The Public Accounts Committee was informed of this on 14 November 1983: a summary of the main features of counsel's advice had been given to it in March 1982. They were told that action was continuing in respect of the mosaics.

Having taken further advice from counsel, WHTSO signed an agreement with the architects, the consulting engineers and the liquidators of the building contractors on 24 November 1983 primarily concerned with the mosaic cladding but also in full and final settlement of all claims in respect of all defects in the building known at that time. The agreement stipulated that it should remain confidential to the parties, saving that WHTSO could disclose the terms in full to the Welsh Office, and envisaged subsequent disclosure in confidence to the Public Accounts Committee. This has been done.

I have asked the parties to the settlement to agree to wider publication of its terms. One party has objected. However, I have decided that in the public interest details of the settlement should be made available to the House. Accordingly, I have placed in the Library a copy of the agreement, together with copies of the related counsel's opinion and the previous counsel's opinion to which I have referred.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Church Commission (Assets)

Mr. Greenway asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, what is the total value of all the assets of the Church Commission; what was the income of the Church Commission in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir William van Straubenzee: As at 31 December 1983 the total value of the assets of the Church Commissioners, excluding £30,592,000 held for particular beneficiaries, amounted to £1,599,827,000.

The income from the Commissioners' own assets for the last 10 years was as follows:

	£ million
1973-74	28·4
1974-75	30·1
1975-76	33·4
1976-77	36·9
1977-78	40·0
1978-79	46·2
9 months to 31 December 1979*	41·7
1980	59·3
1981	64·2
1982	69·5
1983	76·0

* Denotes change from financial year to calendar year.

TRANSPORT

Buses

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Transport if it is his intention fully to protect all employees' pension rights and conditions in his forthcoming legislation on buses.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Transport Bill contains no provisions relating to pensions of employees and pensioners of district council or PTE bus undertakings, since we anticipate that satisfactory arrangements can be made under existing legislation. The Bill does contain powers relating to pension arrangements for National Bus Company employees and pensioners. We shall be discussing the pension issues with the National Bus Company and local government representatives.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsiblity or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department, which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Ridley: The nationalised industries sponsored by my Department are British Airways, British Rail, the British Airports Authority, the National Bus Company, London Regional Transport and the Civil Aviation Authority. They operate to financial targets which take account of their particular circumstances, revenue potential, internal resources and, where appropriate, subsidies. In addition, there are a number of harbour authorities which have received loans from the

Consolidated Fund, but for whose fees and charges I have no direct responsibility. The Mersey Harbour Authority and the Port of London Authority also receive grant support.

Other non-governmental organisations and agencies sponsored by, or receiving funds from, my Department are:

(a) No charge made
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
National Advisory Unit for community Transport
Air Travel Reserve Fund Agency
World Maritime University
Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites
Advisory Committee on the Landscape Treatment of Trunk Roads
Standing Advisory Committee on the Carriage of Dangerous Goods in Ships
Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment
Honorary Medical Advisory Panel for Driving and Disorders of the Nervous System
Panel of Advisers on Disability

(b) Charges did not fully cover costs in 1983-84
Commonwealth Air Transport Council
North Atlantic Air Navigation Service

(c) Charges fully recovered costs in 1983-84
General Lighthouse Authorities
Pilotage Commission
Euro-control Air Navigation Services
Red Sea Lights Company Ltd

(d) Charges more than covered costs in 1983-84
Airport Air Traffic Services

The costs of certain other bodies sponsored by the Department, the Transport Tribunal and the traffic commissioners and licensng authorities, are recovered through the fees of the appropriate departmental services.

Services provided to the general public or to private organisations by my Department which in the financial year 1983-84 cost more than £100,000 are:

(a) No charge made
Weather/gale warnings to shipping
Navigation warnings
Marine search and rescue (HM Coastguard)
Ship inspection and port state control
Civil hydrography
Marking of wrecks and disposal of war works
Channel Navigation Information Service
Publication of results of research at the Transport and Road Research Laboratory
Provision and maintenance of trunk roads
Maintenance of vehicle records
Road safety guidance and publicity
Control and routeing of abnormal indivisible loads

(b) Charges did not fully cover cost in 1983-84
Fishing vessel surveys
Marine pollution services
Marine surveys*
Examination and certification of seamen*†
Public Service Vehicle type and initial fitness testing†
Road service licences
Public Service Vehicle driver licensing
Heavy Goods Vehicle driver licensing
Public Service Vehicle driver testing
Motorcycle Part 1 rider testing and supervision of Approved Training Bodies
Register of Approved Driving Instructors†
Vehicle and component approvals*
Severn Bridge tolled crossing

Note:
* Fees recovered more than 90 per cent. of the costs of these services in 1983-84;
† Adjustments to either fees or costs of these services since 1983-84 have been made to achieve full recovery.

(c) Charges fully recovered costs in 1983-84
Use of Transport and Road Research Laboratory test track by outside bodies
Supply of highway, transport and traffic statistics

(d) Charges more than covered costs in 1983-84
Heavy Goods Vehicle driver testing‡
L-driver testing‡
Goods vehicle operator licences
Public Service Vehicle operator licences
Heavy Goods Vehicle testing‡
Public Service Vehicle testing‡
Marine radio surveys‡
Driver licences‡
Fee paying vehicle licensing and registration transactions (enquiries, duplicates)‡
Transfer of cherished vehicle registration marks
International road freight permits‡

Note:
‡ Charges for these services are set to recover full costs. Small surpluses in 1983-84 are due to variances from forecasts, or adjustments between years.

Road Accidents

Mr. Cockeram asked the Secretary of State for Transport over the most recent three years, respectively, for which figures are available, what were the numbers of road accidents contributed to by *(a)* epilepsy and *(b)* heart attacks.

Mrs. Chalker: Causes are not recorded on road accident reports and therefore I regret that no figures are available.

Large Vehicles (Reversing Alarms)

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to assist large vehicles to reverse more safely.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government have decided to make provisions for the use of audible reversing alarms. Although these alarms have been illegal in many circumstances up to now, I know that a number of local authorities and bus companies have been using them as a useful safety device for some time. We are now establishing a legal framework to allow their use on certain types of vehicle with suitable safeguards to avoid their becoming a nuisance.

Regulations have been laid down which will permit the use of reversing alarms on commercial vehicles over 2 tonnes gross weight, on large passenger vehicles with nine or more seats, including the driver, on engineering plant and on works trucks. But the alarms will still be illegal on private cars.

The alarms will be subject to the same night-time restrictions as apply to the standard horn and must not be capable of being confused with the "safe to cross" signal on a pelican crossing.

This change in the regulations does not diminish the responsibilities of the driver, who must always take the greatest care with any reversing manoeuvre.

PRIME MINISTER

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Prime Minister what response she is making to the resolutions adopted and

drawn to her attention by the Greater Manchester police authority concerning the cost of the miners' dispute and its effects on the policing of Greater Manchester; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: This resolution was drawn to my attention by the right hon. Member in his letter of 4 February, to which I have asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to reply.

Official Information (Public Access)

Mr. Madden asked the Prime Minister (1) what specific action she has taken since 1979 to extend public access to official information; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what plans she has to introduce legislation relating to freedom of information; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We have a clear policy to make as much information available as possible while preserving the confidentiality essential to the effective working of the Government. I asked Ministers in charge of Departments to give this their close personal attention when we took office in 1979, and a very wide range of information is now available as a result.

I remain unconvinced that legislation to give a statutory general right of access to official information would suit our system of government or give a better result in terms of the essential accountability of the Government to Parliament and the electorate.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committees

Mr. Mason asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will list the overseas visits undertaken by the 14 Select Committees since 1979; for what purpose they were undertaken; how many officers and advisers accompanied each delegation; and what have been the total costs incurred by each Committee on these visits.

Mr. Biffen [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1985, c. *184*]: The information is given in the following table:

The dates, destination, purpose and numbers of accompanying staff (including advisers and shorthand writers where relevant) of overseas visits by the departmental select committees are as follows:

Session	*Destination*	*Staff*	*Purpose*
			Agriculture Committee
1979-80	Netherlands and France	3	To discuss common problems with leading figures with the relevant Governments and dairy industry in relation to the inquiry into the Economic, Social and Health Implications for the United Kingdom of the Common Agricultural Policy of Milk and Dairy Products.
1979-80	Brussels	2	For meetings with officials of the European Commission, in relation to the inquiry into the Economic, Social and Health Implications for the United Kingdom of the Common Agricultural Policy of Milk and Dairy Products.
1980-81	West Germany and Denmark	3	To visit various research establishments and farms, and to meet Government and industry representatives, in relation to the inquiry into Animal Welfare in Poultry, Pig and Veal Calf Production.
1980-81	Brussels	2	To discuss the subject of Animal Welfare in Poultry, Pig and Veal Calf Production with officials of the European Commission.
1981-82	France	3	To visit the Puy-de-Dome area of the Auvergne and meet with Government officials, in relation to the inquiry into the Financial Policy of the EEC, of Member States and, as appropriate, of other countries, in relation to agriculture, with particular reference to poultry, horticulture, eggs and less favoured areas.
1981-82	West Germany	2	To visit less favoured areas, and to discuss general policy questions with Federal Ministry officials, in relation to the inquiry into financial policy of the EEC, of Member States, and, as appropriate, of other countries, in relation to agriculture, with particular reference to poultry, horticulture, eggs and less favoured areas.
1982-83	United States of America and Canada	2	To visit various research establishments and private firms, in relation to the inquiry into the organisation and financing of agricultural research and development.
1983-84	Brussels and Netherlands	3	In relation to the inquiry into the effect of feedstuff prices on the United Kingdom pig and poultry industries.
1984-85	Brussels	2	To discuss the effects of the implementation of dairy quotas.
	The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee are £37,331.		
			Defence Committee
1979-80	West Germany	3	Inquiry into Ammunition Storage.
1980-81	United States of America	2	Inquiry into Strategic Nuclear Weapons Policy.
1981-82	West Germany	3	Inquiry into British Forces, Germany.
1981-82	France	3	Exchange visit with Defence Committee of Assemblée Nationale; visits to French forces and arms factories.
1981-82	United States of America, Japan and Hong Kong	3	Inquiry into Burden-sharing in Western Defence; British Forces, Hong Kong.
1982-83	Falklands Islands	3	Inquiry into Future Defence of the Falklands.
1982-83	Greece, Turkey and Italy	2	Inquiry into Southern Flank of NATO.
1983-84	Cyprus	2	Inquiry into British Forces in Cyprus.
1984-85	West Germany	2	Exercise LIONHEART.
	The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee are £87,535.		
			Education, Science and Arts Committee
1979-80	Brussels and Luxembourg	2	Relevant to inquiry into Information Storage and Retrieval in the British Library Service.

Session	Destination	Staff	Purpose
1979-80	United States of America, Washington D.C., New York and Houston, Texas	2	Relevant to inquiry into Information Storage and Retrieval in the British Library Service and inquiry into The Funding and Organisation of Courses in Higher Education.
1980-81	Rome, Bonn and Copenhagen	2	Relevant to inquiry into The Secondary School Curriculum and Examinations, with special reference to the 14-16 year old age group and the inquiry into the Public and Private Funding of the Arts.
1980-81	United States of America, Washington D.C., New York, Houston, Texas	2	Relevant to inquiry into Public and Private Funding of the Arts.
1982-83	France	*3	Relevant to inquiry into Education and Training of 14-19 year olds and follow up to Public and Private Funding of the Arts Report.

The total costs incurred on these visits by the Committee are £37,017.

* One clerk, two advisers: the advisers accompanied the Committee each for half of the visit.

Employment Committee†

1979-80	Canada	2	Training, job creation.
1980-81	Belgium, Federal Republic of Germany	1	Employee participation job creation.
1980-81	Sweden, Norway	4	Employee participation, industrial relations
1981-82	United States of America	2	Impact of new technology on employment.
1981-82	Austria	2	Job creation, training.
1982-83	Japan	1	Impact of new technology on employment.
1983-84	Denmark	2	Training, job creation, industrial relations.
1984-85	New Zealand and Australia	2	Training, industrial relations.

The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee are £66,761.

† The main reasons for the individual visits are shown. However, all the subjects were also discussed in other places, ie industrial relations in Canada and Japan, training in Sweden and the Federal Republic of Germany etc. In addition, matters such as health and safety at work and combating sexual and/or racial discrimination in employment were also discussed in all countries.

Energy Committee

1979-80	United States of America, Canada	2	Relevant to The New Nuclear Power Programme Inquiry.
1979-80	France, Germany	2	Relevant to The New Nuclear Power Programme Inquiry.
1980-81	United States of America	2	Relevant to Combined Heat and Power Inquiry.
1981-82	Germany and Denmark	4	Relevant to Combined Heat and Power Inquiry.
1982-83	France, Germany and Sweden	3	Relevant to Energy Research Development and Demonstration in the United Kingdom Inquiry.
1983-84	United States of America and Japan	2	Relevant to Energy Research Development and Demonstration in the United Kingdom Inquiry.

The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee are £81,825.

Environment Committee

1982-83	United States of America	2	Relevant to Problems of Management of Urban Renewal Inquiry.
1983-84	West Germany	3	Relevant to Acid Rain Inquiry.
1983-84	Scandanavia	2	Relevant to Acid Rain Inquiry.

The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee are £27,087.

Foreign Affairs Committee

1979-80	Bahrain, Oman, Thailand, Jordan, Malawi, Kenya	1	Afghanistan inquiry and Development Divisions inquiry.
1980-81	Gibraltar, Madrid	2	Gibraltar/United Kingdom-Spanish relations inquiry.
1981-82	Washington, New York	2	Talks at United Nations and Congress on Development issues; Namibia, Central America.
1981-82	(Group 1) (Caribbean) Jamaica, Cuba, Venezuela, Grenada, Trinidad, Barbados (Group 2) (Central America) Mexico, Cuba, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador	4	Caribbean and Central American Inquiry.
1982-83	United Nations, New York	2	Falkland Islands inquiry.
1982-83	Falklands Islands	3	Falkland Islands inquiry.
1983-84	Barbados, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago	1	Grenada inquiry.
1983-84	United Nations, New York	1	Falkland Islands inquiry.
1983-84	Bonn, Paris, Rome	2	Fontainebleau Summit inquiry.

Sub-Committee on Overseas Development

1979-80	Malawi, Kenya	1	Development Divisions inquiry.
1979-80	OECD, Paris	1	Talks with OECD Development Committee on its Aid functions.
1980-81	Zimbabwe	2	Zimbabwe inquiry.
1980-81	Brussels, Luxembourg	2	Zimbabwe inquiry.
1981-82	Caisse Centrale de Cooperation Economique, Paris	2	Development Divisions inquiry.

Session	Destination	Staff	Purpose
1981-82	Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi	2	Commonwealth Development Corporation inquiry.
1982-83	FAO, Rome	2	ODA Scientific and Special Units inquiry.
	The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee and the Sub-Committee are £143,533.		
	Home Affairs—Sub-Committee on Race Relations and Immigration		
1980-81	United States of America and West Indies	1	Racial Disadvantage inquiry.
1981-82	India and Bangladesh	1	Immigration from the Indian Sub-Continent.
1981-82	United States of America and Canada	1	Ethnic question in the census.
1983-84	Hong Kong	2	Chinese Community in Britain.
1983-84	Amsterdam, Brussels, Geneva and Vienna	2	Refugees.
	The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Sub-Committee are £44,999.		
	Scottish Affairs Committee		
1979-80	Dublin	2	To see the workings and approach of the Industrial Development Authority of Ireland for an inquiry into Inward Investment in Scotland.
1980-81	Dusseldorf	2	To examine measures taken in West Germany to alleviate Youth Unemployment for an inquiry into Youth Unemployment in Scotland.
1981-82	Brussels and Hamburg	2	To investigate Freeports for an inquiry into Prestwick airport.
1981-82	Shannon, Baltimore, Washington and Miami	2	To investigate Freeports for an inquiry into Prestwick airport.
1983-84	Norway	2	To examine the implementation of regional policy in connection with an inquiry into the Highlands and Islands Development Board.
	The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee are £22,285.		
	Social Services		
1980-81	Sweden	3	In connection with inquiry into Medical Education.
1981-82	Brussels, Paris	2	In connection with the inquiry into the Age of Retirement.
1982-83	Denmark, Netherlands	2	In connection with inquiry into Children in Care.
1983-84	United States of America	1	In connection with inquiry into Community Care with special reference to adult mentally handicapped and mentally ill people.
	The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee are £32,381.		
	Trade and Industry Committee		
1980-81	Brussels	3	Inquiry into Steel.
1980-81	Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong	2	Inquiry into Imports and Exports.
1981-82	Brussels	4	Inquiry into Steel
1981-82	Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia	2	Inquiry into Trade with ASEAN.
1982-83	Brussels	4	Inquiry into Steel.
1983-84	Brussels	3	Inquiry into Steel.
	The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee are £66,787.		
	Transport Committee		
1979-80	Belgium	1	Relevant to inquiry into European Commission's Green Paper on Transport Infrastructure.
1979-80	France	2	Channel Link Inquiry.
1980-81	North America	1	Urban Transport.
1980-81	France, Germany and Denmark	4	Urban Transport.
1982-83	Holland, Germany, Austria and Italy	3	Road Maintenance.
1983-84	France	2	Road Safety.
1983-84	United States of America and Japan	1	Organisation, Financing and control of airports.
	The total costs incurred to date on these visits by the Committee are £68,152.		
	Treasury and Civil Service Committee		
1982-83	Washington	2	In connection with inquiry into International Monetary Arrangements.
	The total costs of this visit by the Committee are £17,658.		
	Welsh Affairs		
1981-82	Brussels	3	Inquiry into the impact of the EEC on Wales.
1982-83	France and Luxembourg	3	Inquiry into the impact of the EEC on Wales.
1982-83	Republic of Ireland	1	Inquiry into the impact of the EEC on Wales.
	The total costs of these visits by the Committee are £12,109.		
	The total costs to date of overseas travel by departmental Select Committees are £745,480.		

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Statistics (Racial Analysis)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* a copy of his reply to a letter from the chairman of the community/police consultative group for Lambeth dated 15 January about the publication of racial analysis of crime statistics.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We will be writing shortly to the chairman of the community/police consultative group for Lambeth and will send the hon. Member a copy of the letter.

Queen's Police Medal

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he bears in mind when putting forward the names of individuals with a recommendation that they be awarded the Queen's Police Medal.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The qualifications for the grant of the Queen's Police Medal are set out in regulations made under the Royal Warrant in 1954. They include special or valuable services in various capacities, distinguished administrative or organisational work and prolonged service distinguished by very exceptional ability and merit.

Metropolitan Police

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many meetings with London local authorities have taken place since the publication to London borough councils of Sir Kenneth Newman's intended changes in the structure of the Metropolitan police force on 20 November 1984, to discuss these proposals; and with which authorities.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has had a meeting with the London Boroughs Association and he intends to consult widely as the reorganisation proceeds.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the bodies to whom Sir Kenneth Newman wrote on 20 November 1984 outlining the conclusions of his review "Organisational and Managerial Support for the Strategic Goals of the Force".

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that he wrote to all right hon. and hon. Members for constituencies wholly or partly within the Metropolitan police district; to the chief executives of borough and district councils within the Metropolitan police district; and to the chairmen of a number of police/community consultative groups.

Private Investigators

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has at any time used the services of private investigators to monitor the activities of *(a)* striking miners, *(b)* peace organisations and *(c)* environmental pressure groups; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No.

Special Branch (Information Processing)

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is satisfied that the information held by the special branch in the Metropolitan police area is updated and weeded out and that unnecessary information is destroyed in the way recommended in his Department's guidelines of December 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Yes.

Post Office Detector Van Service

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the annual cost on both capital and revenue account for each of the past five years of the Post Office detector van service.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The charges to the Home Office for the detector van service were as follows:

	Capital costs £	*Operating costs* £
1979-80	60,000	1,113,000
1980-81	25,000	1,317,000
1981-82	15,000	1,362,000
1982-83	12,000	985,000
1983-84	59,000	668,000

Metropolitan Police Unit C11

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement about the role of the Metropolitan police unit C11;

(2) upon whose authority the Metropolitan police unit C11 operates;

(3) if he will state *(a)* who is eligible to make requests and *(b)* who has made requests for the Metropolitan police unit C11 to operate in particular cases;

(4) what police computers and electronic surveillance equipment and technology is available to the Metropolitan police unit C11.

Mr. Giles Shaw: C11 branch is part of the criminal investigation department of the Metropolitan police, reporting to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis through the assistant commissioner, C department. Its officers are drawn from all branches of the police service, and are generally attached to C11 branch for limited periods. They are subject to normal supervisory control through the ordinary police chain of command.

C11 branch contributes to inquiries being conducted by other parts of the Metropolitan police, and by other police forces, through the acquisition and assessment of intelligence about the activities of those suspected of involvement in major crime.

The central drugs intelligence unit, which is part of C11 branch, is, however, a common police service with a steering committee under the chairmanship of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, and officers of the CDIU are central service appointments, not serving Metropolitan police officers.

The use of surveillance equipment by C11 officers is subject to the same rules and procedures as apply to other parts of the police service. Revised and tightened Home Office guidelines on the use of surveillance equipment by the police were issued on 19 December 1984, and a copy of them was placed in the Library of the House. Officers

of C11 branch have access to the computer facilities dedicated to C department and, on the same basis as other police officers, to the police national computer.

Firearms and Knives (Offences)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department in each of the past five calendar years how many cases of criminal offences involving *(a)* firearms and *(b)* knives were recorded.

Mr. Mellor: The available information on firearms relates to notifiable offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used and is given in tables 3.1 and 3.2 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1983", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The available information on knives relates only to offences currently recorded as homicide in which sharp instruments were used, which is published in table 4.3 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1983".

Special Constabulary

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is issued to special constables about their powers of arrest; and in what ways such guidance differs from that issued to police constables.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Within the police area for which he is appointed and in contiguous police areas a special constable has the same powers of arrest as a regular constable. Guidance is issued by the Home Office to chief officers of police, as the need arises, on particular legislation, which may include powers of arrest, but such guidance does not distinguish between the exercise of such powers by regular or by special constables.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by police force area, the number of special constables.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is collected annually. I shall write to my hon. Friend when figures for 31 December 1984 are available.

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the letter of 28 January written to the hon. Member for Yeovil following the answer given to his question on 17 December 1984, *Official Report*, column *10*.

Mr. Mellor The text of my reply is as follows:

I am sorry that I have not been able to write to you sooner with a substantive reply to your Question of 17 December about the jurisdiction of the United States authorities over their servicemen in this country. The terms in which you couched your Question are, of course, entirely hypothetical; no case has ever occurred in which a United States serviceman has, in the course of his official duties, shot a United Kingdom citizen.

We have no plans for amending the Visiting Forces Act 1952 which, as you know, gives effect to the 1951 NATO Agreement on the Status of Forces. I believe that the Agreement and the statute provide a workable and satisfactory legal basis for foreign forces in this country.

On the specific point raised in your Question—jurisdiction over a United States serviceman who shot a British citizen—I think it important to keep in mind the distinction between, on the one hand, the application of UK Law, and on the other, the respective jurisdictions of the visiting force's service courts and of our civilian courts. In view of your known interest in the Visiting Forces Act, I doubt if I need spell out the provisions of the Act which deal with jurisdiction. As you know, it is the operation of section 3 of the Act which appears to cause most concern, dealing as it does with concurrent jurisdiction.

Section 3 provides that, if a United States serviceman commits an act which is an offence against the law of both the United States and the United Kingdom, in most cases it will be the United Kingdom courts which have primary rights to deal with the offence. The only exceptions to this rule occur in the event—envisaged by your Question—that the offence arose out of and in the course of duty, or it was committed solely against persons or property associated with the visiting force. In such cases, the primary jurisdiction is exercised by the authorities of the visiting force, but the United Kingdom courts have a secondary right of jurisdiction which they may exercise if the authorities of the visiting force decide not to exercise their primary right of jurisdiction and deal with the case under their own law.

It is difficult to speculate on what action might be taken under the 1952 Act if an incident ever occurred in which a United States serviceman, in the course of his duty, shot a British citizen. Much would turn on the particular circumstances of the incident. Clearly the authorities of the visiting force would have to consider whether excessive force had been used and thus whether an offence had been committed. In doing so they would need to take account of the provisions of our law (in particular, section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967), and would no doubt be sensitive to the need to consult our authorities about any action to be taken. If it appeared that an offence had been committed under both US and UK law but the US authorities decided to take no action, the UK authorities would be entitled to exercise jurisdiction. In addition, even if the US authorities had primary jurisdiction in a particular case, under the terms of the Status of Forces Agreement (Article VII, paragraph 3) they would have a duty to give sympathetic consideration to a request from us to waive their jurisdiction. They are also under a duty (Article VII, paragraph 6(a) to provide assistance in the investigation of offences and in the collection and production of evidence.

As I said in the Parliamentary debate on 19 December 1983, if any case arose in which the United States authorities appeared to be adopting what seems to be an unreasonably extensive interpretation of what constitutes official duty, we would not hesitate to make the most strenuous representations to ensure that the spirit, as well as the letter, of the NATO agreement was fully respected.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department, which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Brittan: The Management and Personnel Office publication "Public Bodies 1984" lists the non-governmental organisations for which I have responsibilities. The grants made to voluntary bodies by my Department in 1983-84 were listed in the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 4 December 1984 at columns 129-31.

Comprehensive information about charges which may be made by all these bodies is not immediately available. The following information pertains to those services costing over £100,000 a year for which I am directly responsible, or for which I approve fees:

(a) Services costing over £100,000 a year where fees or charges did not cover costs in 1983-84:

i. Licensing of firearms by police authorities (fees for which are currently under review);
ii. issue of travel document by the Home Office for stateless persons (the charge for which is limited by international convention to that for a passport); and
iii. clamping and removal of illegally parked vehicles by the metropolitan police (charges for which are currently under review).

(b) Services costing over £100,000 a year where fees or charges are known, or estimated, to have covered costs in 1983-84:

i. Dealing with nationality applications in the Home Office;
ii. inspection of premises under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971;
iii. accommodation of passengers refused entry under the Immigration Act 1971 (where charges are made to the carrying companies);
iv. issue of liquor licences by magistrates' courts;
v. issue of gaming and betting licences by the Gaming Board for Great Britain and magistrates' courts;
vi. issue of aliens' registration certificates;
vii. issue of police reports on road traffic accidents; and
viii. issue of passports.

Social Workers (Criminal Records)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will include in his current review of the need to disclose to employers of people seeking work with children any relevant details of criminal convictions, those seeking to work in the field of residential care for the elderly and the physically and mentally handicapped.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This review is primarily directed to the need to protect children from those who by reason of their criminal past are unfit to work with children. But we recognise that there are other areas of employment, such as those referred to by my hon. Friend, where a case can be made for disclosure, and we are prepared to consider any evidence of the need in such areas.

Civil Defence

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which two county councils did not return the questionnaire on civil defence by December 1984;

(2) how many local authorities completed the questionnaire on civil defence in each of the following home defence regions: *(a)* north, *(b)* Yorkshire, *(c)* east midlands, *(d)* east, *(e)* Greater London, *(f)* south-east, *(g)* south-west, *(h)* Wales, *(i)* west midlands and *(j)* north-west.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The questionnaire was directed to county councils and the GLC. All of these replied by December 1984 except Gwynedd, which has now replied, and Mid-Glamorgan.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the district or borough councils which have chosen sites for an emergency control centre;

(2) if he will list the district or borough councils which have an emergency control centre; and what is the cost or proposed cost for each authority.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Comprehensive information in this form is not held centrally.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which local authorities have sent *(a)* elected members and *(b)* appropriate officers to training courses at the Civil Defence college.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information in the form requested is not readily available, but all county councils and most district and borough councils in England and Wales have sent elected members and officers to such courses.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the national voluntary organisations actively participating in civil defence training.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The national voluntary organisations concerned are as follows:

Red Cross Society
St. John Ambulance
Women's Royal Voluntary Service
Royal Observer Corps
United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation Warning Teams
Volunteer Scientific Advisers
National Voluntary Civil Aid Society
Radio Amateur Emergency Network

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to meet the chief executive of any counties to discuss civil defence plans.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Not at present. Home Office officials are in regular contact wih the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the 45 authorities mentioned in the summary of local authority returns to the civil defence questionnaire which have made some civil defence plans;

(2) which four local authorities have civil defence plans in accordance with the 1983 Civil Defence Regulations;

(3) which 24 local authorities are updating civil defence plans from plans made in accordance with the 1974 Civil Defence Regulations.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Since this information was provided in confidence, I would not be justified in disclosing it.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which 48 county councils have one, two or three emergency centres, respectively; and what was the cost or proposed cost for each authority.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Fifty-one county councils have designated one or more emergency centres. I shall write to the hon. Member with the details. Detailed information on costs is not available.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the terms of reference of the study being conducted in the north-west home defence region into the co-ordination of regional home defence planning.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The terms of this study will be to

(i) define the requirements for co-ordination of regional home defence planning taking account of the particular circumstances of the region;
(ii) identify the options for meeting in whole or in part those requirements;
(iii) assess the cost and effectiveness of the options by trial so far as practicable and necessary; and

(iv) make proposals as to which option should be preferred, isolating special or relevant regional circumstances with a view to ensuring so far as possible that the findings are applicable to other home defence regions.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which *(a)* county councils and *(b)* district or borough councils have recruited individual civil defence volunteers and voluntary organisations, respectively, for civil defence training.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The following counties have recruited individual civil defence volunteers: Northumberland, Durham, Tyne and Wear, South Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Humberside, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Essex, Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Greater London council, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey, West Sussex, Devon, Avon, Cornwall, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire, Gwent, Dyfed, South Glamorgan, Powys, Clwyd, West Glamorgan, Salop, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire.

It is not known how many district or borough councils have recruited civil defence volunteers.

Neither counties nor district or borough councils recruit voluntary organisations for civil defence training.

Scientific Advisers (Training)

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which local authorities give scientific adviser training.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information on training given by local authorities is not held centrally, but scientific advisers from 40 county authorities in England and Wales have attended regional or national courses since the 1983 regulations came into effect.

Parole

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times in the last two years a unanimous recommendation of the national review committee that a prisoner be granted parole has been rejected by him; and if he will list the crimes and convictions and prison-status, in terms of category of prisoner, of the person or persons involved.

Mr. Mellor: The readily available information is published in the annual reports of the Parole Board. These show that in 1983, out of the 3,460 cases of determinate sentence prisoners in which the Parole Board recommended release, the Home Secretary was unable to accept the board's recommendation in 17 cases; in 1982, out of 3,158 cases, 20. It has never been the practice to identify individual cases, the kinds of cases involved, or whether the recommendations in question were made unanimously.

Immigration

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average waiting time prior to gaining permanent admission to the United Kingdom in 1984; and how this compares with each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Waddington: Information for 1977 to 1984 on the waiting time to first interview for persons in the Indian sub-continent applying for entry clearance for immediate settlement in the United Kingdom is given in table 9 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Control of Immigration: Statistics, Third Quarter, 1984" (Issue 27/1984) and table 5, of "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom, 1983" (Cmnd. 9246). Applications are decided at the first interview unless further inquiries need to be made or a refusal is followed by an appeal, in which case the time taken depends upon the particular circumstances of the application. Corresponding information for years earlier than 1977, and for countries outside the Indian sub-continent, is not available.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were prosecuted in 1983 for failure to display a current road fund tax disc in circumstances where the car owner had purchased instalment stamps to the full value but was awaiting the issue of a tax disc.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The available information is for all proceedings at magistrates' courts for the offences of a motor vehicle licence being obscured or not affixed and of failure to pay motor vehicle duty and is published in table 5 of "Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, 1983, Supplementary Tables", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Details of the circumstances of prosecutions are not collected centrally.

Marches and Processions

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if has issued any circulars to chief constables in connection with marches and processions held by political and other organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Home Office issued a general circular to chief officers of police in May 1981 explaining the procedure to be followed when applying for an order banning marches or processions under section 3 of the Public Order Act 1936. I have arranged for a copy of this circular to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what have been the three most specific and narrow bans on processions made under the Public Order Act 1936 in the last 20 years; and if the legality of the specific and narrow nature of these bans was ever questioned in court;

(2) on how many occasions he has refused consent to an application from a chief constable to order a ban on any marches and processions under section 3(3) of the Public Order Act 1936 in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Diplomats (Traffic Offences)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parking tickets were evaded by diplomats in 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Cremation Certification (Inquiries)

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the result of his inquiries into suspicious deaths revealed in discrepancies in cremation certification reported to him by the British Medical Association.

Mr. Brittan: During the 12 months ended 31 March 1984 medical referees at crematoria completed a questionnaire about the cases coming before them and, in particular, any discrepancies between the two certificates completed by separate doctors in respect of each death. Of those cases where a discrepancy arose, the medical referees identified 18 which gave them cause for suspicion that death might have been criminally caused.

Eight of the discrepancies were found to arise solely from errors in reporting. A detailed check of the other 10 cases has established that the deaths occurred from natural causes.

Offenders (Reparation and Mediation)

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what grants he intends to make to reparation and mediation projects in respect of an offender and his victim; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: I believe that direct reparation by an offender to his victim has a useful role to play in the criminal justice system. To promote the idea, and to help in appraising how it might usefully be developed, I decided last year that we should fund some experimental schemes. We have now offered grants, totalling about £100,000 a year for two years, to four projects, proposed by the Crypt Association, Wolverhampton, and Cumbria, West Midlands and West Yorkshire probation services.

The Cumbria scheme aims to divert juveniles from prosecution where reparation to the victim is agreed and made. The others envisage reparation by a convicted adult offender which would be associated with an order of the court. In all cases the victim's consent will be an essential condition of his or her participation. Since the schemes will be experimental, grants will be paid for two years only. The precise sums to be paid to each scheme will depend upon the terms and conditions agreed following discussions with my Department.

I am aware of a great deal of interest in promoting reparation in different parts of the country and of work being done or proposed independently of Home Office funding. We have received many worthwhile proposals which we have been unable to fund, but I hope that the Government's support for these schemes will serve to encourage others.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Licensable Technology

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list the constraints required to be imposed on East European purchasers of licensable technology by the COCOM agreement;

(2) if he will arrange to publish the COCOM list in the United Kingdom in the same form as it has been published in the United States of America.

Mr. Channon: Comprehensive details of the information required in support of export licence applications will appear in the revised version of the guidance booklet "Security Export Control" to be published by my Department when I make a new Export of Goods (Control) Order to implement in United Kingdom law the results of the recent COCOM list review.

COCOM

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether he will seek to renegotiate the recent COCOM agreement in the light of the legal objections raised to it under the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the treaty of Rome and in view of the recent statistics published by the United States Commerce Department of United States trade with the Soviet bloc and China in computers, semi-conductor manufacturing equipment and electronic test equipment;

(2) whether he is aware of any complaints being made under the treaty of Rome concerning the recent COCOM agreement; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether he is aware of any complaints being made under the general agreement on tariffs and trade concerning the recent COCOM agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: I am aware that Czechoslovakia has notified COCOM's controls under the general agreement on tariffs and trade, but I am not aware that any complaint has been made under the treaty of Rome. Both the agreement and the treaty permit their signatories to control trade for reasons of national security. The COCOM lists are agreed unanimously and have just been reviewed. I see no reason to renegotiate them.

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if the average length of time taken to grant licences under the COCOM agreement when only the British Government's approval is required has increased over the last three months;

(2) what is the average length of time taken over the last three months to grant licences under the COCOM agreement when only British Government approval is required.

Mr. Channon: Information on the average length of time to grant licences when only the British Government's approval is required is not readily available. I am aware that the consideration of some applications has been prolonged. The procedures are kept under regular review.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why he excluded the British Computer Society from negotiations over the COCOM agreement.

Mr. Channon: When considering the commercial implications of the strategic embargo my Department has attached priority to consulting trade associations. But I am always ready to consider the views of interested bodies. My Department met representatives of the British Computer Society on 25 January.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why his Department's discussions with the Computer Services Association on the COCOM list were conducted under the constraints of official secrecy.

Mr. Channon: During the early stage of policy formulation it is sometimes necessary to consult on a confidential basis. I hope that it will be possible to consult more widely before too long.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the total cost of the Administration of his Department expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Butcher: The total costs of administration of the Department for 1983-84, the year in which it was formed, together with the aggregate costs of the previously separate Departments of Trade and Industry for prior years are as follows, expressed in 1983-84 prices. The costs for 1979-80 are not comparable because of subsequent changes in accounting.

	£ million
1979-80	272·1
1980-81	304·7
1981-82	294·4
1982-83	288·7
1983-84	261·7

Merchant Navy Fleet

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will carry out a review of the problems of the Merchant Navy fleet arising from the reduction of trade carried by United Kingdom ships; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The Government have no plans to carry out such a review. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and I are of course ready to consider any particular problems drawn to our attention.

Insolvency Bill *[Lords]*

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why the Government have decided not to implement the recommendation of the Cork committee contained in chapter 32, paragraph 1450, subsections *(b) (c) (e)* and *(g)* of its report (Cmnd. 8558, in part I) to schedule 5 of the current Insolvency Bill *[Lords]* relating to the substantial reduction in the number and extent of the claims of preferential creditors.

Mr. Fletcher: The reasons why the Government decided that they were unable to accept the recommendations of the Insolvency Law Review Committee to which my hon. Friend refers were explained in the White Paper "A Revised Framework for Company Law" (Cmnd. 9175, February 1984). The principal reason relates to the significant difference between tax and non-tax debts; the former are imposed by law whereas the latter are incurred by agreement. The revenue collection departments and the local authorities are involuntary creditors, and consequently differ from other creditors in that they can not choose their debtors. In the Government's view, the retention of certain preferential rights is needed to compensate for this and for other relative disadvantages which we described in the White Paper.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department, which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Butcher: The nationalised industries and other public bodies with which my Department is concerned are listed at pages 61-65 in "Public Bodies 1984", which is available in the library. Since publication BT has ceased to be a nationalised industry. Grant-in-aid to non-Governmental bodies are shown in the Estimates.

The central aim of my Department is to encourage, assist, and ensure the proper regulation of British trade, industry, and commerce. Within this framework the services for which charges are made are as follows:

Services and groups of services the charges for which are aimed to recover full cost

- Patent Office
- Companies Registration Offices
- The Insolvency Service
- National Weights and Measures Laboratory
- Laboratory of the Government Chemist
- National Engineering Laboratory
- Warren Spring Laboratory
- National Physical Laboratory
- Licensing under the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958
- Use of facilities at Royal Aircraft Establishment for European Space Agency Project
- National Remote Sensing Centre
- Dialtech (on-line computerised information service in science and technology)
- NATLAS — National Testing Laboratory Accreditation Scheme (The aim is breakeven in 1986-87)
- British Calibration Service
- National Corrosion Service

Because of unforeseen changes in demand and costs recoveries in any particular year may be more or less than full cost.

Services for which charges are not set ot recover full cost

- BOTB Export Services
- Small Firms counselling Service
- Wireless Telegraphy Licensing

Pirate Radio Stations

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement on recent raids on pirate radio stations; and if he will list all those radio stations raided;

(2) how many pirate radio stations are operating within the United Kingdom; how many are operating offshore or otherwise outside the United Kingdom; and if he will list them.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Community (Own Resources)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the recent EEC Foreign Affairs Council discussed the text of the new own resources decision; and what are the outstanding points still to be agreed.

Mr. Luce: This item was on the agenda as part of the process of implementing the Fontainebleau conclusions

and so that the Council could discuss how to cover the financing requirements already established in the 1985 budget. The outstanding points relate to the mechanisms to be used to meet the Community's inescapable financial obligations, and to the timing of the entry into force of the new own resources decision.

Cash Limits

Mr. Jessel asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any changes have occurred in his Department's cash limits for 1984-85 since 31 July 1984.

Mr. Renton: The cash limit for Class II, Vote I, "Overseas Representation, Diplomatic, Consular and other Foreign and Commonwealth Services," will be increased by £820,000 from £373,968,000 to £374,788,000. The extra money is required to compensate for the effects in 1984-85 of increases in overseas inflation and adverse exchange rate movements.

The cash limit for Class II, Vote 4, the British Council, will be increased by £1,430,000 from £46,021,000 to £47,451,000. The increase represents that portion of overseas risen costs not covered in the cash limited provision announced on 31 July which falls to be financed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Diplomatic Wing).

A Supplementary Estimate is also being submitted to cover the increased expenditure on the non-cash limited Class II, Vote 2, £5,500,000 which is required as a result of movements in exchange rates.

All the increases will be charged to the Reserve and are subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Walking Aids

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the average intervals between *(a)* the application of the appropriate National Health Service worker for a walking aid for a patient and the approval of such application and *(b)* between the approval and the supply of the aid; and to what extent these periods have increased in the last two years or similar convenient period.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. If, however, the right hon. Gentleman is aware of any specific problems in this field, perhaps he will let me have details which I shall have investigated.

Hotels

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new hotels, of 30 bedrooms or more, received grant support in Northern Ireland in each of the three years ended 31 December 1982, 1983 and 1984.

Dr. Boyson: None, but grant aid has been approved for the construction of three new hotels in this category.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Dr. Boyson: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

SCOTLAND

Surveys and Valuations

Mr. Malone asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to complete consideration of the report of the expert committee on multiple surveys and valuations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: I received a copy of the committee's report at the end of November and the Government are giving consideration to those recommendations which are addressed to them and will respond in due course. Many of the recommendations relate to matters outside the Government's direct responsibilities and fall to be considered by the various professional bodies and institutions concerned.

Administration Costs

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total cost of the administration of his Department, expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Younger: The total cost of administration of the Scottish Office expressed in 1983-84 prices in the last five years was as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	112·8
1980-81	114·8
1981-82	113·6
1982-83	111·8
1983-84	110·8

This information excludes the costs of the State hospital, the Scottish prison service and the Royal Scottish museum.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will break down expenditure in Scotland outlined in Cmnd. 9428, table 3.15, in the same way as tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11 and 3.13 in the same publication.

Mr. Younger: The information requested will be given for each of the programmes within my responsibility in "Public Expenditure to 1987-88: A Commentary on the Scotland Programme", which will be published shortly. I

shall arrange for copies to be deposited in the Library, and for a copy to be sent to the hon. Gentleman and to other right hon. and hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Younger: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Greater Glasgow Health Board (Projects)

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will make a decision on the capital projects at present being considered by the Greater Glasgow health board, especially in respect of the maintenance, improvement and modernisation of the staff houses at Woodilee and Stonyetts hospitals.

Mr. John MacKay: The special allocation to boards for the improvement of building stock will be announced along with the full allocation for boards for 1985-86 before the end of the current financial year. It will be for Greater Glasgow health board to decide how much to allocate towards the maintenance, improvement and modernisation of staff houses.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Servants (Sickness Absence)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister for the Civil Service what is the absence rate caused by illness in the Civil Service, distinguishing between non-industrial and industrial staff; and what have been the trends in these figures in the past five years.

Mr. Hayhoe: Sickness absence rates for the five years from 1977 to 1981 inclusive were analysed following a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) on 6 April 1982 at column *288*. An updated version of those figures is as follows. Analysis of the data for the five-year period up to and including 1983 is being made, and my right hon. and noble Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will write to the hon. Member on the subject.

(Man days basis)

	*1979**	*Average percentage of sickness and absenteeism†*				
	Population	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*
Non-industrial Civil Service						
Ministry of Defence	112,423	3·8	5·0	4·5	4·4	5·0
Unauthorised absence†		0·0001	0·0003	0·003	0·0007	0·006
DHSS	98,500	4·2	4·5	4·4	4·1	4·1
Departments paid through Chessington Computer Centre	90,307			4·9	4·6	4·7
Inland Revenue	78,970	—	—	4·3	4·6	‡3·9
Property Services Agency	40,065	2·7	2·8	2·4	2·6	—
Department of Transport	13,953	—	—	3·0	3·4	—
Department of the Environment	12,485	—	—	2·3	2·6	—
Department of National Savings	10,575	6·0	6·8	7·4	6·3	5·8
Industrial Civil Service						
Ministry of Defence	90,494	6·6	7·5	7·0	7·3	7·6
Unauthorised absence†		0·0009	0·001	0·001	0·001	0·002
Royal Mint	973	—	—	10·4	6·9	6·4

Revised figures at 5.1.1984

* The percentages for each year have been calculated on the population at risk during the year. 1979 figures are given for illustrative purposes.
† Absenteeism—unauthorised absence—is not recorded in most departments because any unexplained absence is investigated and is ultimately classed as annual, sick or special leave. Strikes make up the biggest component in the figures provided.
‡ Figure may be inaccurate because of industrial action.

EMPLOYMENT

Mode A Youth Training

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion and number of locally-approved mode A youth training places are organised by private training agencies for the areas covered by the following area manpower boards: *(a)* Birmingham and Solihull, *(b)* Greater Manchester, *(c)* Coventry and Warwickshire, *(d)* London north, *(e)* London north-east, *(f)* London south-east and *(g)* London south-west.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is in the following table. The figures relate to the situation at the end of December 1984.

Area	Total contracted Mode A places	Contracted places private training agencies	Private training places of total Mode A
			Per cent.
Birmingham	7,425	2,593	34·9
Greater Manchester	11,809	2,517	21·3
Coventry and Warwickshire	3,807	1,447	38·0
London North	2,762	800	29·0
London North East	4,089	1,131	27·7
London South East	3,514	1,770	50·4
London South and West	3,370	80	2·4

Faulty Electrical Apparatus

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed at places of work as a result of faulty electrical plugs, sockets and switches during 1982, 1983 and 1984; which were caused by fires; and which were from other causes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The latest available information is as follows:

Injuries reported to HSE inspectorates in which faulty electrical plugs, sockets or switches were identified*

	1982	1983
Persons killed	7	9
Major injuries (excluding HM Factory Inspectorate for which data not available)	1	1

* Excludes injuries reported to local authorities.

None of the injuries was caused by fire.

In 1982, 819 injuries involving more than three days' absence from work, due to any kind of exposure to, or contact with, electrical current, were reported to all authorities enforcing the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. Of these, 41 were caused by fires or explosions. The figures for 1983 are 455 and 15, respectively, reflecting changed reporting arrangements. The numbers of these involving faulty electrical plugs, sockets or switches could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Wages Councils

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has figures to indicate whether geographical areas are particularly problematic for wages councils.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The level of compliance with wages council orders varies between wages inspectorate divisions. Although no division is particularly problematic, the figures indicate that compliance in the Wales, north-west (west) and northern divisions tends to be not as high as in other divisions.

Hairdressers (Wages)

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has from wages council figures about the extent of underpaying in hairdressing salons.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In 1983, the pay of 13,031 workers in 3,925 hairdressing establishments was checked by inspectors. A total of 1,110 workers—8·5 per cent. —were found to be underpaid and arrears of £125,182 were assessed.

Warehouse Fire (Sheffield)

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any information on the number of people downwind whose health was affected by asbestos or chemicals or in any other way as a result of the fire on 14 December at a warehouse in Sheffield.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This Department does not hold this information. The after effects of the fire were dealt with by the local environmental health departments.

Above-average Earnings

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment what evidence he has about trends in the employment prospects of groups with above average earnings and of the effect on their employment prospects of salary increases above the rate of inflation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There is no specific evidence on the part that the cost of labour has played in determining the employment prospects of groups with above average earnings. However, there is general evidence, too, that these prospects would be enhanced if the cost of labour fell in real terms. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) on 22 October 1984, at column 481, and the recent publication by the Treasury, "The relationship between employment and wages", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Youth Training Schemes (Waltham Forest)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of youth training scheme entrants in the London borough of Waltham Forest in 1984 and in 1985 were from the ethnic minorities.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Of the 618 entrants to the youth training scheme in the London borough of Waltham Forest in 1984, 194 were from ethnic minorities. So far in 1985, 16 young people have entered the youth training scheme, of whom one was from the ethnic minorities.

Unit Labour Costs

Mr. Williams asked the Secretary of State for Employment how unit labour costs in Britain have compared with those in principal competitor countries in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Annual percentage changes in unit labour costs in national currencies in manufacturing for principal competitor countries from 1969 to 1982 are given in table 9.10 of "Historical Statistics, 1960-1982", published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—OECD. Later figures are given in table 21 of the OECD "Economic Outlook", Number 36. These publications are available in the Library.

Redundancy Payments

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list Her Majesty's Government's contribution towards redundancy payments in each financial year since 1979-80.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Expenditure from the redundancy fund on rebates to employers and payments direct to employees in the years referred to was as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	112·8
1980-81	278·1
1981-82	420·6
1982-83	381·8
1983-84	378·1

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Skillcentre, Perivale

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the Perivale skillcentre.

Mr. Peter Morrison: At its meeting on 24 January the Manpower Services Commission considered and endorsed proposals from its skillcentre training agency for the future of skillcentre services. The chairman has written to my right hon. Friend with the commission's views—a copy of his letter is in the Library—and we are considering its advice. The proposals envisage that the skillcentre at Perivale would be retained and provide expanded training services for both employed and unemployed people in line with our adult training strategy.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University of Oxford (Grants)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what grants were made from public funds to the University of Oxford in the five years to May 1979 and in the latest five year period since then, expressed in real and money terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Recurrent and capital grants made available to the University of Oxford, in the five financial years 1974-75 to 1978-79 and in the latest five financial years since then, on the advice of the University Grants Committee and the Computer Board, were as follows:

Financial Year	*Cash* £	**Cost* £
1974-75	17,039,457	51,749,194
1975-76	22,624,277	54,684,997
1976-77	24,031,274	51,306,121
1977-78	21,471,621	40,272,378
1978-79	23,797,363	40,412,599
1979-80	27,475,999	39,912,260
1980-81	35,372,724	43,322,381
1981-82	36,580,111	40,735,090
1982-83	42,409,237	44,281,457
1983-84	†46,209,816	46,209,816

* Cash figures, deflated to a 1983-84 base, using GDP deflators which provide an estimate of the average movement of prices across the economy as a whole.

† Includes £112,785 for redundancy and restructuring costs.

The figures are not comparable from year to year because of various funding changes, most notably because of adjustments made to reflect changes in the level of the home university undergraduate tuition fee which for most students is paid from public funds. For example, the real value of this fee was more than doubled for the 1977-78 academic year, approximately halved for the 1982-83 academic year and further reduced for 1983-84. In all these cases there were compensating adjustments in UGC recurrent grant which prevent valid comparisons between years.

Individual Oxford Colleges also receive income from College fees which for most students are paid from public funds as part of the student award. These cover some of the costs which for other universities are met through UGC recurrent grant.

Universities (Grants)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what grants were made to universities from public funds in each year since 1974 expressed in real money terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Recurrent and capital grants made available to universities in Great Britain in each financial year since 1974-75 on the advice of the University Grants Committee and the Computer Board, were as follows:

Financial Year	*Cash* £	**Cost* £
1974-75	488,714,386	1,484,235,995
1975-76	610,814,409	1,476,395,652
1976-77	692,938,013	1,479,403,943
1977-78	622,003,229	1,166,635,211
1978-79	691,903,606	1,174,988,293
1979-80	842,460,288	1,223,776,947
1980-81	1,067,061,671	1,306,872,836
1981-82	1,098,643,005	1,223,433,190
1982-83	†1,312,258,944	1,370,190,603
1983-84	†1,357,795,954	1,357,795,954

* Cash figures adjusted to a 1983-84 base, using GDP deflators which provide an estimate of the average movement of prices across the country as a whole.

† Includes redundancy and restructuring costs — £57,000,000 in 1982-83 and £38,800,000 in 1983-84.

These figures are not comparable from year to year because of various funding charges, most notably because of adjustments made to reflect changes in the level of the home undergraduate tuition fee which for most students is paid from public funds. For example, the real value of this fee was more than doubled for the 1977-78 academic year,

approximately halved for the 1982-83 academic year and further reduced for 1983-84. In all these cases there were compensating adjustments in UGC recurrent grant which prevent valid comparisons between years.

Individual Oxford Colleges also receive income from college fees which for most students are paid from public funds as part of the student award. These cover some of the costs which for other universities are met through UGC recurrent grant.

Corporal Punishment

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those local authorities in England and Wales which have reserve powers to override school governing bodies in relation to corporal punishment policy.

Mr. Dunn: The Department does not have comprehensive information on the existence of such powers which would be assigned in the articles of government for each school, made in most cases by the maintaining local education authority.

Nursery Schools

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many new nursery schools have been constructed since 1979; and if he will list these area by area.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend approved particulars of major building projects for one new nursery school in 1983-84 and three in 1984-85. The areas were Derbyshire (two), Salford and Waltham Forest.

Primary Schools

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children under the age of five years have been admitted to primary school education during the last four years.

Mr. Dunn: Information is not available centrally in the form requested. However, the number of pupils aged under five years in infant classes in maintained primary schools in England in January 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984 were 206,507, 201,279, 210,372 and 236,417 respectively.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Department does not collect comprehensive information on fees and charges for services rendered by the wide range of bodies which it grant aids. Services costing over £100,000 which the Department and certain non-departmental public bodies for which it is responsible are required to report annually to the Treasury were as follows in 1983-84:—

(a) No fee charged—nil

(b) Fee not fully covering cost of service

Agricultural and Food Research Council: sugar beet research services.

(c) Fee exactly covering cost of service

DES: Accommodation and general services provided for the Further Education Unit.

Agricultural and Food Research Council: research and statistical services.

National Environment Research Council: research services contracts.

Science and Engineering Research Council: computing and research.

British Museaum (Natural History): publications/ bookshop.

(d) Fee more than covering cost of service—nil

NATIONAL FINANCE

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out in league table form, for the year 1983-84 for all European Economic Community countries, the United States of America, Canada and Sweden *(a)* the total gross domestic product in each country and *(b)* gross domestic product per head in each country.

Mr. Peter Rees: The tables show the requested values for the calendar year 1983. They are calculated by OECD and use purchasing power parities rather than market exchange rates to put national currency estimates on to a common basis.

(a) Comparison by gross domestic product, 1983 using purchasing power parities

1.	United States	100·0
2.	Germany	21·0
3.	France	18·0
4.	United Kingdom	16·5
5.	Italy	15·0
6.	Canada	10·0
7.	Netherlands	4·5
8.	Belgium	3·5
9.	Denmark	2·0
10.	Greece	1·5
11.	Ireland	0·5
12.	Luxembourg	0·1

(b) Comparison by gross domestic product per head, 1983 using purchasing power parities

1.	United States	100·0
2.	Canada	95·0
3.	Denmark	82·0
4.	Luxembourg	81·0
5.	Germany	80·0
6.	France	79·0
7.	Belgium	78·0
8.	Netherlands	72·0
9.	United Kingdom	69·0
10.	Italy	61·0
11.	Ireland	49·0
12.	Greece	40·0

Source: OECD.

Note: Comparable data (using purchasing power parities) are not available for Sweden. Comparisons using exchange rates are available for all countries listed in OECD Main Economic Indicators (Appendix) January 1985, but because of exchange rate fluctuations they may be misleading.

Community Reform

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the reply of 23 January, *Official Report*, column 978, if he will explain by what means the agreement on European Economic Community budget discipline will ensure that agriculture will progressively represent a smaller share of the total Community budget.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 29 January at columns *102-3*.

Taxation

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all forms of taxation in rank order by the collection cost of each, with the least expensive to collect first.

Mr. Moore: The information requested is as follows. Column *(a)* gives the absolute cost of collecting each tax. Column *(b)* gives the cost as a percentage of the yield for each tax.

Cost of collection 1983-84	*(a) £ million*	*(b) Cost as a percentage of yield*
Matches/Mechanical lighters	0·2	1·1
Petroleum revenue tax/ supplementary petroleum duty	0·7	0·01
Car Tax	1·8	0·3
Tobacco Products	3·5	0·1
Development Land Tax	4·5	7·2
Betting and gaming	6·0	1·0
Hydrocarbon oil	8·7	0·2
Stamp Duty	9·3	1·0
Capital Gains Tax	14·7	2·1
Capital Transfer Tax and Estate Duty	17·1	2·8
Alcoholic Drink	29·1	0·7
Customs Duties and associated work	*142·0	*10·5
Corporation Tax	63·4	1·0
VAT	174·5	1·1
Income Tax—employment	259·8	1·6
Income Tax—Other Income	417·1	5·9

* includes: CAP work
Preventive
Trade Statistics
Other Customs Work

Pensions (Taxation)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Manchester chamber of commerce and Industry about the tax treatment of pension contributions and tax-free lump sum commutation benefits on retirement; what reply he is sending; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lawson: I have received a considerable number of representations on this subject. As these are treated in confidence, I cannot comment on any individual case; and I would remind the right hon. Gentleman that it is not the practice to comment on speculation about a forthcoming Budget.

Departmental Facility Agreements

Mr. Eggar asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *187-8*, what are the differences in the departmental facility agreements which lead to the sharply differing cost of those agreements as a percentage of the departmental wages bill.

Mr. Hayhoe: The national agreement on facilities provides the framework for departmental facilities agreements, not all of which were fully operational at the time of the last costings review. This factor, together with the varying levels of union membership, staff representation and consultative machinery within Departments, together with the varying number of sites involved, account for the differences in the cost of facilities expressed as a percentage of departmental wage bills. My officials are reviewing with Departments the effectiveness of the 1982 national agreement with the objective of achieving the maximum possible degree of consistency by bringing these where the costs are highest more in line with the rest.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department, which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Child Benefit

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) to what amount per week child benefit could be raised if it were taxed and the proceeds of taxation allocated to raising its levels;

(2) to what level per week child benefit could be raised if the married man's tax allowance were reduced to the rate of a single man's for men below retirement age and the savings allocated to raising the levels of child benefit;

(3) to what level per week child benefit could be raised if both *(a)* it were taxed and the proceeds of taxation were allocated to raising its level and *(b)* the married man's tax allowance were reduced to the rate of a single man's for men below retirement age and the savings allocated to raising the levels of child benefits.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Pension Funds

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what information he has as to *(a)* the absolute value and *(b)* the percentage share of (i) private sector, (ii) local authority and (iii) other public sector pensions funds in total pension funds in 1983 and 1984;

(2) what information he has as to the aggregate assets of pension funds in 1957, 1967, 1977, 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Quoted Shares (Ownership)

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has to the share of *(a)* trust companies, *(b)* insurance companies and *(c)* pension funds in the ownership of total quoted shares in 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

DEFENCE

Research and Development

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence what amount his Department spent on research and development, respectively, for military weapons in the latest year for which figures are available; how many United Kingdom firms benefit directly from this expenditure; and if he will list those firms which received more than £100 million for those purposes.

Mr. Butler: In 1983-84 £357 million was spent on research and £1,556 million on development. A more detailed analysis of research and development figures is given each year in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates, Volume 2." It is not possible without undue cost and effort to identify all firms which benefit directly from defence research and development expenditure, but the number of firms with defence research and development contracts in 1983-84 was about 1,100 and of these British Aerospace (Aircraft) and British Aerospace (Dynamics) each received more than £100 million in defence contracts for research and development purposes.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the defence budget is spent on research and development; what are the comparable figures for West Germany and France; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: In 1983-84, 12·4 per cent. of the defence budget was spent on research and development. Comparable figures for West Germany and France are not available.

Nuclear Capability

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence how he intends to maintain the effectiveness of the United Kingdom nuclear capability in the event of the conclusion of a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Mr. Butler: This is a hypothetical question; but I would remind the hon. Gentleman that effective verification must be at the heart of any such treaty.

Departmental Administration (Cost)

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost of the administration of his Department, expressed in constant prices, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Butler: The following figures are derived from a new assessment of the Department's running costs, based on the final statement of outturn, which covered only the last three financial years:

	£ million (1983-84 prices throughout)
1981-82	6,316
1982-83	6,215
1983-84	6,130

These figures are significantly lower than the figures which were given to my hon. Friend in a written answer on 26 January 1984, at column *691*, mainly because they exclude capital expenditure and notional expenditure such as pension costs. In order to provide a consistent basis for comparison, they also exclude Falklands-related expenditure—in 1982-83 and 1983-84—and payments made under the Property Repayment Services arrangements which were introduced on 1 April 1983.

The figures cover a much wider range of activities than those normally associated with the administration of a Department of state and include the pay and other costs of all service personnel and civilian staff. Consequently, they are not strictly comparable with the administrative costs of other Departments.

Christmas Island (Nuclear Tests)

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in carrying out the survey using service and national cancer registry records, in relation to the atmospheric nuclear tests at Christmas Island in the 1950s

Mr. Butler: I understand that the study being undertaken by the National Radiological Protection Board is progressing to plan, and it is expected that it will be completed by about October 1986.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Butler: The Ministry of Defence has responsibility for 18 non-departmental public bodies, of which 14 are purely advisory bodies receiving money only to cover members' expenses. The remaining four are International Military Services and the Services Sound and Vision Corporation which are limited companies, the National Army museum and the Royal Air Force museum. In addition, the Secretary of State for Defence is the sole shareholder of the Royal Ordnance plc. The MOD also has responsibilities for the Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Associations, Greenwich hospital and Travers estates, and the Royal hospital, Chelsea, which are all

Crown bodies, and for the NAAFI, the Royal Naval Film Corporation and the Services' Sports Control Boards and cadet organisations. A list of the non-governmental organisations in receipt of grants-in-aid from the MOD is given in section 1K of the Supply Estimates, Class 1 (Defence). The MOD also subscribes to international organisations such as NATO.

The MOD provides the general public and private organisations with a wide range of services — for example, search and rescue, meteorological and hydrographic information and sports and recreational facilities. A comprehensive list of these services is not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

As a general rule, charges are set to recover cost. However, many of the services utilise spare capacity and the charge then reflects marginal rather than full cost. Charges may also sometimes be waived or set below cost — for example, for military assistance where there is immediate danger to life, for services provided under reciprocal arrangements, and for services provided where significant publicity, recruiting, training or other defence benefits accrue to the MOD.

Towed Arrays

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of towed arrays in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 1 February 1985, c. *344*]: The towed arrays sonar is in use in the Royal Navy in both submarines and surface ships. It facilitates the passive detection of other ships and submarines from their noise emissions.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Pensions and Benefits

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will compare retirement and other state pensions and all other welfare and national insurance benefits and allowances paid in 1979 with those paid at the end of 1983 and 1984, showing each of the 1984 payments as a percentage of the 1979 payments.

Mr. Whitney: The information requested is in the table.

Benefit rates—Comparisons 1979 to 1984

		A *November 1979*	*B* *November 1983*	*C* *November 1984*	*D* *C as a percentage of A*
		£	£	£	*per cent.*
1. *Retirement Pension* (RP)	—single	23·30	34·05	35·80	153·6
	—couple	37·30	54·50	57·30	153·6
Non-contributory over 80's pension	—single	14·00	20·45	21·50	153·6
	—couple	22·40	32·70	34·35	153·3
2. *Widows' Benefits* (WB)					
Widows' Allowance		32·60	47·65	50·10	153·7
Widowed Mothers' Allowance		23·30	34·05	35·80	153·6
Widows' Pension		23·30	34·05	35·80	153·6
Age-related widows' pension—30 per cent. to 93 per cent. of rate of widows' pension		—	—	—	—
3. *Invalidity Pension* (IVP)	—single	23·30	32·60	34·25	147·0
	—couple	37·30	52·15	54·80	146·9
Invalidity allowance	—higher rate	4·90	7·15	7·50	153·1
	—middle rate	3·10	4·60	4·80	154·8
	—lower rate	1·55	2·30	2·40	154·8
4. *Unemployment Benefit* (UB)					
Under pension age	—single	18·50	27·05	28·45	153·8
	—couple	29·95	43·75	46·00	153·6
Over pension age	—single	23·30	34·05	35·80	153·6
	—couple	37·30	54·50	57·30	153·6
5. *Sickness Benefit* (SB)					
Under pension age	—single	18·50	25·95	27·25	147·3
	—couple	29·95	41·95	44·05	147·1
Over pension age	—single	23·30	32·60	34·25	147·0
	—couple	37·30	52·15	54·80	146·9
6. *Maternity Allowance* (MA)	—single	18·50	25·95	27·25	147·3
	—couple	29·95	41·95	44·05	147·1
Maternity grant (lump sum)		25·00	25·00	25·00	100·0
7. *Attendance Allowance*	—higher rate	18·60	27·20	28·60	153·8
	—lower rate	12·40	18·15	19·10	154·0
8. *Severe Disablement Allowance* (SDA)/NCIP	—single	14·00	20·45	21·50	153·6
	—couple	22·40	32·70	34·35	153·3
9. *Invalid Care Allowance* (ICA)	—single	14·00	20·45	21·50	153·6

		A November 1979 £	B November 1983 £	C November 1984 £	D C as a percentage of A per cent.
	—couple	22·40	32·70	34·35	153·3
10. *Mobility Allowance*		12·00	19·00	20·00	166·7
11. *Child Benefit*		*4·00	6·50	6·85	171·2
12. *One Parent Benefit*		2·50	4·05	4·25	170·0
13. *Family Income Supplement*					
Prescribed amount—one child family†		56·00	85·50	90·00	160·7
Increase for each additional child†		4·50	9·50	10·00	222·2
Maximum payment—one child family		13·50	22·00	23·00	170·4
Increase for each additinal child		1·00	2·00	2·00	200·0
14. *Supplementary Benefit*					
Supplementary pension	—single	23·70	34·10	35·70	150·6
	—couple	37·65	54·55	57·10	151·7
	—non-householder	18·95	27·25	28·55	150·7
Long-term scale rate	—single	23·70	34·10	35·70	150·6
	—couple	37·65	54·55	57·10	151·7
	—non-householder 18+	18·95	27·25	28·55	150·7
	—non-householder 16-17	11·25	20·90	21·90	194·7
Ordinary rate	—single	18·30	26·80	28·05	153·3
	—couple	29·70	43·50	45·55	153·4
	—non-householder 18+	14·65	21·45	22·45	153·2
	—non-householder 16-17	11·25	16·50	17·30	153·8
Dependent children	—18+	18·95	21·45	22·45	118·5
	—16-17	11·25	16·50	17·30	153·8
	—‡11-15	7·70/9·35	13·70	14·35	186·4/153·5
	—‡under 11	5·20/6·25	9·15	9·60	184·6/153·6
Blind addition		1·25	1·25	1·25	100·0
Heating additions	—higher rate	2·85	5·05	5·20	182·5
	—middle rate	‖1·90	—	—	—
	—lower rate	0·95	2·05	2·10	221·0
Central heating additions	—higher rate	1·90	4·10	4·20	221·0
	—middle rate	‖0·95	—	—	—
	—lower rate	0·50	2·05	2·10	420·0
Estate rate heating additions	—higher rate	n/a	8·20	8·40	—
	—lower rate	n/a	4·10	4·20	—
Dietary additions	—lower rate	1·05	1·45	1·55	147·6
	—higher rate	2·50	3·35	3·60	144·0
	—kidney dialysis	7·10	9·60	10·35	145·8
Notional laundry charge		0·10	0·45	0·50	500·0
Extra bath		Discretionary until 1980	0·25	0·25	—
Board and Lodging personal expenses					
Over pension age	—single	6·85	9·85	10·30	150·4
	—couple	11·80	19·70	20·60	174·6
Long-term rate	—single	6·85	9·85	10·30	150·4
	—couple	11·80	19·70	20·60	174·6
Ordinary rate	—single	5·95	8·85	9·25	155·5
	—couple	9·70	17·70	18·50	190·7
Dependants	—18+	5·95	8·85	9·25	155·5
	—16-17	3·65	5·30	5·55	152·1
	—‡11-15	2·60/3·10	4·55	4·75	182·7/153·2
	—‡under 11	1·60/2·05	2·95	3·10	193·7/151·2
Meals allowance (per meal)	—breakfast	0·65	1·00	1·10	169·2
	—main meal	0·90	1·45	1·55	172·2
Increase in maximum amounts for board and lodging	—single	¶	15·35	16·15	—
	—couple	¶	30·70	32·20	—
Maintenance and insurance allowance		1·07	1·70	1·80	168·2
15. *Industrial Disablement Pension*	—over 18	38·00	55·60	58·40	153·7
	—under 18	23·30	34·05	35·80	153·6
Reduced rates—10 per cent. to 90 per cent. of basic rate		—	—	—	—
Maximum disablement gratuity (lump sum)		2,530·00	3,690·00	3,880·00	153·4
Unemployability supplement		23·30	32·60	34·25	147·0
Increases for early onset of incapacity	—higher rate	4·90	7·15	7·50	153·1
	—middle rate	3·10	4·60	4·80	154·8
	—lower rate	1·55	2·30	2·40	154·8
Maximum special hardship allowance		15·20	22·24	23·36	153·7

	A November 1979	B November 1983	C November 1984	D C as a percentage of A per cent.
	£	£	£	
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	15·20	22·30	23·40	153·9
Industrial Death Benefit				
—initial rate	27·30	47·65	50·10	183·5
—higher permanent rate	20·05	34·60	36·35	181·3
—lower permanent rate	5·85	10·22	10·74	183·6
Constant Attendance Allowance				
—normal maximum rate	15·20	22·30	23·40	153·9
—part-time rate	7·60	11·15	11·70	153·9
—intermediate rate	22·80	33·45	35·10	153·9
—exceptional rate	30·40	44·60	46·80	153·9
16. *Workmen's compensation, pneumoconiosis, byssinosis and other schemes*				
—maximum major incapacity allowance	38·00	55·60	58·40	153·7
—partial disablement allowance	14·00	20·45	21·50	153·6
17. *Housing Benefit*●				
Needs allowance—single	31·05	43·05	45·10	145·3
—couple/single parent	45·55	63·50	66·50	146·0
—single handicapped	34·60	48·00	50·30	145·4
—couple—one handicapped	49·10	68·45	71·70	146·0
—couple both handicapped	50·80	70·80	74·15	146·0
—pensioner addition	n/a	0·75	0·80	—
—dependent child addition	7·70	11·90	12·85	166·9
18. *Dependency Additions*				
For child —with MA, SB, UB	1·70	0·15	■	—
—with IVP, RP, WB	7·10	7·60	7·65	107·7
NCIP/SDA, ICA, and if claimant over pension age, with SB and UB				
For Spouse —with NCIP/SDA and ICA	8·40	12·25	12·85	153·0
—with MA and SB under pension age	11·45	16·00	16·80	146·7
—with MA and SB over pension age	14·00	19·55	20·55	146·8
—with UB under pension age	11·45	16·70	17·55	153·3
—with UB over pension age	14·00	20·45	21·50	153·6
—with IVP and unemployability supplement	14·00	19·55	20·55	146·8
—with RP	14·00	20·45	21·50	153·6

Notes:

All benefits are weekly rates unless otherwise stated.

n/a=Not available at that time.

* April 1979 rate.

† These are not rates of benefit.

‡ 1979 scales for children: 13-15; 11-12; 5-10; under 5.

‖ Middle rate abolished 1980.

¶ Changes in the supplementary benefits scheme since 1980 mean no comparable rates are available.

● 1979 rates are comparable figures—housing benefit scheme not fully introduced until April 1983.

■ Abolished 1984.

National Insurance

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate what national insurance contributions would have to be levied to maintain the same income to the fund if the Treasury supplement to the national insurance fund were now at *(a)* 18 per cent. and *(b)* 15 per cent.

Mr. Whitney: The Government Actuary calculates that in order to maintain the same income to the national insurance fund the total class I contribution rate could be reduced by *(a)* 1·05 percentage points and *(b)* 0·6 percentage points if the Treasury supplement were increased to 18 per cent. and 16 per cent. respectively. In each case it is assumed that there would be similar revisions to the other contribution rates. The other assumptions underlying the calculation are set out in the government Actuary's report on the draft of the Social Security (Contributions Rerating) (No. 2) Order 1984 (Cmnd. 9386).

Falklands Campaign (War Pensions Welfare Officers)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the level of advice being given by war pensions welfare officers to service men involved in the Falklands campaign and their families.

Mr. Whitney: Yes. However, if the hon. Member has a particular case in mind and would like to let me have the details I should be pleased to look into it.

Health Authority Employees (Removal Expenses)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what plans he has to carry out a review of the Whitley agreement covering removal expenses of health authority employees;

(2) what is the highest sum that has been paid out by a health authority in respect of removal expenses for an employee; and if he will make a statement as to the circumstances.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the costs of individual removals is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The management side of the General Whitley Council is currently reviewing the working of the agreement and has agreed that there should be a survey of a representative sample of about 40 health authorities to establish reliable estimates of cost.

Health Service and Public Health Act 1968

Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those organisations that have received grants under section 64 of the Health Service and Public Health Act 1968 from his Department in respect of 1984-85, stating the amounts paid in each case.

Mr. John Patten: Under our general scheme of grants to voluntary organisations under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968, grants are approved throughout the financial year and a number of applications are currently being processed. The table gives the most recently available information about grants that have been approved for payment in 1984-85.

Grants to voluntary bodies under s.64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968—General Scheme (Subhead K2(1))

	1984-85 £
Action on Smoking and Health	136,000
Age Concern	225,000
Alcoholic Hostels	*65,762
Alzheimer's Disease Society	23,000
Anorexic Family Aid	12,500
Anthony Nolan Fund	6,000
Apex Trust	56,000
Arthritis Care	5,000
Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus	42,000
Association of Breast Feeding Mothers	1,750
Association of Carers	20,000
Association of Residential Communities for the Retarded	10,000
Association of Professions for the Mentally Handicapped	8,000
Baby Life Support Systems	15,000
Back Pain Association	12,750
Bexley Moorings	21,000
Blenheim Street Agency	7,600
Breakthrough Trust	35,000
Brendoncare Foundation	7,500
British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering	265,000
British Association for Service to the Elderly	5,000
British Association of the Hard of Hearing	25,000
British Association of Immediate Care	20,000
British Deaf Association	15,000
British Institute of Mental Handicap	25,200
British Kidney Patient Association	30,000
British Limbless Ex-Service Mens Association	10,000
British Red Cross	10,000
British Retinitis Pigmentosa Society	4,000
Brittle Bones Society	5,000
Brook Advisory Centres	35,000
Calibre	6,000
Campaign for Single Homeless People	28,000
Campaign for the Mentally Handicapped	14,000
Caner Link	6,000
Catholic Child Welfare Council	2,000
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council	34,000
Centre for Ethnic Minorities Health Studies	†15,000
Centre for Policy on Ageing	19,112
Centre on Environment for the Handicapped	†17,500
Cherwell Housing Trust	7,500
Child Accident Prevention Trust	52,200
Child Care	*80,500
Child Poverty Action Group	10,000
Children's Legal Centre	30,000
Church of England Children's Society	*134,500
City Roads Crisis Intervention	28,600
Coeliac Society	9,750
Community Drugs Project	5,300
Community Projects Foundation	68,000
Community Service Volunteers	*28,000
Consortium Race Project	10,000
Contact	25,000
Contact a Family	25,000
Cope	99,500
Coronary Prevention Group	5,000
Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People	40,000
Coventry Voluntary Services Council	11,700
Crossroads Care Attendant Scheme Ltd	66,000
Cruse	100,000
Cyrenians	40,000
Dial UK	14,000
Disabled Drivers Association	4,000
Disabled Living Foundation	245,500
Disablement Income Group	15,000
Disability Alliance	10,000
Doncaster IT Organisation	20,000
Downs Children's Association	10,000
Dr. Barnardo's	*245,250
Elizabeth House Association	4,000
English Access Committee	57,200
Extend	9,000
Family Forum	30,000
Family Holiday Association	3,500
Family Planning Association	*143,750
Family Policy Studies Centre	45,000
Family Rights Group	*9,750
Family Service Units	168,500
Family Welfare Association	160,000
First Key	30,000
Fluoridation Society	15,000
Forest and Gardens (Northumbria) Ltd.	15,000
Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths	19,000
Gingerbread	58,000
Gingerbread Holidays	5,000
Greater Manchester Council on Alcoholism	35,550
Hampshire Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders	15,000
Headway Association	*2,625
Holiday Care Service	4,000
Home Start Consultancy	19,000
Horticultural Therapy	25,000
Human Ageing Trust	9,000
Hyde Park Community Action	28,435
Independent Adoption Society	*4,000
Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence	142,000
International Hospital Federation	*50,000
International Social Service	45,000
International Voluntary Service	18,000
In Touch	2,000
Invalids at Home Trust	1,500
Invalid Childrens Aid Association	10,000
Iris Fund	1,000
Kent Council on Alcoholism	24,051
Kidney Transplant Olympic Association	3,500
L'Arche Ltd.	10,000
Le Leche League of Great Britain	3,500
Leonard Cheshire Foundation	63,000
Liverpool Alcoholism Services	31,900
London Voluntary Service Council	32,000
Mastectomy Association	6,000
Maternity Alliance	30,000
Medical Commission on Accident Prevention	6,000
Mencap	233,750
Mental After Care Association	30,000
Mental Health Film Council	*11,000
Motability	352,750
Motor Neurone Disease Association	6,000
National Agency on Alcoholic Misuse (NAAM)	*310,789
National Association of Limbless Disabled	5,000

	1984-85 £
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders	255,000
National Association for the Childless	15,000
National Association for the Deaf/Blind, Rubella Handicapped	23,000
National Association for Maternal and Child Welfare	19,000
National Association for Mental Health	380,000
National Association for Patient Participation	2,000
National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital	75,000
National Association of Leagues of Hospital Friends	11,000
National Association of Victims Support Schemes	8,500
National Association of Young People in Care	*37,000
National Association of Youth Clubs	48,000
National Birthday Trust	16,500
National Childbirth Trust	55,000
National Childminding Association	111,720
National Children's Bureau	210,426
National Council for One Parent Families	125,000
National Council for Voluntary Organisations	174,777
National Council on Alcoholism	*29,773
National Eczema Society	†5,000
National Federation of Kidney Patients	6,000
National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom	4,000
National Foster Care Association	70,730
National Marriage Guidance Council	30,000
National Out of School Alliance	33,000
National Playbus Association	35,000
National Schizophrenia Fellowship	†30,000
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Children	202,000
National Tape Magazine for the Blind	500
National Youth Bureau	66,000
Norfolk Children's Projects	11,195
Northern Regional Association for the Blind	42,634
Northope Hall Trust	25,000
Nottingham Council for Voluntary Services	22,000
Ockenden Venture	*17,848
One to One	6,000
Opus	15,000
Outset	9,000
Organisation for Sickle Cell Research	9,000
Overseas Doctors Association	7,000
Parent to Parent Information on Adoption Services	5,575
Parents for Children	46,000
Patients Association	6,800
Phobics Society	5,000
Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied	21,000
Portsmouth Council on Alcoholism	13,000
Pre-School Playgroups Association	*361,000
Queen Elizabeth Foundation for the Disabled	40,000
Radio Lollipop Limited	15,000
Rainer Foundation	95,000
Rape Counselling and Research Project	22,000
Richmond Fellowship	*12,500
Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation	210,000
Royal National Institute for the Deaf	42,300
Samaritans	†49,000
Save the Children Fund	*268,100
Sequal (was Possum Users Association)	34,000
Sexual and Personal Relationships of the Disabled	32,000
Shape	9,000
Sheffield Advocacy Project	10,000
Sickle Cell Society	9,000
Social Work Training Grants	68,362
Society of Voluntary Associates	15,500
Society for Mucopolysaccharide Diseases	1,500
Southern and Western Regional Association for the Blind	65,090
Spastics Society	24,000
Spinal Injuries Association	10,000
Standing Conference on Drug Abuse	94,400
St. Albans Diocesan Council for Social Responsibility	1,510
St. Dismas Resource Centre	*553
St. John Ambulance	52,000
St. Katherine Housing Trust	8,000
Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Association	10,000
Tact Sunderland	22,050
Tibble Trust	3,000
Toy Libraries Association	42,000
Turning Point	113,150
Vocal	20,000
Voluntary Council for Handicapped Children	30,000
Voluntary Organisations Liaison Committee for Under Fives	24,500
Volunteer Centre	93,256
Vortex	10,000
Westminster Pastoral Foundation	66,000
Widows Advisory Trust	12,000
Winged Fellowship Trust	12,000
Women's Aid Federation (England)	100,000
Women's Health Concern	7,000
Women's National Cancer Control Campaign	68,000
Women's Royal Voluntary Service	50,000
£ for £ Scheme	395,902

* Only part grant approved: total grant not yet settled.
† Interim payments: grant not yet settled.

Children and Young Persons (Foot Abnormalities)

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has current information about abnormalities of the foot among children and teenagers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We collect centrally information on the numbers of school children who receive chiropody treatment but do not have more general information about foot conditions in these age groups.

Public Social Services

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the percentage of gross domestic product devoted to the public social services in Britain in each of the past five years for which figures are available; and what was the equivalent percentage of gross domestic product for each of the United Kingdom's European Economic Community partners in each of these years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The proportion of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product devoted to expenditure on health and personal social services over the period 1979 to 1983 was:

Year	Proportion of GDP (per cent)
1979	5·8
1980	6·4
1981	6·7
1982	6·5
1983	6·7

Comparable information for other European Community countries is not readily available.

Departmental Posts

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which were the two new posts at under-secretary level and above, the two new posts at assistant

secretary level and the one new post at senior principal level established between 1 April 1983 and 1 April 1984 and set out in table 3.12.12 of volume 2 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 to 1987-88".

Mr. Whitney: The increase shown at under-secretary level and above reflects the creation of two new posts. One is that of the director of the operational strategy for social security, leading a major development programme for the use of information technology in our operations; the second is that of the chief adjudication officer, who advises adjudication officers on the performance of their functions under the various legislative provisions of social security, supplementary benefit, child benefit and family income supplement.

At the assistant secretary and senior principal level the figures shown in the table mask higher numbers of changes, both additions and reductions, about which I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Emergency Bed Service

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the staffing levels of the emergency bed service in each single year since 1980.

Mr. John Patten: We do not collect the sort of detailed information centrally which would be required to answer fully the hon. Member's question.

The hon. Member may wish to seek further information from the chairman of the Lewisham and North Southwark health authority, to whose authority the day-to-day running of the service has been delegated.

Cot Deaths

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of cot deaths in 1984 occurred within families living in rural areas.

Mr. John Patten: Figures for the full year 1984 are not yet available. Of the 956 deaths in the first three quarters of 1984 with mention of cot death or similar term on the death certificate, 93 (9·7 per cent.) were usually resident in the 78 county districts which were classified in the 1981 census preliminary report as "Remoter largely rural, districts". These districts contain approximately 10 per cent. of the population of England and Wales.

Prescription Charges

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the rates at which prescription charges have been increased in each single year since June 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is as follows:

Prescription charges

Date/Year	*Level of charge Pence*	*Rate of increase Per cent.*
Before June 1979	20	—
16 July 1979	45	125
1 April 1980	70	122
1 December 1980	100	
1 April 1981	100	0
1 April 1982	130	30
1 April 1983	140	7·7
1 April 1984	160	14·3

Limited List Prescribing

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he did not consult the presidents of the medical royal colleges before making his proposals for the limited list of drugs prescribable within the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Over the last two years there has been a large amount of debate involving the Government and members and representative of the medical profession on the subject of containing drug costs, and the profession's views are well known. I do not see that further private consultations before we announced the beginning of public consultation would have served any useful purpose. We have of course now been consulting with the medical and pharmaceutical professions about the limited list for almost three months since my right hon. Friend's announcement on 8 November 1984.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he proposes to announce the final, definitive list of medicines which will be prescribable under the National Health Service from 1 April; when he proposes to announce the final, definitive list of medicines which will not be prescribable under the National Health Service from the same date; and whether he intends to publish on the same dates the criteria by which both prescribable and non-prescribable medicines have been selected for inclusion in those lists.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We will make a comprehensive announcement as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of proprietary medicines dispensed to people on free National Health Service prescriptions he expects will be sold across the counter as a result of his limited list proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is our intention that the drugs on the final list should meet all clinical needs. While some patients may prefer to buy a favourite brand name drug, we have made no estimate of their potential numbers.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he regulates existing limited lists for prescribing in hospital.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. Where they exist hospital formularies are drawn up locally, usually by local drug and therapeutic committees.

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has had about the availability of laxatives under the National Health Service sufficient to provide relief in all cases of constipation, following the introduction of his proposed limited list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received a number of comments about the laxatives to remain available on National Health Service prescription under our limited list proposals. We are considering them all carefully. I can assure my hon. Friend that it is our intention that an adequate range of laxatives should continue to be prescribable under the National Health Service.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department, which provides services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Child Benefit

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration he has given to the possibility of introducing differential rates of child benefit using the same age bands and benefit ratios as for supplementary benefit children's scale rates.

Mr. Whitney: The social security review has considered a wide range of options, including the possibility of introducing differential rates of child benefit. We hope to be in a position to announce the conclusions of this review in the course of the next few months.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what savings would ensue if differential rates of child benefit were introduced using the same age bands and benefits ratios as for supplementary benefit children's scale rates.

Mr. Whitney: The savings would depend upon the levels of benefit chosen.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has recently recieved advocating the introduction of differential rates of child benefit using the same age bands and benefit ratios as for supplementary benefit children's scale rates.

Mr. Whitney: In those precise terms, none.

Highgate Offices (Private Security Firms)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he proposes to use private security firms at his Department's Highgate office.

Mr. Whitney: There are no plans to use private security firms at the Department's Highgate office.

Special Claims Control Unit

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the cost of the special claims control unit fraud investigation at his Department's Highgate office in 1984; how many claimants were visited and over what period; how many repeat visits were made and over what period; how many claimants investigated were taken off benefit or had their benefit reduced; what was the amount of benefit per week this saved; and how many of the people taken off benefit successfully reclaimed benefit in 1984 and in what period.

Mr. Whitney: The one exercise carried out by a specialist claims control team at the Highgate office in 1984 took place between 28 May and 6 July. During this period 55 current claims were examined and as a result 16 claimants stopped receiving benefit and two others had the amount of their benefit reduced. The total amount of benefit per week saved was £1,084·91, which in a full year would total £56,415. Only one of the claimants whose benefit was ceased or reduced made a repeat claim in 1984 and that was made on 14 September. The cost of the exercise was £5,400.

Hospital and Community Medicine Services (Greater London)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what effects the recently announced allocation of funds to National Health Service regions is expected to have on the hospital and community medicine services in Greater London.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have increased the cash available for running hospital and community health services in England by £500 million for 1985-86; an increase of 5½ per cent. which is a clear 1 per cent. above forecast inflation. Allocations have been made to regional health authorities broadly on the basis of the recommendations of the Resource Allocation Working Party designed to secure a fairer distribution of National Health Service resources. The Thames regions, currently funded at above average levels, will accordingly receive a smaller increase, slightly less than forecast inflation. We do not envisage any reduction of health service activity in London arising from this. All regions have major cost improvement programmes which in the case of London should release sufficient resources to fund some growth and development of priority services.

Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the effects of privatisation on standards of cleanliness at Addenbrooke's hospital, Cambridge.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Domestic cleaning services have been provided by private contractors at Addenbrooke's hospital, Hills road, since 1961. I understand that the Cambridge health authority is carefully monitoring the current contract to ensure satisfactory standards of cleanliness.

Monroe Devis Maternity Home, Warwickshire

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what are the financial grounds on which the closure of the Monroe Devis maternity home in Warwickshire can be initiated;

(2) whether he will bear in mind the effects of the indefinite suspension of the plans to build phase II of the district general hospital at Warwick when considering the proposed closure of the Monroe Devis maternity home;

(3) what consideration has been given to the adequacy of Gay block at Warneford hospital, Leamington Spa, as the sole future maternity unit for the district should the Monroe Devis maternity home be closed;

(4) whether in view of the proposed closure of the Monroe Devis maternity home, an extension of the ambulance service in Warwickshire has been considered or costed.

Mr. John Patten: South Warwickshire health authority's proposals for transfer of maternity services from the Monroe Devis maternity home were estimated to produce a recurring annual saving of £180,000 for development of services for the mentally handicapped and the mentally ill. The proposals have come to the Department for decision because the Community Health Council opposed them. In reaching a decision we shall give very careful consideration to the adequacy and accessibility of the services proposed following closure of the home.

Pay Beds

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library documents setting out the formulae and the figures used to calculate the present pay bed charges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall arrange for a note setting out the method of calculation with illustrative figures to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *342*, whether the long-run marginal costs of treating patients in hospitals with pay beds are estimated to be below, above or equal to the long-run average cost; and if he will quantify any difference;

(2) if he will quantify the estimated difference between the long-run marginal cost and the short-run marginal cost of treating patients in hospitals with pay beds;

(3) if he will quantify the difference between the estimated long-run marginal cost and the estimated short-run average cost of treating patients in hospitals with pay beds;

(4) whether the calculation of the estimated long-run marginal cost of treating patients assumes that the National Health Service is free to substitute fixed for variable costs and vice-versa.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am afraid that the answer I gave on 21 January at column *342* referred in error to "long run marginal costs" instead of "long run average costs". Long run marginal costs could be of relevance only in relation to a change in the level of services and have no part therefore in the process of setting private patient charges. I apologise for the error.

The information sought is neither available nor meaningful.

Departmental Offices, Melton Street, NW1

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the number of times his Department's office at 1 Melton street, London NW1, has been closed to the public.

Mr. Whitney: The office has been closed to the public on five separate occasions since 27 September 1984 because of a number of electrical failures and problems with the newly installed boiler system. The Property Services Agency, which is responsible for the maintenance of such equipment, is urgently investigating the causes of the problem.

Information and Statistics

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he does not collect information on information and statistics known to be collected by regional health authorities;

(2) whether he will list in the *Official Report* the statistics and information he requires regional health authorities to collect but which are not made available centrally.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

General Practitioner (Dispensing)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will introduce amendments to the regulations applying to general practitioner dispensing so as to permit general practitioners to sell medicines that will no longer be available on National Health Service prescription.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Handicapped Children

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make available the report of his Department's social work service on services for handicapped children.

Mr. Newton: I have placed in the Library copies of a recent report on services for handicapped children by the social work service of DHSS. The report is also being made available to directors of social services and to appropriate statutory and voluntary bodies. It provides an authoritative view of contemporary social services for handicapped children, and should prove to be of value to directors by providing information which they can use to appraise their own services.

The report reflects the need for policies and systems which consider the handicapped child first of all as a child but also provide social services, often in collaboration with other agencies, appropriate to the particular handicap and handicaps. Its recommendations are designed to assist local authorities to remedy known deficiencies by making more cost-effective use of the resources available. Many are directed towards improvements in assessment, review and collaborative arrangements.

Dentists

Mrs. Currie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will show, for the year 1979 and for the most recent year available (i) the total number of dentists employed by, or under contract to, the National Health Service, (ii) the average income of a dentist under contract to the National Health Service, both in money and real terms and (iii) the total cost to the National Health Service of dentistry in money and real terms.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 1 February 1985, c. *360*]: The information is as follows (all figures are for England, except where indicated).

*Total number of dentists employed by or under contract to the NHS**

	Number
1979	15,226
1983	16,773

* To reduce duplication, these figures exclude hospital practitioners, part-time hospital dental officers, occasional sessional staff in the community dental service and locum appointments. Figures relate to 30 September in each year.

*Average gross income of a dentist under contract to the NHS**

	£
1979-80 cash	28,374
1979-80†	41,165
1983-84 cash	43,187

* Gross income includes reimbursement of average practice expenses. Figures are for England and Wales and exclude the earnings of dentists who did not work for the whole year and a small number in other groups.
† At 1983-84 prices.

Cost to the NHS of dentistry net of income from General Dental Service patients' charges*

	£ million
1979-80 cash	314·139
1979-80†	455·753
1983-84 cash	506·946

* Excluding the costs of the Dental Estimates Board and family practitioner committees, the costs of dental staff employed by health authorities on administrative duties and, for the hospital and community services, current expenditure on accommodation, heating, lighting and support services generally and all capital expenditure.
† At 1983-84 prices.

Resettlement Units

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many men, and how many women are currently living in his Department's reception centres; and if he will give comparable figures for each year since 1974.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 January 1985, c. *166*]: On 30 November 1984, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 1,528 men and 50 women living in the Department's resettlement units (formerly reception centres). Comparable figures for previous years are:

	Men	Women
1983*	1,634	43
1982	1,818	30
1981	1,700	21
1980	2,088	56
1979	1,695	40

* The figures quoted for 1983 are an average for the month of November.

No figures are available for the period 1974 to 1978.

ENERGY

Home Insulation

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of the advertising budget for 1984-85 will be specifically allocated to the homes insulation schemes.

Mr. David Hunt: There is no specific allocation within the Energy Efficiency Office's advertising budget for publicity for the homes insulation schemes which are administered by the Department of the Environment and the Scottish and Welsh Offices.

However, approximately £100,000 has so far been spent in 1984-85 publicising the schemes in advertisements, supporting leaflets and other material produced by the Energy Efficiency Office.

CEGB (Oil Costs)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the cost of oil to the Central Electricity Generating Board for each year since 1972-73 and the cost in the current financial year to date.

Mr. Goodlad: The purchase of fuel for generation is a matter for the CEGB.

Electricity Supplies

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Islington, North on 28 January, *Official Report*, column 11, if he will now list *(a)* the length and incidence of all voltage reductions since 1 March 1984 in electricity supply and *(b)* the comparative figures for each year since 1972.

Mr. Goodlad: I understand from the chairman of the CEGB that, as my right hon. Friend indicated on 28 January, there has been one voltage reduction since 1 March 1984 which lasted for 31 minutes. I am advised that the average number of voltage reductions from 1972-73 to date (excluding the miners' dispute in 1973-74) is 3·08 per year. The cumulative length of these reductions amounts to some 117 hours. The day-to-day operation of the integrated generation and transmission system is a matter for the CEGB.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all the nationalised industries non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Peter Walker: I am responsible for four nationalised industries (National Coal Board, electricity supply industry, British Gas Corporation and British National Oil Corporation) and one non-departmental public body (the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority). In addition, my Department from time to time makes small grant-in-aid payments to bodies such as the British National Committee of the World Energy Conference and the Petroleum Law Education Trust. I have written to the chairmen of the nationalised industries which I sponsor and the chairman of the UKAEA asking them to reply in respect of their organisations.

My Department provides the following services:

(i) Gas meter testing (including disputed meter testing);
(ii) Electricity meter testing;
(iii) Government oil pipeline and storage system (spare capacity in this system, which was constructed for

defence purposes, is utilised for commercal throughputs: BNOC manages this activity on behalf of the Department).

The Department aims to recover at least the full cost of all three services listed above.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many miners have now returned to work since the miners' dispute began; and what is that figure as a percentage of the numbers employed in the mining industry.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand from the National Coal Board that since the start of the dispute over 36,000 ex-strikers have returned to work. There are now over 82,000 NUM members not on strike, which is 44 per cent. of the 187,300 NUM members employed in the industry.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many pits are now operating; what is their combined output of coal per day; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand from the National Coal Board that 79 pits are now producing coal. Only 11 of the board's 174 pits have no men working at all. The latest published figures show that in November deep-mined production was 2·3 million tonnes.

ENVIRONMENT

Rate Capping

7. **Mr. Stuart Holland** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the assumptions on balances made by him prior to determining the provisional maximum rates for the 18 authorities designated under the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I am prepared to discuss how I arrived at my proposed rate or precept limits in the context of discussions with individual authorities on possible alternative limits.

33. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his timetable of further parliamentary action in respect of those authorities designated under the Rates Act.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The draft order setting precept limits for the four precepting authorities which I laid before the House on 30 January will be debated later today. My present intention is shortly to lay before the House a draft order setting rate limits for those designated rating authorities which have not agreed to their proposed rate limit.

Water Authorities

11. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the salaries of the chairmen and chief executives of the regional water authorities.

Mr. Gow: Regional water authority chairmen all work on a part-time basis. Their notional salaries range from £34,650 to £42,000; their actual salaries range from £17,325 to £33,600. Chief executives are full-time, and their salaries range from £34,242 to £39,304. With permission, I shall circulate the details in the *Official Report*.

Salary levels of Water Authority Chairmen and Chief Executives

Authority	*Chairman Full-time equivalent*	*Actual*	*Chief Executive*
	£	£	£
North West	42,000	33,600	39,300
Severn Trent	42,000	33,600	39,304
Thames	42,000	33,600	—*
Anglian	37,275	29,820	36,775
Southern	37,275	26,093	36,775
Yorkshire	37,275	26,093	—*
Northumbrian	34,650	17,325	34,242
South West	34,650	24,255	34,242
Wessex	34,650	20,790	34,242

* There is no chief executive post in these authorities.

Housing Statistics

16. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses were completed in 1984 in the private and public sectors.

Sir. George Young: During 1984, about 131,000 private sector and 42,000 public sector dwellings were completed in England.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

18. **Mr. Bell** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest there were in England at the latest available date.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am advised by the Nature Conservancy Council that as at 31 December 1984 there were 2,779 sites of special scientific interest in England.

Water Charges

19. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what average increase in charges by water authorities he expects for 1985-86.

Mr. Gow: A little over 10 per cent.

23. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the likely increase in water charges to domestic consumers in each of the next three years as a result of Government financial targets.

Mr. Gow: A little over 10 per cent. in 1985-86; above the rate of inflation in the two following years.

Borough of Brent (Labour Party Document)

20. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which a document belonging to the Brent Labour Group concerning the recent meeting of Labour party leaders of local authorities on his rate-capping list came into his hands.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I understand that police investigations are now taking place into the alleged theft of a blue exercise book from Brent town hall. It would not be appropriate therefore for me to comment at this stage.

Milk Production

21. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been made to him as to the possible effect on the countryside of constraints in milk production.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have received representations from various quarters expressing concern that the introduction of quotas on milk production may encourage the conversion of grazing marshes in the Broads to arable, and, in addition, have adverse implications for employment in rural areas.

Local Authority Services

22. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has undertaken with the local authority associations concerning any proposals for additional tendering for local authority services.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I shall be seeking the views of the local authority associations and other interested bodies very shortly.

Falkland Islands (Airport)

24. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest cost estimate for Mount Pleasant airport in the Falklands.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 30 January 1985, at column 181.

Household Survey

25. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in view of the decision not to carry out a census in 1986, he will proceed to carry out a 10 per cent. household survey for England in 1986.

Mr. Macfarlane: We are considering commissioning a large-scale household survey in England in 1986, involving about 1·5 million households. A decision will be announced in the spring.

Privatisation (Departmental Savings)

26. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the current estimated savings by his Department for 1984-85 as a result of privatisation schemes.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I estimate that privatisation and contracting out will save the Department, excluding the Property Services Agency, some £5 million in 1984-85.

In the Property Services Agency, including Crown Suppliers, some 8,800 posts have been saved since April 1979 by the transfer of work to the private sector.

Most of the work transferred has been maintenance work. In cost terms, the effect of this has been neutral.

Private Sector Housing

27. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to allow local planning authorities to lay down minimum standards for internal arrangements of private sector housing development.

Mr. Macfarlane: No.

Nuclear Electromagnetic Pulse

28. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to harden vulnerable equipment in his charge against the effects of nuclear electromagnetic pulse.

Sir George Young: Necessary action is taken in respect of defence equipment, which it would not be in the public interest to describe.

Endangered Species (Preservation)

Mr. John M. Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy regarding the use by the United Kingdom of the fund established by the Council of Ministers of the European Economic Community for the preservation of the habitat of endangered species, Council regulation No. 1872/84.

Mr. Waldegrave: In am encouraging the maximum use of the grant facilities available under this regulation.

Block Grant System

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Audit Commission to discuss the Commission's report on the workings of the block grant system.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My right hon. Friend met the chairman of the Audit Commission on 10 January 1985. They discussed a wide range of issues.

Homeless People

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will identify the programmes, or parts of programmes, in the housing chapter of the public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9428-II) which have as their object a reduction in the number of homeless people.

Mr. Gow: The housing programme includes provision for £3 billion of capital investment in each of the next three years. One of the aims of the programme, set out in the White Paper, is to enable local authorities, housing associations and new towns to provide accommodation for those whose needs cannot be met in the private sector. It is for each authority to decide the relative priorities of those in need, including homeless people.

Low-cost Rented Accommodation

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action his Department is taking to encourage the building of low-cost rented accommodation in the public or private sectors.

Sir George Young: The Government's public expenditure plans allow for over £3 billion of public investment in housing in 1985-86. Ministers have encouraged local authorities to concentrate their resources on those in special need. The Housing Corporation's programme for 1985-86 includes £550 million for expenditure on providing fair rent and hostel accommodation. The Government are considering whether further steps, in addition to those in the Housing Act 1980, should be taken to encourage private landlords to meet the demand for homes to rent.

Nuclear Damage

34. **Mr. Neil Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect a 1 megaton nuclear burst at a height of 300 miles overhead would have on the equipment and resources in his charge.

Sir George Young: Apart from defence equipment, no assessment has been made of the damage which such an attack would cause.

Hythe (Industrial Plants)

35. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will set up an independent review of the information available from official sources on the effect on the environment and health of those living and working locally of the activities of Re-Chem International plc and other industrial plants in the Hythe area.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services and I are not aware of any particular grounds for commissioning such a review.

Basildon District Council

36. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the efforts of Basildon district council to save money and stay within the proposed rate limitation.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have no detailed information. It is for the council to decide how to make the savings required by rate limitation in 1985-86.

Capital Allocations

37. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authorities in response to the capital allocations for 1985-86.

64. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards local authorities' use of their capital receipts.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: A number of representations have been made by right hon. and hon. Members, by individual local authorities and by the local authority associations. Discussions are being held with the associations as to the future of the local authority capital control system as a whole.

Leicester (Improvement Grants)

38. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect he expects his housing policy to have on the level of improvement grants for private property in Leicester.

Mr. Gow: It is for Leicester city council to decide how much of its housing investment programme should go towards improvement grants.

Development Commission

39. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Development Commission; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Secretary of State last met the chairman of the Development Commission in July last year. Discussions were wide-ranging, but topics included the commission's financial and manpower resources, the designation of rural development areas and the preparation of rural development programmes within these areas.

Inner Cities (Departmental Review)

40. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the conclusions of the review of the inner cities directorate of his Department; when the review will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Officials have carried out a review of urban policy and the urban programme. It is not proposed to publish this internal review, but the conclusions will be reflected in the proposals now being prepared to improve the delivery of urban policy and the management of the urban programme. These proposals will be announced shortly.

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Gleneagles Agreement

41. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent meetings he has had with sports representatives to discuss the Gleneagles agreement.

Mr. Macfarlane: None.

70. **Mr. John Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is considering any new initiatives to strengthen the Gleneagles agreement.

Mr. Macfarlane: No.

Anglian Water Authority

42. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Anglian water authority; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues are always in close touch with water authority chairmen. Most recently, I met the chairman of the Anglian water authority on 14 January 1985. Among the subjects discussed were river quality, navigation costs and income, nitrates and fluoridation.

Housing Improvement Grants

43. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish the consultation document on the development of the housing improvement grants system referred to in Cmnd. 9428.

47. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to announce the result of his review of improvement grants.

57. **Mr. John Fraser** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish the consultative document about the future of repair and improvement grants.

Mr. Gow: I refer the hon. Members and my hon. Friend to my answer earlier today to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

52. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to increase the level of investment in housing improvement.

Mr. Gow: The Government's public expenditure plans allow for over £3 billion of public sector investment in housing in each of the next three years. It is for local authorities to decide, within the total of resources available to them, what proportion to devote to housing improvement. In the private sector it is primarily the responsibility of owners to keep their own houses in good repair.

Jubilee Park Gardens, Southall

44. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the decision of Ealing borough to build dwellings across the entrance to Jubilee Park Gardens, Southall.

Mr. Macfarlane: One letter, in addition to the correspondence from, and earlier parliamentary question tabled by, the hon. Member.

Planning Permission

45. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is satisfied with the current state of the law regarding planning permission.

Mr. Macfarlane: We have issued a number of consultation documents about possible amendments to the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, and the necessary legislative proposals will be introduced when the parliamentary timetable permits. If my hon. Friend is concerned about problems which may have arisen over a particular proposal, I would be glad if he would write to me.

Boxing

46. **Mr. Pendry** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to meet the British Boxing Board of Control to discuss the future of British boxing.

Mr. Macfarlane: I have no current plans to do so.

Local Government Reform

48. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many further representations he has received concerning his proposals relating to the future of the Greater London council and metropolitan counties since the publication of the Local Government Bill.

50. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many further representations he has received concerning his proposals relating to the future of the Greater London council and metropolitan counties since 22 November 1984.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State continues to receive a number of submissions daily.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by metropolitan county council the expected number of job losses as a result of abolition of the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have nothing to add to the estimates given in the financial memorandum to the Local Government Bill which were based on an across-the-board view of the scope for rationalisation savings arising from the removal of a tier of government, and the elimination of duplication, in all the areas concerned.

Rate Capping

49. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has had from those councils, including Leicester, since he announced their rate-capping figures.

Mr. Waldegrave: Most designated authorities have made some response to the rate or precept limits I proposed. Where relevant information has been provided it is being taken into account.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his meeting with leaders of Labour-controlled local authorities to discuss his rate-capping proposals.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: On 4 February I met councillors from 17 of the local authorities selected for rate limitation, and from nine other local authorities.

They asked me not to implement the system of targets and holdback for 1985-86; not to implement the rate limitation procedures contained in the Rates Act; to delay the timetable for debating precept limits; to put forward a detailed assessment of the impact of rate capping on local communities; to indicate the assumptions I had made in setting rate and precept limits; to restore block grant to earlier levels; and to agree to a joint commission of inquiry into local government finance.

In response I explained that, notwithstanding the failure of the 17 authorities represented to discuss the expenditure levels announced last July, and the rate limits announced on 11 December, I saw the meeting as an opportunity for individual rate-capped authorities to make representations about their proposed rate or precept limit as provided for in the Rates Act. I repeated an earlier offer to indicate, in the context of such discussions with an individual authority, the assumptions I had made in calculating their rate limit. I explained that even as such a late stage my mind was still open if any individual authority wished to make new information available to me, but that time was short in view of my duty to implement the procedures in the Rates Act within the overall rating timetable.

I pointed out that both the rate support grant report which determined the level of grant for 1985-86, and the Rates Act, had been approved by Parliament in January and that I could not go against the will of Parliament by not implementing them. I also pointed out that the target and holdback arrangements for 1985-86 had been announced in the RSG report and would already be influencing local authorities' budget-making processes. I repeated the Government's wish to abandon targets and holdbacks if possible for 1986-87.

On the proposal for a commission of inquiry, I explained that such work was already in hand, in the form of the imminent report of the National Audit Office on the block grant system and the studies of the local government finance system currently being undertaken in my Department.

Water Authorities

51. **Mr. Dobson** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairmen of the regional water authorities to discuss their financial targets.

Mr. Macfarlane: The chairmen of the regional water authorities discussed their financial targets with my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction on 21 November 1984.

Construction Industry

53. **Mr. Frank Cook** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the Group of Eight to discuss the state of the construction industry.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friend last met the Group of Eight in December 1983 and I met the group last July. My right hon. Friend and I will meet the group again later this month.

Rural Environment

54. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent initiatives he has taken regarding the rural environment.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle).

Rate Revaluation

55. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to begin a national rate revaluation.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Bar (Mr. Rooker), on 22 October 1984 at column 491.

Rent Controls and Security of Tenure

56. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations concerning the abolition of rent controls and security of tenure he has received.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: We continue to receive representations from various sources concerning these and other aspects of the Rent Acts.

Local Government Finance

58. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a progress report with regard to his internal departmental review of local government finance.

59. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to complete the internal studies of local government finance.

Mr. Waldegrave: The local government finance studies are at a very early stage. I do not expect them to be completed before the end of this year.

Council House Sales

60. **Mr. Maples** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council owned properties have been sold to their tenants under the provisions of the Housing Act 1980 at the latest available date; and how many of these have been flats.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 28 November 1984 at column 513.

Housing Statistics

61. **Mr. Rooker** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the total housing starts for 1984; and how this compares with 1978.

Sir George Young: The figures for England appear in table 2 of the Department's housing statistics press notice released on 5 February; a copy is available in the Library.

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why the "Housing and Construction Statistics 1972-82" did not include up-to-date information in *(a)* table 11.7 (rent registration: mean registered rents and previous rents by type of accommodation) and *(b)* table 11.8 (rent registration: mean change on previous rent and number of cases by type of applicant); what are the figures for these tables for 1981, 1982 and 1983; and what are the figures for table 11.9 (rent registration: references to rent assessment committees) for 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Gow: In 1981 we reviewed the tables of rents which are compiled from the rents registered by rent officers. Some new tables were introduced and some were discontinued, including those of rents registered for unfurnished houses, flats and rooms—excluding housing associations and decontrolled cases—in table 11.7; and those of rent changes of applicants for first registrations of unfurnished accommodation — excluding housing associations—and of furnished accommodation in table 11.8. The tables of references to rent assessment committees are to continue and statistics up to the end of 1984 will be available shortly, when I will write to the hon. Member.

Council House Sales

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether it is Government policy that former tenants who have bought council houses and cannot keep up their mortgage payments should resell their house to the council or sell on the open market.

Sir George Young: If a former council tenant has a mortgage from the local authority and is in default, the authority may repurchase the dwelling by agreement. In other cases special consent from the Department is needed. We want to see the development of a normal market in former local authority dwellings.

Domestic Rates

62. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received against the domestic rating system during the past year.

Mr. Waldegrave: We continue to receive many representations about the domestic rating system seeking its reform or abolition.

Grant-related Expenditure

63. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his practice

in future, when assessing a district council's grant related expenditure, to take into account the precepts of parish councils within its area.

Mr. Waldegrave: Parish councils have powers to provide a range of services concurrently with district councils, and to raise the necessary revenue from precepts levied on their district council. For the purpose of assessing grant related expenditure (GRE) it is assumed that the bulk of parish council expenditure relates to recreation services. A district council's recreation GRE therefore covers any spending by its constituent parish or town councils as well as its own expenditure.

Public Sector House Building

65. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will provide the number of public sector dwellings erected in 1978 and 1984, respectively.

Sir George Young: The figures for England appear in table 2 of the Department's housing statistics press notice released on 5 February. A copy is available in the Library.

Starter Units (Construction)

66. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is satisfied with the provision of industrial land for the construction of starter units by the Development Commission.

Sir George Young: Yes. In only a few cases has the Development Commission had to abandon intended locations for its starter units because of lack of suitable sites. There has been no unduly adverse effect on programmes as a whole.

The Development Commission look to local authorities in particular to help find possible sites. The preparation of rural development programmes will provide an incentive for the identification of further sites.

Local Authorities (Capital Expenditure)

67. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authority associations on the implications for the future capital expenditure of the recent severe weather conditions.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

Golf Courses

68. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many golf courses have been built on common land since 1955.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am not aware of any golf courses having been built on common land since 1955.

Water Supplies (Nitrate Pollution)

69. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting on 14 January of the interdepartmental co-ordination group of experts studying the nitrate pollution of water supplies.

Mr. Waldegrave: The group had a useful meeting on 14 January. Members discussed the work of the group, the range of membership, the nitrate inputs to water, the present and future position concerning agricultural practices and water supplies, and the scope for action on both inputs and removing nitrate from water and several aspects of the problem. These discussions will be continued at subsequent meetings.

Calderdale, West Yorkshire

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for an exhibition relating to the Calderdale area of West Yorkshire to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I understand that arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House to arrange for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 11 February 1985 to Friday 15 February 1985.

Lambeth

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of projects which will be funded under the inner city partnership in Lambeth in 1985-86 from his Department; and if he will indicate for each project the amount of the bid and the award of funding.

Sir George Young: The projects approved so far by the Lambeth partnership committee for 1985-86, together with their approved costs, are as follows. Where the approved cost differs from the amount sought the latter sum is shown in brackets.

Lambeth Inner City Partnership
Renewals of Time-expired Projects submitted by London Borough of Lambeth approved costs 1985-86

£'000s

Project Title	*Capital*	*Revenue*
Melting Pot Foundation	—	144·5
Lambeth Inner City Consultative Group—Minibus Pool	—	9·5
CCRL—BOACS Hostel	—	*61·5
London City Mission	—	*29·84
St. Matthew's Meeting Place	—	74·8
ASHA (Asian Women Community Workers' Group)	—	73·5
Help 71—Community Worker (town hall ward)	—	9·1
North Lambeth Day Centre	—	103·3
Handicapped Adventure Playground	—	47·8
CAVE Literacy Club	—	10·54
Gresham Supplementary Education Scheme	—	32·65
Renewal of Time-expired Projects submitted by Camberwell Health Authority		
C4/500 Lambeth Sickle Cell Information Centre	—	50
New Projects submitted by London Borough of Lambeth Approved Costs 1985-86		
Environment Improvement package (EIP)	750 (1,000)	—
Environmental Improvements for the disabled	100	—
Gresham Supplementary Education Scheme—CCR1	—	—
Chinese Community Project—CCR1	3·5	—
Asian Community Action Group—Multi-lingual Print Shop	1·370	—

Project Title	Capital	Revenue
Ujamaa Centre Project	8·309	—
Oasis Karting Project	6·9	—
Steelband Bus	3·4	0·4
Basic recording aids for visually and physically handicapped in libraries	10 (pool) (6)	—
Cernege Library—electric lift	(3·5)	—
Cassette players with headphones for visually handicapped in libraries	(2)	—
Close circuit TV system for magnifying print for visually handicapped	(3)	—
External Decorations to Short Life Properties	190 (58·5)	—
Lambeth Short-life Repair Scheme	(190)	—
26 Kempshott Road—ASRA	9	—
Thorlands Community Centre	7·25	—
Nelson's Row Community Flat	5·293	—
Larkhall Community Flat	5·293	—
Lambeth Pensioners' (Non-smoking) Club	29·090	—
Brixton Family Centre—Family Welfare Association	1·320	—
Lambeth Talking Newspaper for the Blind	3·541	—
Asian Community Action Group—Under 5's Resources	4	—
Rathbone Centre	7·5	—
Lambeth Girls Project	(5)	—
Women's Mechanics Project	26·188	26·706 85-86 only
Project Fullemploy—Training for Office of Future	43·7	35
Lady Margaret Hall Settlement Employment Development Project, Microcomputer	10·337	—
Job Creation/Training Fund	50	—
Refurbishment for Industrial Commercial Letting	500	
Environmental Improvements in Industrial Improvement Areas	200 (500)	—
Inner Urban Areas Act Pool	500	400
Consortium Furnishing Enterprise	18·7	—
New Projects submitted by Greater London Council		
Clapham Park Tenants' Association	46	—
Black Roof Housing Co-op	9	—
New Projects Submitted by ILEA		
Clapham Black Parent Group	5·8	0·665
Clapham/Battersea AEI Equipment for Computer Awareness Classes	5·112	—
Lambeth AEI—Information Technology	6·325	—
Lambeth Community Charity Services	5	—
St. Martins in the Fields CE Girls' School	5	—
Corpus Christ RC Primary School	18	—
Johanna Primary School	12	—
Patmore Youth Club—Improvements	50	—
Alan Edwards/Oasis Garden Project	2·996	—
Railton Youth Club—Equipment	20	—

Planning Appeal No. APP/Z3445/A (Report)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date he received his inspector's report in respect of planning appeal No. APP/Z3445/A which was held on 11, 12 and 13 September 1984; and when he anticipates announcing his decision.

Mr. Macfarlane: The inspector's report concerning appeal ref APP/Z3445/A/84/11678 and 18210 was received on 28 January 1985 and a decision will be issued as soon as possible.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department, which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fee, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The bodies for which my Department either has responsibility or provides funding are listed in "Public Bodies 1984" (HMSO, 1984). These bodies perform a range of functions which in some cases include services to the general public or private organisations; information concerning the level of cost recovery for specific services is not readily available in all cases but a general indication is provided in the following lists:

Public bodies providing a free service
Board of Trustees for the Armouries (museum services)
London Docklands Development Corporation (advisory services to industry)
Mersey Development Corporation (advisory services to industry)
Commons Commissioners
Local Valuation Panels
Rent Assessment Panels

Public bodies providing services for which fees are charged
British Board of Agrément
Development Commission/Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas
Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (buildings and monuments open to the public)
Sports Council (national sports centres)

Various sections of the Department of the Environment and the Property Services Agency provide services to the general public or private organisations; current services costing over £100,000 are as follows, based on 1983-84 costs and income:

a. Services for which no fee was charged
Tenants Exchange Scheme

b. Services for which fees did not fully cover costs
Building Research Establishment: advisory and other services
Registration of captive birds
Royal palaces and royal parks
Occupied ancient monuments
Osborne House convalescent home
Cabinet War Room Exhibition (forecast deficit, War Rooms opened in April 1984)

c. Services for which fees exactly covered costs
Building Research Establishment: research work
PSA works and estates services for non-Exchequer clients

d. Services for which fees more than covered costs
Crown Suppliers

Greater London Enterprise Board

Mr. Ground asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will decline to provide financial support for the Greater London Enterprise Board unless the board either allows its business tenants in Frampton road, Hounslow, to purchase their premises or provides them with suitable alternative accommodation.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I shall answer this question shortly.

Airport Development and Stansted (Correspondence)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the letter to the Minister for Housing and Construction on airport development and Stansted dated 24 January from the north west regional executive committee of the National Housing and Town Planning Council, together with the Minister's reply.

Mr. Gow: No. It is not our practice to publish correspondence of this kind. The right hon. Gentleman may like to approach the north-west regional executive committee of the National Housing and Town Planning Council.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 7 February 1985

ENERGY

Combined Heat and Power

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his assessment of the extra employment which could be derived from combined heat and power schemes in British cities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Energy Paper No. 53 gave estimates of the total labour input required for the installation of combined heat and power district heating in nine selected cities. From these it may be calculated that about 3,000 jobs might be created for a 12 to 15-year period by the installation of CHP-DH in all nine cities.

Plutonium Storage Ponds (Inspections)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether the Sellafield plutonium storage ponds contaning United Kingdom origin plutonium from British magnox reactors are physically inspected by International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors in connection with safeguards applied under the United Kingdom, International Atomic Energy Agency/European Atomic Energy Authority tripartite safeguards treaty.

Mr. Goodlad: No. The position on the designation of civil nuclear facilities for inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency remains as stated in my reply of 3 December 1984 to the hon. Member.

National Coal Board

Mr. Rowlands asked the Secretary of State for Energy what assumptions have been made in relation to capital expenditure, current losses and reduction in capacity in arriving at the reduction of £1 billion in the external financing limits of the National Coal Board for 1985-86 given in Cmnd. 9428.

Mr. David Hunt: The figure for the NCB's external financing limit in 1985-86 given in Cmnd. 9428 will be reviewed after the strike. It cannot be compared directly with the forecast outturn for 1984-85 given in Cmnd. 9428.

ENVIRONMENT

Derelict Land

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce the allocation of funds for derelict land reclamation in 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The expenditure provided for derelict land reclamation in 1985-86 is £76·4 million compared with £74 million this year and only £12 million in 1974-75.

Schemes approved so far in 1984-85 will lead to the reclamation of some 1,400 hectares. About 65 per cent. of this land will be used subsequently for housing, industry or commerce. One of our main objectives is to involve the private sector in reclamation especially in towns and cities. To that end we instituted in 1982-83 a system of "category A" projects, whereby schemes where a developer is in firm prospect receive priority funding. There have, in the early years, been difficulties in bringing such schemes to fruition but DLG expenditure on new category A projects has risen from £8·3 million in 1983-84 to an anticipated £9·1 million this year. I intend to allocate up to £12 million to such schemes next year. Together with about £9 million carried forward for ongoing projects, the provision for category A schemes totals almost £21 million in 1985-86.

Money is also available for the private sector and nationalised industries to undertake reclamation on their own behalf without the involvement of the local authority. I am allocating £5 million for such schemes next year, of which about £2 million will be accounted for by projects which have already been approved.

I have allocated over £44 million to category B schemes where there is no specific developer in prospect. Of this, about half is for continuing projects, including such major schemes as those reclaiming the former Consett and Corby steelworks and Workington ironworks. The remaining £22 million is available for new starts. I have set aside almost £9 million of this for new projects in special programmes to which we have a long-standing commitment, somewhat more than last year. These include groundwork projects, which tackle dereliction in the urban fringes in the north-west, the reclamation of coal tips following the CENE report, solving the problems created by limestone subsidence in the Black Country and reclaiming derelict sites for garden festivals, in Stoke in 1986 and Gateshead in 1990. Of the remaining £13 million for new starts, at least £5 million will be spent on projects which will definitely result in private industrial or housing development, even though there is as yet no specific developer associated with the scheme. Finally, as last year there is a further special allocation of £6 million for reclamation on Merseyside.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the main policy objectives of his Department in the field of environmental protection in 1985.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our major objectives will be to maintain and improve environmental quality in the United Kingdom and, through active involvement in the relevant international bodies, to contribute to its maintenance and improvement in Europe and worldwide; and to seek scientifically based and cost-effective solutions to environmental problems. More particularly:

—to work towards further improvements in the control of atmospheric pollution, including the reduction of acidifying emissions;

—to secure a sustained improvement in river quality;

—to establish and implement a long-term improvement programme for estuarial and costal waters (including bathing waters);

—to ensure that the arrangements made for the storage and/or disposal of wastes, in particular radioactive and hazardous wastes, are satisfactory from a safety and environmental standpoint;

—to promote economy and efficiency in handling of wastes by local authorities, and to encourage recycling of wastes where appropriate;
—to ensure that progress is maintained in reducing levels of lead in the environment;
—to ensure that the practical management of the environment is supported by vigorous and relevant programme of research; and
—to promote greater provision, accessibility and understanding of data and other information about environmental protection matters.

Housing Associations

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will advise the Housing Corporation in determining grants for 1985-86 to charitable housing associations that the corporation should make an allocation of funds without taking into account the possibility of private finance for part of a project.

Sir George Young: The allocation of funds to individual housing associations within the Housing Corporation's approved development programme is a matter for the corporation. The basis of the allocation is principally an assessment of housing need.

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the policy and practice for the Housing Corporation on granting a second mortgage to secure its advances for the construction or conversion of new housing association buildings for the elderly leaving a first mortgage for the providers of private sector finance.

Sir George Young: The Housing Corporation normally obtains a first charge for its loans to housing associations in order to ensure the security of these public funds, but it will consider exceptions to this rule in appropriate circumstances where private finance is being offered.

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had recently with building societies about funding capital schemes in partnership with the Housing Corporation for private housing associations which are developing projects to care for the elderly.

Sir George Young: None of this particular subject, but proposals for the use of building society finance for housing association schemes, including projects for the elderly, have been put forward by the housing Corporation's private finance working party and are being considered by my Department.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the effect on the preparation of the arrangements for the transfer of services and contracts following the abolition of the Greater London council of the instructions which have been given to the Greater London council staff not to assist in the process of abolition; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I am aware of the concern among successor bodies that the reported instructions to GLC staff will hamper their ability to effect a smooth handover. I hope that the council will review its present stance and recognise its responsibilities to its staff and its ratepayers.

Fire Safety

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 11 December 1984, *Official Report*, column *443*, stating his decision not to extend the scope of the Housing (Means of Escape from Fire in Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order (S.I., 1981, No. 1576), if he will *(a)* list the organisations which made representations to him in the course of his review of the extension of the order, *(b)* place copies of the responses of all organisations which submitted representations to his review of the order in the Library, *(c)* state how many of the organisations making representations to his review supported increased statutory protection for households from fire risks and how many opposed this step and *(d)* give full details of the consultations he held with tenants and occupiers of houses in multiple occupation in the course of his review.

Mr. Gow: Ten organisations outside central Government were consulted:

The Association of County Councils
The London Boroughs Association
The Association of District Councils
The Association of Metropolitan Authorities
The Greater London Council
The Institute of Housing
The Housing Corporation
The National Federation of Housing Associations
The Institute of Environmental Health Officers
and
The Campaign for Single Homeless People
(on behalf of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Group)

Seven organisations supported an extension to SI 1981 No. 1576, though several attached conditions to their support; none was opposed to an extension.

The hon. Member may wish to ask those organisations about consultations which they had with tenants and occupiers, and whether they wish to supply him with copies of their replies to my Department's inquiries. I am aware of residents' views through correspondence, and from visits which I have made.

Local Government Superannuation Regulations

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects to receive final comments from the local authority associations on the proposed amendment to regulation 3(4) of the Local Government Superannuation Regulations 1974, as amended, which was circulated for consultation in May 1983;

(2) when he expects to make the regulations referred to in the letter to the hon. Member for South Hams, of 26 April 1984, from the Minister of State for Local Government regarding regulation 3(4) of the Local Government Superannuation Regulations 1974 with regard to disqualification from war service reckoning.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The final comments from the local authority associations have now been received, and the regulations are expected to come into operation in April.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total of block grants to be received by each local authority in England in 1985-86 if it spends at the total of its grant-related expenditure

assessment after the effects of holdback, in a manner consistent with his reply in the *Official Report*, 9 February 1984, column *764*.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have arranged for this information to be placed in the Library.

Water Charges (North-West)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from the president of the Manchester chamber of commerce and industry about the scale of likely water price increases in the north-west; what reply he is sending; if he will publish the president's letter in the *Official Report*, together with his reply; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The president's letter of 28 January expresses concern that the charges will rise faster that inflation under "new" financial arrangements, that they amount to covert taxation and that they affect the competitive position of industry. The arrangements have not changed: financial targets and external financing limits have been set for previous years. The increase in the North-West water authority's financial target to a modest 1·43 per cent. return on net assets cannot fairly be described as taxation. Increases in price are always unwelcome, but reasonable charges for water services ought to provide for a reasonable rate of return on assets.

Cold Weather Shooting Ban

Sir Hector Monro asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the meteorological stations concerned, their height above sea level in feet and their daily temperatures in degrees Fahrenheit for the 14 days before the cold weather shooting ban was put into force in January and for the seven subsequent days.

Mr. Waldegrave: This information is not readily available, and is not directly relevant to the decision to impose a shooting ban. The agreed criterion is based on the state of the ground and requires that a ban should be imposed if more than half of the 13 meteorological stations monitored record 13 continuous days of frost. The ban then comes into effect on the fifteenth day.

The following table shows the stations and indicates where ground was reported as frozen between 2 and 23 January.

Station	*Plymouth*	*Hurn*	*Manston*	*Rhoose*	*Aberporth*	*Hemsby*	*Bridrush*	*Blackpool*	*Carlisle*	*Tynemouth*	*Abbotsinch*	*Leuchars*	*Dyce*	*Total reporting frozen ground*
Height ASL	88	33	144	213	420	43	353	33	85	95	16	33	215	
Date														
2 January	O	X	X	O	O	X	X	O	O	X	O	O	X	7
3 January	O	O	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	X	10
4 January	O	X	X	O	O	X	O	O	O	X	O	O	X	8
5 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	X	O	X	X	9
6 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	X	O	X	X	9
7 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	12
8 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	12
9 January	O	O	O	X	X	O	O	O	X	X	O	O	X	8
10 January	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	X	10
11 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	X	11
12 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	13
13 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	12
14 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	13
15 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	O	12
							Ban imposed							
16 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	X	X	O	10
17 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	X	X	10
18 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	X	O	X	X	10
19 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	X	X	10
20 January	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	13
21 January	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	12
22 January	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	O	X	X	X	X	3
23 January	X	X	O	O	X	O	O	X	O	O	O	O	O	9

X = Frost Free
O = Frozen

Temple Bar

Mrs. Roe asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce his decision on the application for consent to move the Temple Bar from Theobalds Park in Hertfordshire to St. Paul's Churchyard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: This application was the subject of a public inquiry held between October 1983 and January 1984 and a resumed hearing in December 1984 to examine fresh evidence submitted by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. My right hon. Friend has accepted the advice of the inquiry inspector, who recommended in favour of granting consent. In reaching this decision my right hon. Friend paid particular attention to the possibility of damage to the monument and to the setting of St. Paul's Churchyard, but concluded that these factors were outweighed by the advantages of returning this important monument to the City where it could be seen and enjoyed by many more people than if retained at Theobalds park. The consent is subject to stringent conditions to ensure that the dismantling, repair and re-erection of the monument is carried out with every contractual and architectural care and to the satisfaction of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Walden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what change he proposes to make to the Property Services Agency's cash limits for 1984-85.

Mr. Gow: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit on Class

XIV, Vote 2 will be increased by £10 million, from £351,630,000 to £361,630,000. The increase is required to pay for consultants' fees to meet the requirements of the defence works programme. It will be financed by a corresponding reduction in the Ministry of Defence cash limit (Class 1, Vote 5), so will not increase public expenditure.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Health Education Group

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what public funds are paid to the Scottish Health Education Group in the current financial year and for each year since 1979;

(2) what proportion of the budget of the Scottish Health Education Group is spent on campaigns to restrict smoking;

(3) what role the Scottish Health Education Group will be playing in the National No Smoking Day campaign 1985; and whether funds paid to the Group will be spent on this campaign.

Mr. John MacKay: Expenditure by the Scottish Health Group since 1979-80 is shown in the following table:

Financial year	*SHEG Expenditure £000*
1979-80	1,252
1980-81	1,540
1981-82	1,889
1982-83	2,136
1983-84	2,386
1984-85	*2,802

* Estimate.

In the current financial year approximately £302,000 — or 10·7 per cent. will be spent by the group on publicity campaigns to restrict smoking. Out of that sum the group has, in its capacity as a sponsoring body, made an initial payment of £1,500 to the National No Smoking Day Campaign 1985 and plans to spend a further £20,000 to promote the campaign in Scotland. The focus of the SHEG initiative is to be the provision, in association with Action on Smoking and Health, of an information shop for the public in the Waverley market, Edinburgh.

Cold Weather Shooting Ban

Sir Hector Monro asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the meteorological stations concerned, their height above sea level in feet and their daily temperatures in degrees Fahrenheit for the 14 days before the cold weather shooting ban was put into force in January and for the seven subsequent days.

Mr. Younger: The criteria and arrangements for the imposition of shooting bans in severe weather are based on recommendations made by the Nature Conservancy Council's working group on wildfowling bans in severe weather which reported in 1982. This group included representatives from the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, British Trust for Ornithology, British Field Sports Society, Game Conservancy Council and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The Government accepted the working group's recommendation that a ban should be imposed where more than half the 13 agreed meteorological stations had recorded frosty weather for more than 13 consecutive days disregarding short spells of milder weather during that period. Frosty weather is defined in this context and for this purpose as

"state of ground E4-5 (no snow but surface frozen or glaze) or E'0-9 (snow or measurable ice cover)".

Air temperature is not therefore relevant and is not recorded for the purpose of deciding on any ban on wildfowling. Three of the 13 meteorological stations are in Scotland at Dyce, Leuchars and Abbotsinch. Where the circumstances so warrant — for example, because weather conditions in Scotland are markedly different from those obtaining elsewhere in Great Britain — information is also sought from meteorological stations at Inverness, Prestwick and Carlisle.

Depending on the information received from the five Scottish stations and Carlisle, the decision whether or not to impose a ban, and the timing of any ban, may differ from that made in relation to England and Wales.

"Frosty weather", defined as indicated, was recorded at the Five Scottish stations and Carlisle on the dates shown.

January

	Height above sea level					
	Dyce 215ft	*Leuchars 33ft*	*Abbotsinch 16ft*	*Inverness 13ft*	*Carlisle 86ft*	*Prestwick 53ft*
5			X			X
6			X		X	X
7		X	X		X	X
8		X	X		X	X
9		X	X			X
10		X	X		X	X
11		X	X		X	X
12		X	X	X	X	X
13		X	X	X	X	X
14	X	X	X	X	X	X
15	X	X	X	X	X	X
16	X			X	X	X
17			X		X	X
18			X	X	X	X
19			X	X	X	X
20	X	X	X	X	X	X
21	X	X	X	X	X	X

	Height above sea level					
	Dyce 215ft	*Leuchars 33ft*	*Abbotsinch 16ft*	*Inverness 13ft*	*Carlisle 86ft*	*Prestwick 53ft*
22				X	X	
23	X	X	X	X	X	X
24	X	X	X	X	X	X
25	X	X	X	X	X	X

X State of ground E4-5 or E' 0-9

Tourism (Expenditure)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the capital and current expenditure of each local authority in Scotland on tourism and tourist-related projects for the latest year for which figures are available in cash and per capita terms.

Mr. John MacKay [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1985, c. *205*]: The latest available information is for 1982-83 and is provided in the table.

Expenditure on Tourism (including Pubicity and Development) and Caravan Sites

Local authority	*Gross capital expenditure*		*Gross current expenditure*	
	Cash £000	*per head† £*	*Cash £000*	*per head† £*
Regional Councils				
Borders	23	0·23	119	1·18
Central	—	—	87	0·32
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	25	0·17
Fife	—	—	77	0·23
Grampian	23	0·05	220	0·45
Highland	—	—	16	0·08
Lothian	—	—	11	0·01
Strathclyde	—	—	448	0·19
Tayside	—	—	—	—
Islands Councils				
Orkney	—	—	50	2·61
Shetland	—	—	—	—
Western Isles	—	—	—	—
District Councils				
Aberdeen	—	—	56	0·26
Angus	—	—	148	1·59
Annandale and Eskdale	—	—	27	0·76
Argyll and Bute	—	—	90	1·39
Badenoch and Strathspey	—	—	22	2·21
Banff and Buchan	66	0·79	90	1·08
Bearsden and Milngavie	—	—	—	—
Berwickshire	—	—	7	0·38
Caithness	10	0·36	23	0·83
Clackmannan	—	—	—	—
Clydebank	—	—	—	—
Clydesdale	—	—	—	—
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	—	—	—	—
Cumnock and Doon Valley	—	—	27	0·61
Cunninghame	—	—	69	0·50
Dumbarton	—	—	4	0·05
Dundee	—	—	102	0·56
Dunfermline	—	—	—	—
East Kilbride	—	—	—	—
East Lothian	44	0·54	196	2·42
Eastwood	—	—	—	—
Edinburgh	—	—	597	1·34
Ettrick and Lauderdale	—	—	23	0·69
Falkirk	—	—	—	—
Glasgow	—	—	220	0·29
Gordon	—	—	—	—
Hamilton	—	—	—	—
Inverclyde	—	—	—	—
Inverness	—	—	18	0·31
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	—	—	—	—
Kincardine and Deeside	—	—	49	1·13
Kirkcaldy	74	0·50	134	0·90
Kyle and Carrick	—	—	261	2·31
Lochaber	—	—	6	0·31
Midlothian	—	—	—	—
Monklands	—	—	—	—

Local authority	Gross capital expenditure Cash £000	Gross capital expenditure per head† £	Gross current expenditure Cash £000	Gross current expenditure per head† £
Moray	10	0·12	79	0·94
Motherwell	—	—	—	—
Nairn	—	—	4	0·40
Nithsdale	—	—	10	0·18
North East Fife	3	0·05	271	4·14
Perth and Kinross	—	—	102	0·85
Renfrew	—	—	—	—
Ross and Cromarty	—	—	15	0·32
Roxburgh	—	—	10	0·29
Skye and Lochalsh	—	—	5	0·47
Stewartry	—	—	30	1·31
Stirling	2	0·02	12	0·15
Strathkelvin	—	—	—	—
Sutherland	38	2·88	39	2·95
Tweeddale		Not available		
West Lothian	—	—	14	0·10
Wigtown	—	—	5	0·17

* Gross current expenditure is gross revenue expenditure excluding loan charges.
† Population figures used are the Registrar General's mid-year estimate June 1982.

EMPLOYMENT

Community Programme

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the number of community programme places currently sponsored by voluntary sector agencies;

(2) which voluntary sector agencies sponsor 200 or more community programme places;

(3) which local authorities sponsor 200 or more community programme places.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in the *Official Report* those local authorities that sponsor 100 or more community programme places and give the number or places in each case.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall write to the hon. Members as soon as possible setting out the information that is available and will place a copy of my letters in the Library.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of community programme places allocated within the borough of Sunderland; and how many of these are sponsored by *(a)* voluntary sector agencies, *(b)* the local authority and *(c)* other sponsors.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is not available in the form requested. The borough of Sunderland is in the South Tyne and Wear area of the employment division of the Manpower Services Commission. On 14 December —the latest date for which figures are available—of the 3,428 filled places in the area, 1,115 were on projects sponsored by or through local authorities, and 2,313 were sponsored by other bodies.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current target figures for placements under the community programme; and how many have been approved by the Manpower Services Commission and how many filled for each Manpower Services Commission area at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) on 26 March at column 29, which set out plans for the allocation of places on the community programme up to October 1986. On 14 December, the latest date for which information is available, 130,027 places were filled by employees. Approvals were current in respect of 152,304 places, but this total includes projects yet to start up or in the process of running down, and also takes account of temporary vacancies because of labour turnover. Information is collated centrally and made available about the number of filled places in each region.

Region	Filled places at 14 December
London	9,376
South East	11,536
South West	8,205
Midlands	24,350
Wales	9,133
North West	21,531
Scotland	17,537
Northern	13,529
Yorks and Humberside	14,830
Great Britain	130,027

Abbeystead Explosion

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the explosion at Abbeystead.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The report by the Health and Safety Executive to the Health and Safety Commission on the explosion at the Abbeystead water transfer station on 23 May 1984 is published today. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

The report sets out in detail how the explosion followed an accumulation of methane gas in the water transfer station.

The report draws attention to the fact that methane is soluble in water and that it can be given off by ground water entering workings. It makes recommendations to designers, constructors and operators of tunnelled raw water transfer systems to help improve safety standards. The findings are being widely publicised throughout the civil engineering profession and incorporated in professional training. The number of similar water transfer schemes in this country is extremely small.

A number of the recommendations contained in the report have already been implemented by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the explosion, the executive wrote to water authorities alerting them to the possible dangers of water transfer and comparable systems where methane may create a risk. Interim advice on the risk of gas evolution at water boreholes has been produced for the guidance of users. Further advice on the wider aspects of methane evolution from ground water is also being prepared.

My right hon. Friend has asked the Health and Safety Commission to report to him as soon as possible on the implementation of the outstanding recommendations in the report; and to inform itself and keep him informed of any issues which local people may wish to raise when they have had the opportunity to study the report.

This was a most tragic occurrence, and the deepest sympathy has been extended to those who suffered loss, or injury in this explosion. We are determined to see that every possible lesson is learnt and applied.

Notifiable Installations

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report*, for the most recent available date, for each local authority area in Scotland, the number of notifiable installations constituting a major hazard.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1985, c. 493]: By the end of December 1984 the numbers of installations notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Notification and Installations Handling Hazardous Substances Regulations 1982 for each local authority area in Scotland—on a regional or island basis—were as follows:

Regions	
Borders Regional	2
Central	22
Dumfries and Galloway	4
Fife	12
Grampian	22
Highland Regional	15
Lothian	11
Orkney Islands	2
Shetlands Islands	2
Strathclyde	52
Tayside	9
Western Isles	1

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of installations in each county notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Notification of Installations Handling Hazardous Substance Regulations 1982.

Mr. Peter Bottomley [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1985, c. 493]: The number of installations notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Notification of Installations Handling Hazardous Substances Regulations 1982 for each county in England are as follows. The numbers for counties in Wales have been given in my replies to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) on 17 January at column 214 and on 29 January at column 89; and for local authority areas in Scotland in my reply to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) today.

Region	
Avon	36
Bedfordshire	11
Berkshire	18
Buckinghamshire	9
Cambridgeshire	18
Cheshire	58
Cleveland	110
Cornwall	8
Cumbria	23
Derbyshire	26
Devon	33
Dorset	9
Durham	17
East Sussex	9
Essex	43
Greater London	71
Gloucestershire	13
Greater Manchester Metropolitan County	61
Hampshire	34
Hereford and Worcester	22
Hertfordshire	20
Humberside	60
Isle of Wight	2
Isles of Scilly	0
Kent	44
Lancashire	46
Leicestershire	17
Lincolnshire	16
Merseyside Metropolitan County	43
Norfolk	42
Northamptonshire	15
Northumberland	12
North Yorkshire	13
Nottinghamshire	14
Oxfordshire	10
Salop	9
Somerset	13
South Yorkshire Metropolitan County	39
Staffordshire	34
Suffolk	29
Surrey	19
Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County	34
Warwickshire	19
West Midlands Metropolitan County	71
West Sussex	19
West Yorkshire Metropolitan County	51
Wiltshire	13

TRANSPORT

Motocross Cycles (Safety)

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for Transport if the Transport and Road Research Laboratory will assess the safety of motocross bicycles; if he has received any representations on this subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: All new bicycles normally used on the roads, including BMX cycles, are required to meet British Standard BS 6102. The Transport and Road Research Laboratory was involved in the preparation of the standard and has no present plans for further assessment.

Some representations have been received about irresponsible behaviour on public roads and pavements by BMX riders; current publicity leaflets issued by my Department encourage safe riding of these cycles.

Wilstead Road, Elstow

Mr. Lyell asked the Secretary of State for Transport when notice of the making of the experimental order to prohibit all vehicles except buses and pedal cycles from turning right from the A6 trunk road into Wilstead road, Elstow, is to be given; and when it will come into operation.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend hopes to give notice shortly of the making of the experimental order, which will come into operation before the end of this month.

Air Services Licences

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to require airlines granted air services licences to commence services within a specific time of the grant of the licence and thereafter to maintain it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: A decision on whether or not to operate a route for which it has been granted a licence is a matter for an airline's commercial judgment. However, under arrangements introduced last year, the Civil Aviation Authority intends to review licences regularly and sector rights which are not being used and whose retention cannot be justified will be liable to revocation. I do not think that there is a need for legislation.

Scottish Aerodromes

Mr. Wilkinson asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent discussions between his Department, the Scottish Development Agency and the Civil Aviation Authority about the future of aerodromes in the Highlands and Islands in Scotland currently in the ownership of the Civil Aviation Authority.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In evaluating the offers both the Government and the authority were concerned that the aerodromes should continue to be operated on a basis which meets the essential social needs of the communities concerned. The extent to which offers would have resulted in a significant reduction in the subsidy requirement was also taken into consideration. We have concluded that none of the offers received was satisfactory.

The aerodromes will continue to be owned and operated by the CAA for the time being but we are considering in the context of airports policy generally if alternative arrangements might be appropriate in the longer term.

Vehicle Examiners

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what action he is proposing to take arising from the reference in the annual report of the traffic commissioner for the south east traffic area to the shortage of examiners having hindered an acceptable level of enforcement;

(2) whether he is proposing to take any action from the reference in the annual reports of the traffic commissioners for the eastern, south Wales and west midland traffic areas concerning the lack of recruitment of examiners;

(3) whether he is proposing to take any action arising from the reference in the annual report of the traffic commissioner for the Scottish traffic area to recruitment of examiners not having kept pace with the work or having dealt with backlogs;

(4) whether he is proposing to take any action arising from the reference in the annual report of the traffic commissioners for the eastern traffic area to the decrease in prohibitions resulting from spot checks being probably due to fewer checks rather than better standards of maintenance;

(5) whether he is proposing to take any action arising from the reference in the annual report of the traffic commissioner for the Scottish traffic area to the shortage of vehicle examiners dangerously limiting control on standards of vehicle safety.

Mrs. Chalker: Recruitment of vehicle examiners was temporarily suspended while the Government considered the scope for greater efficiency of the heavy goods and public service vehicle testing. This led to a shortage of vehicle examiners in some traffic areas during 1983-84. When the decision not to proceed with the transfer to the private sector was announced in July 1983, a recruitment campaign was immediately organised. Thirty seven new vehicle examiners were recruited and trained, but were only beginning to take up posts at the end of 1983-84, the period to which the traffic commissioners' reports relate. Further recruitment is now in progress to fill another 40 posts, which will bring the vehicle examiner strength well up to complement by mid-1985.

Channel Tunnel (Study)

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he still expects the Anglo-French study group on the Channel tunnel to report by the end of February.

Mr. David Mitchell: Yes.

European Ferries

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what consultations have taken place between his Department and European Ferries following its decision to lay up the ship Dragon;

(2) what consultations have taken place between his Department and the French Government over the decision by European Ferries to lay up the British ship Dragon and retain in service the French ship Leopard.

Mr. David Mitchell: None.

London Taxis

Dr. Twinn asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in ensuring that in future taxis in London are suitable for carrying disabled people, including those in wheelchairs.

Mrs. Chalker: I am delighted to be able to tell the House that since I last reported progress on this matter on 22 December 1983, extensive consultation has taken place with the cab trade and other interested bodies and the assistant commissioner for the Metropolitan police, who is the licensing authority for all London taxis, has amended the conditions of fitness to require all cabs offered for type approval on or after 1 January 1985 to be capable of accommodating a disabled person in a wheelchair and to facilitate the carriage of disabled people generally.

I believe that this will be a major step in ensuring that the transport needs of disabled people in London and other major cities are more effectively met in the future.

WALES

Wintex-Cimex 85

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will *(a)* list the responsibilities and functions of the officials from his Department involved in Wintex-Cimex 85 and *(b)* state the date and purposes of the meetings they will attend in the course of these duties.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the local authorities in Wales which have indicated to his Department that they intend participating in Wintex-Cimex 85.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply he received from my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 30 November 1984 at columns *597-98*.

Welsh Language (Educational Material)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that the Welsh joint education committee will publish materials produced for Welsh-speaking fourth and fifth-form pupils by University College, Aberystwyth, as part of its project for his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: My right hon. Friend will give careful consideration to the possibility of the WJEC undertaking publication. His prime concern will be to ensure that the materials reach the classrooms as rapidly as possible.

Congenital Malformations (Review)

Mr. Raffan asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether his Department has concluded its review of congenital malformations in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: My Department's review has been completed and I am today publishing the results in full as a report entitled "The incidence of congenital malformations in Wales, with particular reference to the district of Torfaen, Gwent." I have placed a copy in the Library.

I initiated this review as part of a response to public concern in Pontypool at the operation there of Re-Chem International Ltd's industrial waste disposal plant following the establishment by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland of an independent review under Professor J.M.A. Lenihan of unusual features of morbidity in the Denny-Bonnybridge area. At the outset I asked my Department to review statistics for Pontypool similar to those published by the Scottish Office immediately prior to the setting up of the Lenihan inquiry. These included the incidence of cancers and of babies born with congenital abnormalities. While the figures published on the incidence of cancers in Torfaen revealed no cause for concern, the data produced on congenital malformations were insufficiently detailed to provide a confident basis upon which to reach conclusive judgments. As a consequence I commissioned a more detailed and extensive study covering a longer period.

The review has compared from routinely available statistical data the incidence over the period 1974 to 1983 of all babies with certain congenital malformations in each of the district council areas of Wales. The malformations chosen include those about which particular public concern has recently been expressed, notably specific abnormalities of the eye. For each condition, the rate for Torfaen has been compared with that for the county of Gwent and for Wales as a whole.

The results indicate that for all babies with congenital abnormalities and for most of the specific conditions reviewed, Torfaen had over the 10-year period incidence rates less than those for Wales and less or not significantly higher than those for Gwent. In the case of only two conditions, anencephalus and polydactyly, was the rate significantly higher than that for Wales; in the case of the latter it was also significantly higher than the rate for Gwent. A higher than average incidence of anencephalus in the south Wales valleys during the past 30 years has been reported in medical journals since 1967. My Department has recently conveyed to Professor Michael Laurence of the university of Wales college of medicine, its support in principle to his request for funding of a continuation of some of his previous work on congenital abnormalities of the central nervous system. He has new been asked to include in this work the latest findings on anencephalus and, because of his special interest in congenital abnormalities, the previously undocumented elevated rate for polydactyly.

A special effort has been made to review the incidence of two particular abnormalities of the eye, anophthalmos and microphthalmos, about which there has been public concern. No cases of either of these two conditions is recorded as having been notified in the Torfaen area. The incidence rate for Gwent is below that for Wales.

My Department also examined statistics on the level of spontaneous abortions in individual districts of Gwent and throughout Wales and the ratios of girls to boys at birth in all districts in Wales as well as studying the ratios among cohorts of 5-year-old children registered at New Inn primary school, Pontypool. The results of this work are also published, as appendices to the report. Over the 10-year period the rate of recorded spontaneous abortions in Gwent was significantly higher than that for Wales as a whole. However, the rate for Torfaen was not significantly higher than the rate for Gwent. There is no evidence that the female to male sex ratios at birth in Torfaen differ significantly from the all Wales average over the 10-year period.

The review of conditions covered in this report — apart for anencephalus and polydactyly — does not indicate that the experience of Torfaen residents is in any way exceptional. The Lenihan report may indicate the need nonetheless to consider further action.

In the meantime, I have asked my Department to consider what may need to be done in Wales to improve the present arrangements for the notification of congenital malformations and of any other national data bases used for epidemiological studies.

Residents of the Pontpool area should be reassured by this report. In addition, I am sure that the authorities with a more local responsibility for public health would be ready, together with my Department, to consider any evidence of further concern.

Beef (Intervention Storage Costs)

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much it costs to store a body of beef weighing 300 kg in the intervention cold store for six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Intervention beef is held in commercial stores and information about unit costs is not given on grounds of commercial confidentiality. The overall cost of storing and handling intervention beef in the United Kingdom in 1983-84 was £5·2 million.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Party Leaders (Discussions)

14. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his most recent round of discussions with the Northern Ireland party leaders.

Mr. Hurd: The party leaders have all said publicly that they are willing to discuss whether there is any common ground from which new arrangements for administering Northern Ireland could be developed. I am encouraging them to start practical discussions. The best way forward is for them to proceed quietly and in confidence.

Republic of Ireland (Extradition)

15. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to improve the procedures involved when applying for the extradition to Northern Ireland of suspects from the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Scott: I am satisfied that existing procedures for the forwarding of warrants to the Garda Siochana under the unique reciprocal arrangements for the backing of warrants, are adequate.

Funerals (Incidents)

17. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions in the last 12 months the security forces have intervened to control incidents at funerals in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: During 1984 the Royal Ulster Constabulary intervened at five funerals to prevent paramilitary displays from taking place.

Young Persons (Supplementary Benefit)

19. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many young people have had supplementary benefit reduced for either *(a)* refusing to go on a youth training programme scheme or *(b)* prematurely leaving a youth training programme scheme, to the latest available date.

Mr. Chris Patten: None.

Tucano Project

20. **Mr. Molyneaux** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from trades unions in Short Brothers on the Tucano project.

Dr. Boyson: The trades unions in Shorts have written to my right hon. Friend expressing their strong support for the company's bid for the new Royal Air Force basic trainer contract. Their letter points out the merit of the Shorts Tucano for this contract and highlights the employment which would result both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Terrorism

21. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will report progress on the eradication of terrorism in the Province.

Mr. Hurd: There has been a steady decrease in the level of violence in Northern Ireland and a gradual return to normality over recent years. This is encouraging but gives no grounds for complacency. The Government will continue fully to support the security forces in their efforts to eradicate terrorism.

Sinn Fein

22. **Mr. McCusker** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if any meetings have taken place between civil servants in his Department and Sinn Fein representatives since he took office.

Mr. Hurd: Since I became Secretary of State for Northern Ireland there have been no meetings between officials in the Northern Ireland Office and representatives of Sinn Fein. As the House knows, officials at local level in the Northern Ireland departments occasionally meet Sinn Fein representatives, when this is necessary to ensure that constituency matters are dealt with in a fair and proper manner.

Lear Fan Project

23. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the financial implications of the Government's involvement in the Lear Fan project.

Dr. Boyson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on 19 December 1984, at column 216.

New Ireland Forum

24. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will reconsider his attitude to the report of the New Ireland Forum.

Mr. Hurd: The Government's consistent and realistic attitude to the report of the New Ireland Forum has been to recognise and welcome what is in it of positive value, but to point out that the three specific options set out in the report cannot be accepted since they would not receive the consent of a majority of people in Northern Ireland. The importance of this consent was recognised by the Forum report. I see no grounds for changing this assessment.

Orlit Houses

25. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he plans to introduce legislation to place owners of Orlit houses in Northern Ireland in the same position as owners in Great Britain.

Mr. Chris Patten: The necessary legislation has proved more complex than expected, but proposals will be brought forward as soon as possible.

Hospital Facilities (Bangor)

26. **Mr. Kilfedder** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the need for fuller hospital facilities in Bangor; if he will institute a public inquiry to examine the case for a new acute hospital in Bangor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: None. Any such assessment would be a matter in the first instance for the Eastern Health and Social Services Board, which is responsible for the administration and organisation of health and personal social services in its area.

Terrorism

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the statistics for terrorist activity and security forces' activity in Northern Ireland for the year ended 31 December 1984.

Mr. Hurd: The statistics on security for each year since 1971, including those for the year ended 31 December 1984, together with the conviction statistics for the last six months of 1984, are as follows:

Statistics on security—Part I (yearly figures)

	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Shooting incidents‖	1,756	10,628	5,018	3,206	1,803	1,908	1,081	755	728	642	815 (327)	382 (165	290 (134)	230 (100)
Explosions	1,022	1,382	978	685	399	766	366	455	422	280	398	319	266	193
Bombs neutralised	493	471	542	428	236	426	169	178	142	120	131	113	101	55
Weight of explosives in lbs*														
Explosions	10,972	47,462	47,472	46,435	13,753	17,596	2,839	5,343	11,181	9,059	9,621	11,199	6,923	8,545
Neutralised	3,001	19,978	32,450	27,094	11,159	16,252	2,188	5,860·5	4,430	6,405	9,168	7,300	7,503	6,114
Armed robberies	437	1,931	1,215	1,231	1,201	813	591	442	434	412	587	580	622	627
Amount stolen	303,787	790,687	612,015	372,951	572,105	545,497	446,988	232,650	568,359	496,825	854,929	1,392,202	830,258	701,903
Malicious fires†‡	—	—	587	636	248	453	432	269	315	275	536	499	528	840
Deaths														
Civilian	115	322	171	166	216	245	69	50	51	50	57	57	44	36
Army/UDR	48	129	66	35	20	29	29	21	48	16	23	28	15	19
RUC/RUC'R'	11	17	13	15	11	23	14	10	14	9	21	12	18	9
Injuries														
Civilian	1,838	3,813	1,812	1,680	2,044	2,162	1,027	548	557	530	878	328	280	513
Army/UDR	390	578	548	483	167	264	188	135	153	77	140	98	88	86
RUC/RUC'R'	315	485	291	235	263	303	183	302	165	194	332	99	142	267

* Estimated weight only.
† Consolidated figures not available for earlier years.
‡ No figure for April to June 1981.
‖ Figures in () refer to shots heard only and not included in the total.

Statistics on security—Part II (yearly figures)

	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Houses searched*	17,262	36,617	74,556	71,914	30,092	34,939	20,724	15,462	6,452	4,106	4,104	4,045	1,497	1,282
Finds														
Firearms	717	1,264	1,595	1,260	825	837	590	400	301	203	409	317	200	197
Ammunition (rounds)	157,944	183,410	187,399	147,202	73,604	70,306	52,091	43,512	46,280	28,078	47,127	41,452	32,451	27,211
Explosives	2,748	41,488	38,418	26,120	11,565	21,714	3,809	2,108	1,996	1,810	7,536	5,066	3,762	8,534

* Includes occupied and unoccupied houses searched.

*Persons charged with terrorist type offences**

	†1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Murder	13	71	77	138	120	131	60	45	63	48	50	75	41
Attempted murder	16	85	76	88	121	135	79	39	59	72	96	60	68
Firearms offences	242	631	545	460	353	301	225	177	112	155	173	150	155
Explosives offences	86	236	161	100	215	146	79	40	39	39	41	48	21
Theft act	111	186	239	314	188	203	151	159	128	158	130	119	94
Other	63	205	276	97	279	392	249	210	149	446	196	161	149
Total	531	1,414	1,374	1,197	1,276	1,308	843	670	550	918	686	613	528

* These figures are not available in consolidated form for earlier years.
† 31 July to 31 December.

Convictions—for scheduled offences—July-December 1984

Offence	*Number convicted*	*Non-custodial sentence*	*Young offenders centre training schools*	*Less than 5 years*	*5 years and less than 7 years*	*7 years and less than 10 years*	*10 years and less than 15 years*	*15 years and less than 20 years*	*20 years and over*	*Life*
Murder	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Attempted murder	6	2	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0
Conspiracy to murder	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Causing grievous bodily harm	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Causing explosion	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Possessing explosives with intent	15	5	1	1	0	3	5	0	0	0
Possessing a firearm with intent	4	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Offence	Number convicted	Non-custodial sentence	Young offenders centre training schools	Less than 5 years	5 years and less than 7 years	7 years and less than 10 years	10 years and less than 15 years	15 years and less than 20 years	20 years and over	Life
Possessing a firearm	6	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Robbery	44	25	7	9	0	3	0	0	0	0
Attempted robbery	9	3	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
Burglary	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Membership of illegal organisations	8	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contributing to resources of a proscribed organisation	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Possession of an offensive weapon	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hijacking	16	10	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arson	4	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Petrol bomb offences	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Escape offences	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assisting offenders	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Possessing prohibited articles	13	6	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common law riot	14	6	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	158	75	20	33	7	7	9	2	1	4

Notes on the tables:

1. The offence classifications are based on those used by the Crown and Peace Office in its annual return.
2. The tables relate to persons convicted at the Belfast Crown court. This covers all scheduled offences tried on indictment.
3. Some jury trials are included in cases where the Attorney General certified out of the schedule mode of trial, ie non-terrorist serious offences.
4. Where a person has been convicted of more than one offence only the most serious or that which received the longest sentence is recorded in the statistics.

Recreation and Sports Centres

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the recreation or sports centres operated by each of the 26 district councils.

Mr. Scott: The information is as follows:

COUNCIL AND CENTRE

Antrim
Antrim Forum Leisure Centre

Ards
Donaghadee Recreation/Community Centre and Kiltonga Sports Complex

Armagh
Keady (Cowfair) Recreation/Community Centre

Ballymena
Trostan Avenue Leisure Centre

Ballymoney
Riada Leisure Centre

Banbridge
Downshire Road Recreation/Community Centre

Belfast
Anderson town Leisure Centre; Avoniel Leisure Centre; Ballymacarrett Recreation Centre (Tamar Street); Ballysillan Leisure Centre; Beechmount Leisure Centre; Grosvenor Recreation Centre; Loughside Recreation Centre; Maysfield Leisure Centre; Olympia Leisure Centre; Ormeau Park Recreation Centre; Shaftesbury Recreation Centre; Shankill Leisure Centre; Stadium Recreation Centre and Whiterock Leisure Centre

Carrickfergus
Carrickfergus Leisure Centre (Kennedy Drive)

Coleraine
Coleraine Leisure Centre

Craigavon
Brownlow Recreation Centre

Derry
Brandywell Stadium; Brooke Park Activity Centre; Lisnagelvin Leisure Centre; Templemore Sports Complex

Down
Downpatrick Leisure Centre (Dunleath Park)

Fermanagh
Lakeland Forum Leisure Centre (Enniskillen) and Bawnacre Recreation Centre (Irvinestown)

Limavady
Dungiven Recreation/Community Centre and Greystone Road Recreation/Community Centre (Roe Valley)

Lisburn
Brook (Twinbrook) Activity Centre; Glenmore Activity Centre; Grove (Knockmore) Activity Centre and Kilmakee (Seymour Hill) Activity Centre

Magherafelt
Greenvale Leisure Centre (Magherafelt) and Maghera Recreation/Community Centre

Moyle
Sheskburn House Recreation Centre

Newry and Mourne
Newry Sports Centre (Patrick Street)

Newtownabbey
Ballyearl Sports Complex and Valley Leisure Centre

North Down
Bangor Leisure Centre

Omagh
Omagh Leisure Centre

Strabane
Riversdale Leisure Centre

Work on major recreation or sports centres is due to commence in the near future at Castlereagh and Cookstown. Both Dungannon and Larne are planning the provision of such facilities.

Scheduled Offences

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of cases in which persons were convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland in 1984 on the basis of evidence given by accomplices on behalf of the Crown in which evidence, other than of the accomplice, either forensic, from other non-supergrass witnesses or by an admission of guilt from the accused, was used to obtain the conviction.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *71*]: Courts make their decisions having regard to all of the admissible evidence which is placed before them. It is not possible to identify cases in which the eventual decision depended only on accomplice evidence.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Passports

28. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the introduction of a requirement to present passports at the border between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Giles Shaw: None recently.

Interpol

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contact his Department has in supporting the international detection organisation Interpol in its work; what improvements in its efficiency are likely to be achieved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Home Office deals with the United Kingdom's annual subscription to Interpol and financial provision for the national central bureau of Interpol, which is located in London. Home Office officials also attend Interpol conferences and maintain regular contact with senior officers of the national central bureau. The Association of Chief Police Officers has established a working party to review the working methods of the United Kingdom national central bureau with the aim of evaluating the bureau's existing resources and its future pattern of work.

Laboratory Animals

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regulations and requirements he has issued to laboratory animal breeders; and if he has any further plans for regulation and control of their activities.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has at present no power to issue any such regulations or requirements. His plans for controlling the breeding of laboratory animals were set out in the White Paper "Scientific Procedures on Living Animals" (Cmnd. 8883). Legislation to enact the White Paper proposals will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Special Constabulary

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by police force area, the number of arrests recorded on an annual basis by special constables.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Griston Prison

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Griston prison will receive its first prisoners.

Mr. Mellor: It is hoped that commissioning of the new Wayland prison at Griston, Norfolk, will be sufficiently advanced for the first inmates to be received later this month.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners, and what types of prisoners, Griston prison will accommodate.

Mr. Mellor: The new prison will accommodate 484 category "C" prisoners serving sentences of between 18 months and four years.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners in Griston prison will have *(a)* integral sanitation and *(b)* access to sanitation at night.

Mr. Mellor: Four hundred and forty-eight of the 484 prisoners will be accommodated in single cells with integral sanitation. The remaining 36 prisoners will be accommodated in the pre-release unit and will have access to sanitation facilities at night.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the dimensions of single cells at Griston prison.

Mr. Mellor: 3.375m long by 2.145m wide by 2.480m high.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how far off the floor cell windows will be at Griston prison.

Mr. Mellor: Nine hundred and fifty millimetres.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the ratio of water closets to prisoners at Griston prison.

Mr. Mellor: In addition to the integral sanitation facilities installed in the cells there are 90 water closets for the use of prisoners located in various parts of the establishment. The ratio of water closets to prisoners is therefore approximately 1: 0.9. A total of 95 urinals has also been provided.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the ratio of baths, showers and washbasins to prisoners at Griston prison.

Mr. Mellor: Nineteen baths, 76 showers and 565 washbasins (including those installed in the cells) have been provided for the use of prisoners. The approximate ratios of appliances to prisoners are therefore as follows:

	Ratio
Baths	1: 25·47
Showers	1: 6·37
Washbasins	1: 0·86

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities for education are provided at Griston prison.

Mr. Mellor: The facilities for education comprise a woodwork classroom, pottery and art classrooms, two further crafts rooms, an outdoor activities room, music room, library, two informal classrooms, a remedial classroom, a general purpose classroom and a display area. There are also appropriate offices for staff and toilet facilities for staff and prisoners.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities for indoor and outdoor recreation are provided at Griston prison.

Mr. Mellor: At Her Majesty's prison Wayland, which is at Griston, Norfolk, each of the four house blocks has a general association and games area, group and television viewing rooms, a quiet room and a record playing room. In addition there is a central sports hall with a remedial area. Outdoor recreational facilities comprise grassed playing fields for rugby, soccer and cricket and hard surface playing areas.

Homeless Persons (Convictions)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of people who committed criminal offences in each single year since 1979 were designated as homeless.

Mr. Mellor: The information collected centrally relates to persons prosecuted for criminal offences and does not separately identify those who were homeless.

Naturalisation

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what effect the diversion of Metropolitan police officers to mining areas has had on the time taken to process naturalisation applications.

Mr. Giles Shaw: None.

Syrians (Deportation)

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he will make a statement on the deportation of four men holding Syrian passports on or about 29 January;

(2) why four men travelling on Syrian passports were arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and deported to Damascus on 29 January;

(3) whether four men travelling on Syrian passports who were arrested by the Metropolitan police under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and deported on 29 January held diplomatic passports and were accredited to the Syrian embassy in London.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the recent incident in which Syrian nationals were required to leave the United Kingdom; and what was the reason for his decision in this matter.

Mr. Brittan: Four men holding Syrian passports were arrested by the Metropolitan police on 20 January under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984. It is not the practice to disclose the reasons for such arrests. I subsequently authorised extensions of detention to 27 January to enable the police to continue with their inquiries, at the conclusion of which I understand that there was insufficient evidence to support criminal charges. On 27 January the four men were detained under the Immigration Act 1971, and on 29 January they were deported to Damascus on my personal direction on the ground that their presence in the United Kingdom was not conducive to the public good. One of the men carried a Syrian diplomatic passport in addition to a normal passport; none was accredited to the Syrian embassy in London.

Fire Accident Statistics

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details of the total number of people who were *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured as a result of fires in the following categories of houses in multiple occupation in England between September 1983 and December 1984 (i) detached, semi-detached or terraced houses in multiple occupation, (ii) hostels and (iii) hotels and guest houses.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information for 1984 is not yet available. Information for the year 1983 is given in the following table.

Casualties from fires in certain types of buildings

England	*Number Casualties*	
	Fatal	*Non-fatal*
Detached, semi-detached or terraced houses in multiple occupation	59	748
Hostels and similar institutions*	3	54
Hotels, boarding houses, guest houses, motels*	7	67

* Corresponding figures for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are given in table 30 of "Fire Statistics United Kingdom 1983".

Mr. John Neil

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many letters he has received from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside concerning Mr. John Neil; and how many replies he has sent;

(2) when he first received representations from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside concerning Mr. John Neil; and when he expects to reply.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has received two letters about Mr. John Neil from the hon. Member, the first of which arrived on 6 November. My noble Friend sent a detailed reply on 6 February.

Stateless Persons

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many stateless people are currently residing in the United Kingdom; how this compares with 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The information requested is not available.

Members' Correspondence

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time it takes to answer correspondence from hon. Members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: It is not possible to calculate the average time without disproportionate cost, but every effort is made to ensure that there are no avoidable delays.

Chelmsford Prison (AIDS)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisfied that all the inmates of Chelmsford prison are free from the disease acquired immune deficiency syndrome following the death of the chaplain from the disease; if he has had any discussions with the governor since the incident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The district medical officer for the Mid-Essex health authority has visited Chelmsford prison. Guidance has also been obtained from the Chief Medical Officer for the DHSS and the Centre for the Surveillance of Communicable Diseases. There are no suspected cases of AIDS at Chelmsford prison. The deputy director of Prison Medical Services is visiting the prison today and I shall make a further statement in due course.

Unsentenced Prisoners

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State of 31 January, *Official Report*, column 255, whether the 25 unsentenced prisoners included prisoner 50804.

Mr. Mellor: They included a prisoner whose number was C50804.

Car Radios

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the revenue which would be raised from levying a £5 licence fee on each car radio.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Immigration

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which immigration rule permits the husband of a British citizen, settled in the United Kingdom, to be refused entry solely on medical grounds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I am writing to the hon. Member.

Diplomats (Traffic Offences)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parking tickets were evaded by diplomats in 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1985, c. *576*]: The available information relates to all fixed penalty notices and is published annually in "Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (table 22 of the issue published in 1984) a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Information for 1983 and 1984 is not yet available.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Staff (Monitoring)

Mr. Madden asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what action is being taken to monitor regularly the country of origin of all staff employed in the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beith: No action is currently being taken to monitor the country of origin of staff employed by the House of Commons Commission. The House authorities have however adopted the race relations policy statement agreed for the Civil Service, and an equal opportunities officer has been appointed in the Establishments Office. Consideration will be given to the introduction of monitoring of existing staff and applicants for employment in the light of the results of surveys currently being undertaken in the Civil Service.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he intends to take to seek to ensure a successful conclusion to the non-proliferation treaty review conference.

Mr. Luce: Our policy towards the non-proliferation treaty review conference is under consideration at present. It will reflect our very firm commitment to the treaty which has been successful in preventing the further spread of nuclear weapons and has contributed significantly to the security of all its parties.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he plans with the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics about the forthcoming review conference of the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Luce: We plan to continue to hold regular consultations with the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics about arms control matters, including the non-proliferation treaty. Such consultations usually take place on a bilateral basis, but there are also trilateral meetings arising from the fact that the United Kingdom, United States and USSR are the depositary Governments designated by article IX(2) of the treaty. The consultations have revealed a common determination to support the treaty and to strengthen the non-proliferation regime.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will propose an amendment to the non-proliferation treaty to ensure that no country will provide any kind of nuclear help to countries which withdraw from the treaty.

Mr. Luce: We do not intend to propose any amendments to the non-proliferation treaty. As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) on 28 January, at column 39, we are not aware that any party is contemplating withdrawal from the treaty, membership of which makes it easier to acquire nuclear equipment and material for peaceful purposes. No country has left since the NPT came into force, and the fact that there were three

new parties in 1984 demonstrates that support for this important and successful arms control measure continues to grow.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent meetings he and other Ministers in his Department have had with members of the Sri Lankan Cabinet.

Mr. Renton: On 30 January my right hon. and learned Friend met the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, who also called on my noble Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 31 January. My noble Friend also met the Sri Lankan Minister of National Security on 31 January. During these meetings we discussed matters of mutual interest, including the situation in Sri Lanka. My right hon. and learned Friend took the opportunity to urge the Sri Lankan Government to continue their efforts to reach a negotiated settlement on the inter-communal problem. He also drew attention to the growing public and parliamentary concern in this country about reports of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date members of the Sri Lankan Cabinet recently visited Britain; which visitors were met by Ministers and staff in his Department; and what was the breakdown of costs to public funds.

Mr. Renton: The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister paid a private visit to the United Kingdom from 28 January to 3 February. The Sri Lankan Minister of National Security also passed through London on 31 January on his way back to Sri Lanka from the United States. For details of ministerial meetings with the two Sri Lankan Ministers I would refer the hon. Member to my answer to his earlier question. During these meetings my right hon. and learned Friend and my noble Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office were accompanied by officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. As both visits were private there was no cost to public funds.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those courses, arranged in conjuction with his Department, provided in Britain for Sri Lankan police or security personnel.

Mr. Renton: The information is as follows:

Date	*Number of Officers*	*Course*
26 March 1984 (for 10 weeks)	1	Overseas Command Course (Bramshill)
30 April 1984 (for 10 weeks)	1	Overseas Officers Criminal Investigation Course (West Yorkshire Constabulary)
14 May 1984 (for 3 months)	1	Document Examination Attachment (Metropolitan Police)
9 July 1984 (for 10 weeks)	1	Overseas Command Course (Bramshill)
7 January 1985 (for 18 weeks)	1	Driving School Management Course (Lancashire Constabulary)
7 January–4 February 1985	1	Instruction Training Attachment (Essential Planning Unit, Harrogate; Bramshill and Hendon Police College)
21 January 1985 (for 10 weeks)	1	Overseas Criminal Investigation Course (West Yorkshire Constabulary)

In addition, we provide limited training in the UK, funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for a small number of personnel from the Sri Lankan armed forces on the same basis as for personnel from other Commonwealth and friendly countries.

Republic of Ireland (Minister for Foreign Affairs)

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about his meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ireland on Monday 4 February.

Mr. Renton: The meeting was one of a continuing series within the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council. My right hon. and learned Friend was accompanied at the meeting by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Gibraltar

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will make it their policy, during the talks in Geneva on the future of Gibraltar, that in the absence of a satisfactory agreement safeguarding the nationality and the standard of living of the citizens of Gibraltar, they will retain the option of granting full independence to Gibraltar.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Member to the statement which my right hon. and learned Friend made in the House on 6 February at columns 942-3, and to the answer which he gave to the hon. Member in answer to a question which he raised following that statement.

PRIME MINISTER

Coal Industry Dispute

Q12. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Prime Minister what is the total estimate of the cost to date to public funds and nationalised industries of the mining dispute.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in answer to a question by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 24 January at column *501*.

Welwyn

Q63. **Mr. Murphy** asked the Prime Minister, if she will pay a visit to the parish of Welwyn.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Limited List Prescribing

Q67. **Mr. Michael Morris** asked the Prime Minister if she will receive a delegation from the leaders of the pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession on the limited list proposals.

The Prime Minister: I have received no requests for a meeting from either organisation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health have already met representatives of both the industry and the profession in recent weeks.

Libya (British Detainees)

Q73. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Prime Minister what recent representations she has made to the Libyan authorities, including Colonel Gaddafi, about the detention of Britons in Libya.

The Prime Minister: I warmly welcome the release of the four Britons who have been held in Libya since mid-May 1984. During their detention, we have made representations through a variety of channels, especially the Italian protecting power, to press for the earliest possible release of the hostages. We have also worked closely with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been in constant contact with his special representative, Mr. Terry Waite. I am deeply grateful to them both for the humanitarian mission which Mr. Terry Waite has undertaken to secure the hostages' freedom, and I should like to pay tribute to the patience and outstanding skill with which Mr. Waite successfully completed his mission.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury

Q92. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Prime Minister if she will dismiss the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

The Prime Minister: No.

Young Persons (Training)

Q106. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement about the employment and training opportunities which exist for young people in British industry.

The Prime Minister: Although only industry and commerce can create sustainable jobs, the Government are concerned to see that there are constructive and worthwhile opportunities for young people to have proper training whether employed or unemployed. Much has already been achieved, particularly through the youth training scheme, and the Government are currently reviewing the range of provision for young people. But employers will continue to have a key role in providing training, if it is to be relevant to industry's needs.

Craigmaddie

Q16. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Craigmaddie.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Teesside

Q76. **Mr. Bell** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Teesside.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Racial Equality (Code)

Mr. Cohen asked the Prime Minister what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to ensure that the Commission for Racial Equality's code of practice is adhered to by those who supply goods and services under contract to Her Majesty's Government; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: On a number of occasions Ministers have made clear their support for the code and its recommendations for good employment practice. Since the code came into operation on 1 April 1984, the Department of Employment's race relations employment advisory service has been in regular contact with industry, including many firms which supply goods and services under contract to Her Majesty's Government, seeking to persuade them to consider and apply the practical guidance given in the code.

Chile

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will list all public statements made by Ministers since April 1981 on the regime in Chile.

The Prime Minister [*pursuant to her reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *23*]: The information is as follows:

House of Lords

Vol 425 Col 569-70
Vol 455 Col 776

House of Commons

Vol 5 Col 190-91
Vol 7 Col 213, 287
Vol 10 Col 318, 335
Vol 17 Col 294-95
Vol 18 Col 17, 18
Vol 21 Col 135
Vol 22 Col 244-45
Vol 25 Col 197, 198
Vol 26 Col 164-65, 202-03, 336
Vol 27 Col 36
Vol 29 Col 209
Vol 32 Col 270
Vol 33 Col 838-39, 855
Vol 38 Col 213
Vol 40 Col 795
Vol 42 Col 321
Vol 45 Col 111, 383
Vol 46 Col 168, 364, 365
Vol 50 Col 304, 305
Vol 55 Col 614
Vol 57 Col 191, 192, 193
Vol 58 Col 496
Vol 59 Col 153
Vol 62 Col 481
Vol 65 Col 271
Vol 67 Col 248, 249
Vol 68 Col 566, 579
Vol 69 Col 299, 373, 520

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will list all meetings held between Ministers and members of the Chilean Government and military since April 1982; and what was the purpose of each meeting.

The Prime Minister [*pursuant to her reply*, 28 January 1985, c. *23*.]:

(a) The visit to Chile in September 1982 of the then. Minister for Trade, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Rees), to review commercial relations.

(b) A brief courtesy call on the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement, my hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Mr. Pattie), during the service visit of General Matthei, the commander-in-chief of the Chilean air force in March 1983.

(c) Farewell ministerial calls in March 1983 by the outgoing Chilean ambassador, consequent upon his appointment as Chilean Minister for Foreign Affairs.

(d) Visit to Chile in April 1983 by the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) to review our bilateral relations.

(e) Meetings between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Chilean Foreign Minister at the United Nations General Assembly in 1982, 1983 and 1984 as part of the normal series of bilateral meetings between Foreign Ministers on these occasions.

(f) A meeting between the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), and the Chilean Foreign Minister, as part of the series of courtesy meetings between foreign representatives to the inauguration of the new President of Ecuador, in August 1984.

Engagements

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

Mr. John M. Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

Mr. Beith asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

Mr. Loyden asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Nellist asked the Prime Minister which Government Departments were involved in the recent visit to the United Kingdom by members of the Sri Lankan Government.

The Prime Minister: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office was the only Government Department involved in the recent visits. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, in the course of a private visit to the United Kingdom, called on my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 30 January and on my noble Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Baroness Young, on 31 January. The Sri Lankan Minister of National Security, who paid a private visit to the United Kingdom on 31 January, also called on my noble Friend Baroness Young.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Telecom (Northern Ireland)

29. **Mr. Maginnis** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ensure that appropriate security checks are applied for employees of British Telecom in Northern Ireland whose duties have security implications.

Mr. Butcher: I can confirm that British Telecom, as for any company with employees involved in security related work, complies with the Government's requirement that all necessary security checks are carried out.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the total of United Kingdom overseas investment since May 1979 in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* non-manufacturing, showing the proportions invested in the European Economic Community, other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development members and non-Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, respectively.

Mr. Channon: The information available relates to overseas direct investment between 1979 and 1982 and is given in the table.

Total net outward direct investment (excluding oil) 1979-82

	Manufacturing	*Non-manufacturing*
World total £ million	6,660	7,373
Share of world total (percentage):		
EC	11·5	6·2
OECD other than EC	67·4	66·1
Non-OECD	21·1	27·7

Pirate Radio Stations

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has taken any steps, or proposes to take any, in relation to radio stations operating illegally in British territorial waters in interference with stations operating legally from the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Butcher: No radio broadcasting station operates in British territorial waters. If one did, my Department would take vigorous action against it, particularly if it were interfering with legitimate radio users. Two unauthorised broadcasting stations, Radio Caroline and Radio Laser operate from vessels in the North sea, anchored outside territorial waters and therefore outside United Kingdom jurisdiction. The Marine, Etc.

Broadcasting (Offences) Act 1967 makes it an offence for persons in the United Kingdom to supply the stations or otherwise support or promote their activities. Prosecutions under the Act are the responsibility of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on recent raids on pirate radio stations; and if he will list all those radio stations raided.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 6 February 1985, c. *580*]: From the beginning of 1985 to 4 February 1985, the radio investigation service took action against unlicensed broadcasters on radio and television on 24 occasions. For comparison, in 1984 the RIS took action against unlicensed broadcasters on 124 occasions.

Unlicensed, unregulated use of radio can cause interference and annoyance to legitimate radio users who have licences and operate in accordance with them. Some unlicensed stations cause interference to emergency and safety of life services. Unlicensed stations also block frequencies which cannot then be allocated to legitimate radio users.

The names and locations of unlicensed broadcasters and the number of occasions on which action has been taken against them so far this year are:

RIS action against unlicensed broadcasters on radio 1 January 1985 to 5 February 1985

Name	*Location*	*Number of times action taken*
Shoestring Radio	London	1
Skyline Radio	London	1
London Weekend Radio	London	1
JFM	London	1
Radio Gel	London	1
Thameside Television	London	1
British Greek Community Radio	London	1
No Call Sign (105·4 MHz)	London	2
No Call Sign (89·9 MHz)	London	1
Radio Contact	London	1
Metropolitan Radio	London	1
No Call Sign (105·5 MHz)	London	1
FM 103	London	1
Radio Sovereign	Sussex	1
Radio Jackie	London	3
Ace Radio	London	1
Venus Radio	London	1
Asian People's Radio	London	1
London Greek Radio	London	1
Solar Radio	London	1
Turkish Community Radio	London	1

Isle of Man Steam Packet Service

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer to the Director General of Fair Trading the termination of the Isle of Man steam packet service from the island to Liverpool.

Mr. Fletcher: I understand the Director General of Fair Trading is currently considering a proposed merger involving the Isle of Man Steam Company and Sealink which would affect ferry services to the Isle of Man. If the Director General decides that this is a qualifying merger under the Fair Trading Act 1973 he will advise the Secretary of State as to whether a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission should be made.

Japan (Technological Links)

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to make a statement to the House about any proposals for links, funded in whole or in part by Her Majesty's Government, between the United Kingdom and Japan, involving information technology development, before these are agreed between the interested parties.

Mr. Pattie: I would not wish to rule out any co-operation which is to the benefit of the United Kingdom but it must be for those companies intending to carry out the work to agree their proposals amongst themselves before seeking Government support.

Walters Microsymptons International Ltd.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from schools in Bradford about difficulties they are experiencing in obtaining equipment from Walters Microsystems International Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: I have received no reports from schools in Bradford about difficulties they are experiencing in obtaining equipment from Walters Microsystems International Ltd. However if the hon. Member has any specific cases in mind I would be pleased to hear further details.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers (Salaries)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current average salary of a teacher; and what it would be with 4 per cent. added.

Sir Keith Joseph: The average salary for teachers in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England and Wales—excluding special schools—based on the number and distribution of teachers in March 1984 is about £9,700. A 4 per cent. increase would bring that to around £10,100. However, there is a wide range of salaries. The average salary by scale—rounded to the nearest £100—is as follows:

	£
Scale 1	7,700
Scale 2	9,000
Scale 3	10,600
Scale 4	12,200
Senior teacher	13,300
Deputy head teacher	11,700
Head teacher	13,200

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what salary increases for teachers there have been in each year since 1974 set against the rate for inflation in the same year; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: The information is given in the following table. Teachers' pay settlements apply from 1 April and in the table all pay increases are attributed to the April of the year to which they relate, although the figures for 1974 and 1980 represent a consolidation of separate settlements applicable from two or more dates during those years. The retail price index increases are those for the 12 months preceding the settlement date.

Year from 1 April	Increases in the RPI	Increases in teachers pay per cent.
1974	15·1	*37·0
1975	21·7	22·3
1976	18·9	8·3
1977	17·4	3·8
1978	8·0	9·9
1979	10·0	9·3
1980	21·8	†35·1
1981	12·0	7·5
1982	9·4	6·0
1983	4·0	5·0
1984	5·2	5·1

* A negotiated settlement of 8 per cent. from 1 April plus an additional 27 per cent. by the Houghton committee taking effect from 24 May and estimated as providing a further 2 per cent. in the long-term.
† 14·6 per cent. arbitration award plus an additional 17·9 per cent. by the Clegg commission.

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the current pay scales of teachers; and what they would be if 4 per cent. were added.

Sir Keith Joseph: The tables give the information requested for qualified full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England and Wales, excluding special schools where different scales apply to some 16,000 teachers. These scales are set out in the Remuneration of Teachers (Primary and Secondary) (Amendment) Order 1984, SI No. 1650.

Scales of salaries for qualified teachers (excluding Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers and unqualified teachers) in schools, other than special schools

Incremental point	Scale 1		Scale 2		Scale 3		Scale 4		Senior teacher	
	Existing salary from 1 April 1984	Revised salary*	Existing salary from 1 April 1984	Revised salary*	Existing salary from 1 April 1984	Revised salary*	Existing salary from 1 April 1984	Revised salary*	Existing salary from 1 April 1984	Revised salary*
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
0	5,442	5,661	6,252	6,501	7,734	8,043	9,201	9,570	9,915	10,311
1	5,694	5,922	6,489	6,750	8,004	8,325	9,597	9,981	10,287	10,698
2	5,883	6,117	6,732	7,002	8,280	8,610	9,915	10,311	10,659	11,085
3	6,072	6,315	6,975	7,254	8,556	8,898	10,287	10,698	11,031	11,472
4	6,252	6,501	7,230	7,518	8,886	9,240	10,659	11,085	11,403	11,859
5	6,489	6,750	7,482	7,782	9,201	9,570	11,031	11,472	11,931	12,408
6	6,732	7,002	7,734	8,043	9,597	9,981	11,403	11,859	12,363	12,858
7	6,975	7,254	8,004	8,325	9,915	10,311	11,931	12,408	12,963	13,482
8	7,230	7,518	8,280	8,610	10,287	10,698	12,363	12,858	13,395	13,932
9	7,482	7,782	8,556	8,898	10,659	11,085	—	—	—	—
10	7,734	8,043	8,886	9,240	11,031	11,472	—	—	—	—
11	8,004	8,325	9,201	9,570	—	—	—	—	—	—
12	8,280	8,610	9,597	9,981	—	—	—	—	—	—
13	8,556	8,898	‡9,915	‡10,311	—	—	—	—	—	—
14	†8,886	†9,240	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
15	†9,201	†9,570	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

*Revised Salary of 4 per cent. rounded-up to the nearest £3·00.
†Extended Scale for good honours graduate.
‡Teachers entitled to be paid on a personal salary of £3,609 as good honours graduates on Scale 2 under the provisions of Appendix 1 to the 1974 Primary and Secondary Salaries Document, shall be paid on a personal salary of £9,915 (£10,311 revised salary at 4 per cent.).

Scales of salaries for qualified deputy headteachers (other than special schools)

		Incremental point 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Below 4													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	6,807	7,077	7,347	7,608	7,878	8,145	8,412	8,676	8,946	9,216	9,483	9,753
Revised salary*	£	7,080	7,359	7,641	7,911	8,193	8,472	8,748	9,024	9,303	9,585	9,861	10,143
School group 4													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	8,049	8,322	8,589	8,862	9,135	9,402	9,669	9,942	10,215	10,482	—	—
Revised salary*	£	8,370	8,655	8,934	9,216	9,501	9,777	10,056	10,341	10,623	10,902	—	—
School group 5													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	9,006	9,321	9,645	9,957	10,272	10,590	10,902	11,223	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	9,366	9,693	10,032	10,356	10,683	11,013	11,337	11,673	—	—	—	—
School group 6													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	10,272	10,590	10,902	11,223	11,514	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	10,683	11,013	11,337	11,673	11,976	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
School group 7													
Existing salary from													

		Incremental point											
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 April '84	£	10,854	11,172	11,496	11,814	12,123	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	11,289	11,619	11,955	12,288	12,609	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
School group 8													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	11,403	11,721	12,039	12,360	12,681	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	11,859	12,189	12,522	12,855	13,188	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
School group 9													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	12,039	12,360	12,681	13,002	13,356	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	12,522	12,855	13,188	13,521	13,890	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
School group 10													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	12,840	13,167	13,497	13,821	14,142	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	13,353	13,695	14,037	14,373	14,709	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
School group 11													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	13,497	13,821	14,142	14,463	14,790	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	14,037	14,373	14,709	15,042	15,381	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
School group 12													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	14,262	14,583	14,916	15,243	15,567	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	14,832	15,165	15,513	15,852	16,191	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
School group 13													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	14,697	15,027	15,354	15,681	16,011	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	15,285	15,627	15,969	16,308	16,650	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
School group 14													
Existing salary from 1 April '84	£	15,369	15,696	16,026	16,359	16,689	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Revised salary*	£	15,984	16,323	16,668	17,013	17,358	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

* Revised salary at 4 per cent. rounded to the nearest £3·00

Scales of salaries for qualified headteachers (other than special schools)

	Incremental point				
	0	1	2	3	4
	£	£	£	£	£
School group 1					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	9,573	9,846	10,116	10,389	10,653
Revised salary*	9,957	10,239	10,521	10,806	11,079
School group 2					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	9,990	10,254	10,527	10,800	11,073
Revised salary*	10,389	10,665	10,947	11,232	11,577
School group 3					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	10,455	10,722	10,995	11,265	11,535
Revised salary*	10,872	11,151	11,436	11,715	11,997
School group 4					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	11,112	11,430	11,748	12,063	12,384
Revised salary*	11,556	11,886	12,219	12,546	12,879
School group 5					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	12,042	12,363	12,684	13,002	13,317
Revised salary*	12,525	12,858	13,191	13,521	13,851
School group 6					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	12,888	13,218	13,533	13,860	14,184
Revised salary*	13,404	13,746	14,073	14,415	14,751
School group 7					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	13,686	14,016	14,334	14,655	14,979
Revised salary*	14,232	14,577	14,907	15,240	15,579
School group 8					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	14,664	14,985	15,318	15,639	15,963
Revised salary*	15,252	15,585	15,930	16,266	16,602
School group 9					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	15,792	16,125	16,449	16,779	17,112
Revised salary*	16,425	16,770	17,106	17,451	17,796
School group 10					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	16,824	17,148	17,484	17,808	18,141
Revised salary*	17,496	17,835	18,183	18,519	18,867
School group 11					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	18,159	18,489	18,831	19,167	19,509
Revised salary*	18,885	19,230	19,584	19,935	20,289
School group 12					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	19,437	19,863	20,283	20,706	—

	Incremental point				
	0	1	2	3	4
	£	£	£	£	£
Revised salary*	20,214	20,658	21,093	21,534	—
School group 13					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	20,481	20,910	21,333	21,756	—
Revised salary*	21,300	21,747	22,185	22,626	—
School group 14					
Existing salary from 1 April 1984	21,660	22,089	22,512	22,941	—
Revised salary*	22,527	22,974	23,412	23,859	—

* Revised Salary at 4 per cent. rounded to the nearest £3·00

Teachers (Computer Training)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what programmes he plans to initiate for the purpose of training secondary school teachers in the application and working of computers.

Mr. Dunn: We estimate that the microelectronics education programme and the local education authorities have already provided relevant training for some 80,000 secondary teachers. The Government are considering how best to maintain the impetus when the present phase of the programme comes to an end in March 1986.

Special Schools

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the pupil-teacher ratio in special schools for each year since 1979-80; and what are the projected pupil-teacher ratios until 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: The pupil-teacher ratios for maintained and non-maintained special schools — including hospital schools—in England for each year from 1980 to 1984 are as follows:

January of each year	*Pupil-teacher ratio*
1980	7·6
1981	7·6
1982	7·5
1983	7·3
1984	7·1

No projections are available of total teacher numbers or pupil teacher ratios in all special schools including non-maintained schools.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of the total school population has been educated in special schools for each year since 1979-80; and what are the projected figures to the year 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: The proportion of the total school population in England in January of each year from 1980 to 1984 inclusive, who attended maintained and non-maintained special schools, including hospital schools, was 1·5 per cent. The same percentage is projected for each year up to 1988.

Peace Studies

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if Her Majesty's Government have any plans to issue guidelines on the teaching of peace studies in primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend set out his views on the teaching of peace studies in primary and secondary schools in his speech to a conference organised by the National Council of Women on 3 March 1984, a copy of which is in the Library. He has at present no plans to publish further guidance on this matter.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

World Bank Special Fund for Sub-Saharan Africa

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the United Kingdom is now making to the World Bank special fund for sub-Saharan Africa; if such aid is tied to the purchase of British goods; and if the amounts involved are in addition to the figures for his Department in the recent White Paper on public expenditure.

Mr. Raison: The Government have undertaken to earmark, for use in close support of the special facility and its objectives, disbursements of £15 million a year of bilateral aid in each of the five years during which it is expected that the facility will disburse funds.

We are still considering whether in this case we should waive our normal rule under which offshore procurement from bilateral aid is tied to British goods and services.

The money to be earmarked is not in addition to the figures for the ODA in the recent White Paper. In planning our aid programme, however, we always make allowance for sensible new commitments. The important consideration is that the aid should be fully effective.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Polling Stations (Ramps)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer which local authorities have been helped with the purchase of portable ramps for use for the disabled at polling stations.

Mr. Peter Rees: This information is not readily available from the records of election claims maintained by the Treasury and could be provided only at a disproportionate expenditure of time and resources.

Unearned Income

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what gross unearned income would be needed to provide a net annual income of £200,000, £400,000, £500,000 and £600,000, respectively, assuming the taxpayer is married with two dependent children aged under 11 years; and what were the comparable figures in each of the last four years.

Mr. Moore: The information for a married man with two dependent children is in the table, which assumed that no tax relief or allowance, other than the married man's allowance, is available. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £10.

Net income after tax and child benefit £	Gross Investment Income (£)				
	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1985-85
200,000	769,270	769,000	764,790	759,880	475,950
400,000	1,569,270	1,569,000	1,564,790	1,559,880	975,950
500,000	1,969,270	1,969,000	1,964,790	1,959,880	1,225,950
600,000	2,369,270	2,369,000	2,364,790	2,359,880	1,475,950

Taxation

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his estimate of the effect on revenue accruing to the Exchequer of changes in income tax paid at above basic rate, arising only from the change in the tax threshold in each year since 1979;

(2) what was the total amount of revenue accruing to the Exchequer from *(a)* income tax, *(b)* investment income surcharge, *(c)* capital transfer tax, *(d)* capital gains tax and *(e)* income tax above the basic rate in each year since 1979 in real terms, calculated at (i) 1979 prices and (ii) 1984 prices;

(3) what is his estimate of the cumulative effect on revenue accruing to the Exchequer of changes in *(a)* income tax, *(b)* investment income surcharge, *(c)* capital transfer tax, *(b)* capital gains tax and *(e)* income tax above the basic rate introduced since June 1979;

(4) what is the total amount of revenue expected to accrue to the Exchequer from *(a)* income tax, *(b)* investment income surcharge, *(c)* capital transfer tax, *(d)* capital gains tax and *(e)* income tax above the basic rate in the years 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Silvester asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the cost of the revenue of treating husbands and wives separately in respect of tax relief for mortgage interest payments while retaining the rule that such relief applies only to the taxpayer's only or main residence and to a limit of interest on a £30,000 mortgage on any one house.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *319*]: On the assumption that the husband and wife would each be entitled to claim relief for interest on borrowing of up to £30,000 for their only or main residence. The cost would depend on the way in which the total borrowing was divided between them, and I regret that it has not been possible to make a precise calculation. But the cost is likely to be between £50 million and £75 million in 1985-86. If my hon. Friend has a different point in mind, perhaps he would write to me.

Pensions

Mr. Hordern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the savings to the Exchequer if pensions of employees of *(a)* nationalised industries and *(b)* local authorities were paid as they arose and not through funded schemes, with present funded schemes being frozen.

Mr. Hayhoe: Public expenditure would not be affected by changes in pension schemes for nationalised industry employees because in general these schemes do not involve direct public expenditure. These funds are the responsibility of the industry and the pension fund trustees, and the Government have no responsibility for their operation.

In respect of the local authorities, on the basis that the frozen funds would continue to pay the benefits accrued on past service, there would be an initial saving in the contributions currently paid to the funds. This would diminish as the liability for future service built up and eventually pay-as-you-go would become more expensive because of the lack of pre-funding. The effect on the Exchequer would depend upon the nature of the arrangements made.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Hordern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of abolishing capital gains tax on *(a)* assets held before 1979 and *(b)* held for more than two years.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Personal Allowances

Mr. Hordern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how many people would be taken out of tax, and at what cost to the Exchequer, if personal allowances were increased by *(a)* 5 per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent., *(c)* 15 per cent. and *(d)* 20 per cent.

Mr. Moore: Estimates are in the following table. All comparisons are made against indexation of allowances, thresholds and rate bands by 4·6 per cent. in 1985-86.

Increase in personal allowances above indexation (as percentage of 1984-85 levels) (per cent.)	Numbers of taxpayers taken out of tax (thousand)	Direct revenue cost (£ million at forecast 1985-86 income levels)	
		1985-86	Full year
5	450	780	975
10	850	1,540	1,915
15	1,260	2,290	2,850
20	1,670	3,040	3,780

Mr. Silvester asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much would be transferred to non-taxpayers if the value of the married personal allowance and the additional personal allowance were used to increase child benefits; and what proportion of that value this transfer represents.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c. *320*]: The estimated yield from the allowance changes would total about £4,240 million at 1984-85 income levels, as detailed in replies I gave to my hon. Friend on 22 January 1985 at column 365. About £150 million of this yield would be extra tax from people who currently have no tax liability. If the whole of the £4,240 million were used to increase child benefit—and the scale rates of supplementary benefit for dependent children by a similar amount—then families with children who currently pay no tax would receive about £600 million, some 14 per cent. of the total. The net benefit to non-taxpayers as a group — including those without children — would therefore be about £450 million.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Hordern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on the retail price index of a change of 1 per cent. of value added tax on the present range of goods and services now covered by value added tax.

Mr. Hayhoe: A change in the rate of value added tax of one percentage point would have an impact effect on the retail price index of 0·5 per cent.

Tax Havens

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will include in the Finance Bill legislation to limit tax evasion and avoidance through the tax havens of the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey.

Mr. Moore: I have noted the hon. Member's suggestion.

Civil Service (London Weighting Allowances)

Mr. Hordern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the cost to the Exchequer of the London weighting allowances for the Civil Service.

Mr. Hayhoe: Approximately £129 million per annum.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the value to *(a)* a married man on national average earnings with two children aged 5 and 11 years, *(b)* a married man with the same family on two thirds national average earnings and *(c)* a married man with the same family on five times national average earnings, from the expenditure of £2 million to either (i) increase child benefit or (ii) raise tax thresholds.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Pension Funds

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to the aggregate assets of pension funds in 1957, 1967, 1977, 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1985, c. *593*]: Estimates of total assets of pension funds, at end of year, valued at market prices, are as follows:

	£ billion
1957	2·1
*1967	6·6
†1977	28·8
†1982	84·2
†1983	106·2

* Local authority funds within the total were at end-March 1968.
† Net of short-term liabilities and long-term borrowing. Figures for end-1984 are not yet available.

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to *(a)* the absolute value and *(b)* the percentage share of (i) private sector, (ii) local authority and (iii) other public sector pensions funds in total pension funds in 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1985, c. *592*]: Latest figures of the assets* of pension funds valued at market prices are as follows:

	£ billion		*per cent. of total*	
	end-1982	*end-1983*	*end-1982*	*end-1983*
Private sector funds	48·9	62·5	58·0	58·9
Local authority funds	11·4	14·3	13·5	13·4
Other public sector funds	24·0	29·4	28·5	27·7
TOTAL, ALL FUNDS	84·2	106·2	100·0	100·0

* Net of short-term liabilities and long-term borrowing. Figures for 1984 are not yet available.

Quoted Shares (Ownership)

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to the share of *(a)* trust companies, *(b)* insurance companies and *(c)* pension funds in the ownership of total quoted shares in 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1985, c. *593*]: Figures for 1984 are not yet available.

The estimated proportions* of total United Kingdom quoted ordinary and preference shares held by the specified financial institutions are as follows:

	end 1982 *per cent.*	*end 1983* *per cent.*
Trust companies:		
Unit trusts	3·7	3·9
Investment trusts	3·5	3·1
Insurance companies	20·4	20·0
Pension funds	29·3	29·3
Total of above institutions	56·9	56·3

* based on holdings valued at market prices.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department, which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1985, c. *592*]: Details of the organisations for which the Treasury accounts are contained in the Votes for Economic and Financial Administration Class XIII, 13 and Civil Service Catering Services Class XIII, 14. The charges for the services provided are set to cover costs.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of

Commons Commission, if he will give details of the expected costs of the visit by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner to Australia and New Zealand; and if he will explain its intended purpose.

Mr. Beith: The estimated costs of the visit are as follows:

Air travel—£10,692
Subsistence—£6,594

Provision in the estimate of up to £1,500 has also been made in the usual way for other contingent costs which may arise, in particular for local travel.

I understand that the purpose of the visit is to complete further inquiries into how appropriate are the restrictions placed upon the Parliamentary Commissioner's jurisdiction by the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967, and in that connection to hold discussions with Commonwealth and State Ombudsmen, Parliamentarians and others about Ombudsman systems, with special reference to jurisdictional matters. The visit has been authorised by the Liaison Committee in accordance with the normal procedure.

Members (Groups Insurance)

Mr. Chapman asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representating the House of Commons Commission, what changes have been made to the hon. Members' group accident insurance arrangements.

Mr. Beith: The death and capital benefits available under the terms of the policy have been increased to £85,000 as from 1 January 1985. I will arrange for the memorandum by the Accountant, which gives details of the cover and exclusions, to be place in the Library.

DEFENCE

General Belgrano

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the signal authorising HMS Conqueror to sink the General Belgrano transmitted via a United States satellite channel was received by HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Stanley: The signal was initially received some time after 3 pm London time, but as it was slightly garbled it was not until after 5 pm that HMS Conqueror reported that she had received and understood the new order. It would not be in the public interest to comment on the channels of communications with submarines.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consequences Her Majesty's Government envisage from a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons in the world.

Mr. Stanley: A safer world, so long as the reductions are balanced, effective and verifiable.

NATO

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Leyton of 29 January, if he will give a breakdown of the increased level of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation infrastructure funding agreed by North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Defence Ministers in December 1984; and if he will give details of the subjects to be covered by the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organisation studies aimed at producing early proposals for improvements to conventional defence.

Mr. Stanley: The funds approved in December 1984 by NATO Defence Ministers for infrastructure will be broken down into six annual programmes to be authorised in the years 1985 to 1990 inclusive. These programmes will include work services items such as airfield facilities and protection, naval base facilities and ammunition storage sites, and equipment such as communications, radar, and command, control and information systems. The precise programme content and project locations, which will range through the member countries of the Alliance, will be determined according to NATO's military priorities. The United Kingdom will contribute about 12 per cent. of the funding. On improvements to conventional defence, I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 8 of the communiqué issued at the end of the Defence Planning Committee meeting in December 1984, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Systems

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Defence what alternative strategic nuclear deterrent systems for the United Kingdom other than Trident he has evaluated since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: None. As described in open government document 80/23 "The Future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force" and 82/1 "The United Kingdom Trident Programme", a number of alternative weapons systems were considered before the decision was made to purchase Trident II D5, which the Government believe to be the most cost-effective choice.

Wintex-Cimex 85

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the involvement of the home defence system in exercise Wintex-Cimex 85.

Mr. Stanley: Home defence plans and procedures will be tested during Exercise Wintex-Cimex 85. As I said to the hon. Member in my reply to him on 30 November 1984, columns *597-98*, details of the scenario for the execise and the play itself are classified.

"New Statesman"

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what reply the Secretary of the D Notice Committee gave to the *New Statesman* newspaper; and who sought his advice on whether they should publish figures publicly made available by Admiral Lord Lewin pertaining to the operation of Her Majesty's submarines.

Mr. Stanley: Advice was sought by the *New Statesman* in relation to the article in *The Guardian* of 28 January concerning the sinking of the Belgrano. Discussions between the secretary of the defence press and broadcasting committee and the press, broadcasting organisations and publishers are regarded as having taken place in confidence.

Home Defence

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the aims of home defence.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the section of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1984" on the defence of the United Kingdom, paragraphs 407 to 414.

Directorate General of Defence Accounts

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Defence when copies of the report by Coopers and Lybrand into the Directorate General of Defence Accounts will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Butler: A copy of the report by Coopers and Lybrand into the Directorate General of Defence Accounts has been placed in the House Library today.

Harrier (Navigation System)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he will be in a position to declare the outcome of the recent competition for the Royal Air Force Harrier G R mark V inerial navigation system.

Mr. Butler: The contract is to be awarded to Ferranti plc at Edinburgh.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Cell and Organ Culture Tests

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is Her Majesty's Government's policy toward companies offering cell and organ culture tests as an alternative to the use of living animals for assessing the safety of substances.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government are advised on the safety of chemical substances by a number of independent expert committees. So that manufacturers and testing laboratories submitting data for assessment may be aware of the most suitable tests, HMSO has published guidelines on testing for carcinogenicity, mutagenicity and toxicity prepared by certain of the committees.

The Government are funding research on safety testing, including the development of cell and organ culture tests as an alternative to animal testing, and welcome the fact that companies are offering such tests if they give useful and reliable information. However, certain animal tests are essential to provide all the data needed if human health and the environment are to be adequately safeguarded.

Elderly Persons (Care)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what recent representations he has received from the National Union of Public Employees about care for the elderly.

Mr. John Patten: None.

Oxygen Concentrators

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to improve the supply of oxygen concentrators by arranging for their issue by family practitioner committees.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I announced on 3 October 1984 that concentrators would replace cylinders for patients requiring large quantities of oxygen and that they would be supplied through the family practitioner services. Arrangements are being made to implement this decision and we hope that concentrators will be available on the prescription of general practitioners by mid to late summer.

Surrogate Motherhood

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to reach a conclusion concerning legislation to ban surrogate motherhood; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on 14 January at column *63*.

Benefit (Overpayments)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to ensure that claimants of unemployment or supplementary benefit do not receive overpayment of benefit allocations.

Mr. Whitney: Existing instructions to officials are designed to minimise the risk of overpayment of benefits. These instructions are kept under continuous review.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how he proposes to notify prescribing doctors, including those in hospital employment, dispensing pharmacists and the manufacturing companies of the medicines which will, and will not, be prescribable under the National Health Service from 1 April; and how much time they will then have to consider the information before the proposed date of implementation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We will use our normal and well-established channels of communication to provide the medical and pharmaceutical professions and the pharmaceutical industry with details about the drugs which will cease to be prescribable under the National Health Service from 1 April 1985. We recognise the need to give them as much notice as possible.

Abortions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has concerning the total numbers of *(a)* legal abortion deaths, *(b)* other abortion deaths and *(c)* non-abortion maternal deaths in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983; and how these figures compare with those for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in each of those years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Information is not readily available in the exact form requested. However, information from World Health Statistics is given in the table. International comparisons are difficult because of differences in definition. Figures for 1980-1983 are classified on a different basis to those of earlier years.

Numbers and rates per 100,000 live births of abortion deaths and non-abortion maternal deaths in selected countries for 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983

Year		Country														
		France	*Federal Republic of Germany*	*German Democratic Republic*	*Irish Republic*	*Italy*	*Poland*	*Portugal*	*Spain*	*Sweden*	*Yugoslavia*	*Hungary*	*Czecho-slovakia*	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*
1965																
Abortion	Number	45	97	..	†1	50	16	25	..	3	152	25	10	52	7	2
	Rate	5·2	9·3	..	†1·6	5·0	2·9	11·9	..	2·4	37·2	18·8	4·3	6·0	7·0	5·9
Non-abortion	Number	234	644	..	†17	714	189	153	..	14	332	64	70	169	31	7
	Rate	27·2	61·7	..	†27·3	72·1	34·6	72·7	..	11·4	81·4	48·1	30·2	19·6	30·8	20·7
1970																
Abortion	Number	50	55	..	—	45	14	†40	*17	—	79	13	3	32	—	—
	Rate	5·9	6·8	..	—	5·0	2·6	†17·0	*2·6	—	21·8	8·6	1·3	4·1	—	—
Non-abortion	Number	189	375	..	20	446	147	†88	*204	11	128	51	47	114	17	—
	Rate	22·3	46·2	..	31·1	49·5	26·9	†37·5	*30·9	10·0	35·2	33·6	20·6	14·5	19·5	—
1975																
Abortion	Number	*26	29	2	—	*20	3	10	*23	—	31	9	*5	8	—	—
	Rate	*3·2	4·8	1·1	—	*2·3	0·5	5·6	*3·4	—	8·0	4·6	*1·7	1·3	—	—
Non-abortion	Number	*151	209	40	5	*239	92	67	*158	2	82	43	*39	69	6	3
	Rate	*18·9	34·8	22·0	7·5	*27·1	14·3	37·3	*23·1	1·9	21·1	22·2	*13·4	11·4	8·8	11·5
1980																
Abortion	Number	11	..	..	..	..	8	..	..	..	15	8	..	13	1	1
	Rate	1·4	..	..	..	..	1·2	..	..	..	6·2	5·4	..	2·0	1·5	3·5
Non-abortion	Number	92	..	..	..	..	73	..	..	..	28	23	..	57	9	1
	Rate	11·5	..	..	..	..	10·5	..	..	..	11·6	15·5	..	8·7	13·1	3·5
1981																
Abortion	Number	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	4	..	10	1	—
	Rate	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2·8	..	1·6	1·4	—
Non-abortion	Number	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	21	..	47	12	1
	Rate	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	14·7	..	7·4	17·4	3·7
1982																
Abortion	Number	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6	—	1
	Rate	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1·0	—	3·7
Non-abortion	Number	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	36	6	1
	Rate	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	5·8	9·1	3·7
1983																
Abortion	Number	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	8	2	—
	Rate	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1·3	3·1	—
Non-abortion	Number	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	46	6	4
	Rate	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7·3	9·2	14·7

* One year earlier (nearest available).
† One year later (nearest available).
.. Not available.

Rheumatology Unit, Truro

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that the rheumatology unit in Truro can satisfy demand for treatment in Cornwall.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly health authority plans to improve its rheumatology service by appointing an additional consultant and, as resources allow, by providing a further six inpatient beds at the Truro unit.

Rheumatology

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the ratio of beds available for rheumatology treatment to the number of patients in Cornwall and nationally.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The available information is as follows:

Rheumatology departments in National Health Service Hospitals 1983

	Average daily number of available beds	*In-patient cases*	*In-patient cases per available bed*
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly District Health Authority	17	425	25·0
England	1,917	29,014	15·1

AIDS

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has issued instructions to district health authorities as to the amount of information to be given to the public when a case of the disease acquired immune deficiency syndrome occurs within the district.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have not felt it necessary to issue such instructions.

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he issued instructions to the district health authorities as to the tracing of contacts of persons known to be suffering from the disease acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No instructions have been issued. Medical officers for environmental health have responsibility for local measures to prevent and control the spread of infectious disease. Facilities for identifying sources of infection exist, but local arrangements vary. Recipients of blood of blood products which may have been donated by an individual who subsequently developed AIDS are traced by the blood transfusion service.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Hordern asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer if employers' contributions to the national insurance fund of employers operating solely within the development areas were abolished.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that the information necessary to answer this question is not available.

Hospitals (Cross-Infection)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence he has of the level of cross-infection within hospitals in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not hold such information centrally. The public health laboratory service report on the national survey of infection in hospitals, 1980 suggests that there is a 9 per cent. rate of hospital acquired infections amongst inpatients. However, not all such infections are serious or preventable.

State Pensions

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of average workers' earnings the basic state pensions represents; and how this figure compares with other European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Whitney: At November 1984 it is provisionally estimated that the state basic retirement pension for a single person represented about 19·2 per cent. of the average gross earnings of all male employees. Comparative estimates for other countries are very difficult to compile and results must be interpreted with a good deal of caution. For example, it is difficult to derive comparable estimates of average earnings between member states of the European community. Published data for average earnings with which pensions are compared may relate to different months, refer to work forces of different compositions, and the definition of gross earnings varies between countries. Moreover a number of technical factors, such as the method of revaluing past earnings, may substantially affect calculations. Additionally, in order to get a fair comparison it is necessary to have information on many other factors, such as the coverage of occupational pension schemes, which play widely differing roles from country to country, protection for women with limited work records, the level of social assistance for those with inadequate contributory pension rights and the effect on pensioners of housing, pharmaceutical and medical treatment costs.

Subject to these qualifications, the latest information readily available is set out in the table. It is based on earnings information obtained through official contacts and state pensions information derived from "Tables of Social Benefits Systems in the member states of the European countries, Portugal and Spain, the position at 1 January 1984" (a copy of which is in the Library).

Level of state old age pensions as a percentage of current gross average earnings at January 1984*

	Single Pensioner			*Pensioner with dependent spouse of pension age*		
	Basic pension	*Earnings related supplement*	*Total state pension*	*Basic pension*	*Earnings related supplement*	*Total state pension*
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
Netherlands	37	—	37	53	—	53
France	50	10-20	60-70	plus means-tested additional equal to 4 per cent.		
Belgium	20	40	60	20	50	70
Denmark	20	7	27	40	7	47
Germany	50	—	50	No increase for dependent spouse		
United Kingdom†	19	7·5	26·5	31	7·5	38·5

Notes:

* Pensions in France, Belgium and Germany and partly in Denmark and the United Kingdom, are calculated at award upon previous earnings revalued in line with increases in average earnings: if an individual's earnings have not been at least equal to average earnings over the qualifying period the percentage figures above will over estimate the value of the old age pension.

† At November 1984.

Ambulance Service (Northern Region)

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of the genuine 999 calls received by the northern region ambulance service in 1984 were dealt with within his Department's recommended emergency response time standard (Orcom standards).

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this detailed local information centrally.

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many ambulance stations there were in the northern region ambulance service in December 1984; and what are the projected figures for 1985, 1986 and 1987;

(2) how many emergency ambulance vehicles were available in the northern region ambulance service in *(a)* December 1983 and *(b)* December 1984.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect centrally information on the numbers of ambulances and ambulance stations. The following figures are derived from statistics compiled by the York district health authority.

	1982-83		*1983-84*	
	Ambulances	*Ambulance Stations*	*Ambulances*	*Ambulance Stations*
Northern Region*	546	66	†546	66
Northumbria Ambulance Service	253	29	‡258	29

Projections for future years are the responsibility of the relevant managing health authorities.

* Including Northumbria Ambulance Service

† Including 334 emergency ambulances

‡ Including 211 emergency ambulances

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many ambulance men were in the employ of the northern region ambulance service in *(a)* December 1983 and *(b)* December 1984.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The latest available information, in the form requested by the hon. Member, is at 30 September 1983. At that time, 1,279 ambulance men/women were employed within the northern region and of these, 570 were employed by the Northumbria ambulance service. Later figures are not yet available to this level of detail.

The total numbers of staff employed by the ambulance services (that is, including ambulance officers and control assistants) within the Northern region were as follows:

Date	*Number*
September 1983	1,480
December 1983	1,470
March 1984	1,450
June 1984	1,430
September 1984*	1,420

* Provisional.

All these figures are whole time equivalents.

Hospitals (Private Contractors)

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what hospitals in the area covered by northern region employ private contractors; what services they provide; what guidelines exist to monitor their performance in laundry cleaning; and whether any private contractors have had their contracts terminated or not renewed because of poor standards of work.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have issued guidance to health authorities on competitive tendering including the need to monitor the performance of contractors. We do not collect centrally the detailed local information requested by the hon. Member.

South Tyneside Health Authority

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total of annual fees, emoluments or expenses paid to the chairman and vice chairman of the South Tyneside district health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No remuneration as such is paid to chairmen, vice-chairman or members of health authorities. Regional and district chairmen do however receive an honorarium, currently £8,424 a year. The conditions under which expenses may be claimed and the current rates payable are set out in the National Health Service and English and Welsh National Boards for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (Travelling Allowances, etc) Determination 1983, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. For detailed information, the hon. Member may care to contact the health authority direct.

Doctors (Prescribing Habits)

Dr. Mawhinney asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what records of individual general practitioners' prescribing habits and drug costs exist; who holds them; for how many years they have existed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Records of individual general practitioner's prescribing habits and drug costs have been held by our Department since the early years of the National Health Service. The Prescription Pricing Authority prepares every year for every family practitioner committee, an analysis of all prescriptions written by general practitioners in the FPC area during a sample month. A summary of this analysis is sent to every general practitioner in the area together with the statistics relating to his or her individual prescribing. The general practitioner is then able to see how his or her prescribing compares with that of colleagues in the area. More detailed analyses are prepared on doctors whose prescribing costs are significantly higher than the local average.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about the proposal to extend the use of postal claim forms for supplementary benefit.

Mr. Newton: I am pleased to be able to announce that we shall shortly start offering to retirement pensioners and other people wishing to claim supplementary benefit the opportunity to make their claim by post. They will have this option in addition to the present system of home visit or DHSS office interview. All DHSS offices will offer a postal method to those people who want it by the end of May 1985.

Our decision to offer this new choice follows a careful pilot study last year, which itself followed the successful introduction of postal claiming for unemployed claimants to supplementary benefit from December 1982. The pilot study produced no sign of a reduction in claims or of unacceptable error rates in processing them. An independent study by Social Community Planning Research found that many claimants felt that they would prefer to claim by post, and the Social Security Advisory Committee have welcomed the proposal.

The forms used in the pilot study worked well, but are being further improved in the light of detailed points which emerged, and of suggestions by the Social Security Advisory Committee. In particular they will express as clearly as possible that postal claiming is a matter of choice for these groups; that the other options remain open; and that personal help will continue to be available, for example to those for whom English is not the first language.

Extension of the postal claiming option is expected to result in a small staff saving, perhaps of about 60, but in the first 18 months or so more than half of these will be used to monitor the arrangements to ensure that they result in the improvement we seek.

ASH (Scottish Committee Grant)

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what public funds from his Department are paid in the current year to Scottish Action on Smoking and Health; and how this compares with each of the last 10 years.

Mr. John MacKay: I have been asked to reply.

The Scottish Home and Health Department's grant to the Scottish committee of Action on Smoking and Health in the current financial year is £23,100. Figures for past years are:

	£
1975-76	800
1976-77	1,700
1977-78	1,500
1978-79	1,400
1979-80	2,200
1980-81	*11,000
1981-82	15,400
1982-83	20,500
1983-84	22,000

* Prior to 1980-81 the Scottish committee also received grant from the Scottish Health Education Group (then Unit).

Cancer (Cumbria)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will retabulate the wards in table 2.18 of the Black report, ranking them by probability using a poisson distribution, and identify those wards on the Cumbrian coast; and if he will make a statement on the differences in ranking obtained by using probability and not rate of incidence as used in table 2.18 of the Black report.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 January 1985, c. *225*]: The identity of the wards quoted in tables 2.18 and 2.19 are as follows, with the poisson probability ranking order also shown:

Ward Rank and Details in order of incidence	*Wards Rank in order of Poisson Probability*
Table 2.18 Cancer	
1. Eladon, Alnwick, Northumberland	8
2. Whittingham, Alnwick, Northumberland	17
3. Warden and Newbrough, Tynedale, Northumberland	19
4. Chesters, Tynedale, Northumberland	20
5. Kendal Underley, South Lakerland, Cumbria	10
6. Seascale, Copeland, Cumbria	5
7. Prudhoe South, Tynedale, Northumberland	2
8. Chollerton with Whittington, Tynedale, Northumberland	29
9. North Tyneside, Tyne and Wear, Monkseaton West	1
10. Wampool, Allerdale, Cumbria	4
Table 2.19 Lymphoid Malignancy	
1. Whittingham, Alnwick, Northumberland	3
2. Eladon, Alnwick, Northumberland	22
3. Seascale, Copeland Cumbria	1
4. Warden and Newbrough, Tynedale, Northumberland	31
5. Whalton, Castle Morpeth, Northumberland	32
6. Slaley and Heathershire, Tyne Dale, Northumberland	33
7. No. 14, Teesdale, Durham	36
8. Lazonby, Eden, Cumbria	38
9. Askham, Eden, Cumbria	42
10. Windermere Bowness South, South Lakeland, Cumbria	44

Of the wards listed only Seascale is situated on the Cumbria coast.

Benefits

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people of working age claimed supplementary benefit for 12 months and more in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the west midlands and *(c)* the Walsall borough area in May 1979; and if he will give the latest figures for the three groups and the percentage difference in each case.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 31 January 1985, c. *304*]: It is regretted that information is not available for the west midlands and the Walsall borough area. Nor is information available for May 1979.

The latest information available is as follows:

Thousands

	December 1978	*December 1982*	*December 1983*	*Percentage increase*
People of working age in receipt of supplementary benefit for 12 months or more in the United Kingdom	690	—	1,500	117

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries. Statistics for December 1983 are provisional.

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people aged 45 years and over received supplementary benefit for 12 months and more in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the west midlands and *(c)* the Walsall borough area in May 1979; and if he will give the latest figures for the three groups and the percentage difference in each case.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1985, c. *304*]: It is regretted that information is not available for the west midlands and the Walsall borough area. Nor is information available for May 1979.

The latest information available is as follows:

Thousands

	December 1978	*December 1982*	*December 1983*	*Percentage increase*
People aged 45 or over in receipt of supplementary benefit for 12 months or more in Great Britain	1,830	1,970	—	8
People aged 40 or over in receipt of supplementary benefit for 12 months or more in Northern Ireland.*	68	—	82	20

* Information is not available about the number of claimants aged 45 or over in Northern Ireland.
Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef

27. **Mr. Nicholson** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tons of beef sold into intervention in Northern Ireland during 1984 were *(a)* stored within Northern Ireland and *(b)* transhipped and stored outside Northern Ireland.

Mr. MacGregor: In 1984 about 16,000 tonnes of intervention beef were taken into store in Northern Ireland and 20,000 tonnes shipped for storage in Great Britain.

Packaging Date Stamps

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all food products other than pre-packed eggs where the packaging date is required to be stamped.

Mr. MacGregor: There are none.

Because of the unique nature of the product, the grading, packaging and marketing of eggs are subject to separate rules embodied in the Egg Marketing Standards Regulations of the European Community. These regulations have always required that egg pre-packs should carry an indication of the period of packaging to safeguard consumers against buying stale eggs. Until 1 December 1984 such indication had to be given by a coded week number. From that date it has been possible, and after 1 July 1985 it will be mandatory, to replace the coded week number by an "open" date of packaging.

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the EEC Commission's proposal that all pre-packed eggs should be stamped with the date of packaging; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: We received a number of representations last year from trade interests about the amendments to the Egg Marketing Standards Regulations which allow the sell-by date to be printed on egg packs as an optional extra in addition to the mandatory marking of the date of packaging. There was some concern that it might not be practical to mark both dates on pre-packs. But such technical problems now seem to have been resolved.

EC (Food Stocks)

Mr. Proctor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the current levels of surplus food stocks in existence within the European Economic Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) on 14 January 1985 at column 30.

Potatoes

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tons of new potatoes were imported between 1 June and 1 July for the years 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84; and what percentage of the total United Kingdom markets between these dates these figures represent.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is as follows:

	Imports of New Potatoes (Tonnes)	*Imports as percentage of total United Kingdom market in potatoes in the same period Per cent.*
June 1981	97,000	24·7
June 1982	109,000	28·8
June 1983	117,000	22·7
June 1984	83,000	22·3

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tons of processed new potatoes were imported in the years 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84.

Mr. MacGregor: Separate figures are not available for imports of processed new potatoes.

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total consumption of processed potatoes in the United Kingdom in the years 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84.

Mr. MacGregor: Total consumption, both inside and outside the home, of processed potatoes in the United Kingdom in the years stated was as follows:

	Tonnes (raw equivalent)
1980-81	1,236,000
1981-82	1,371,000
1982-83	1,558,000
1983-84	1,613,000

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total volume of imports of processed potatoes for the years 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84.

Mr. MacGregor: The total volume of United Kingdom imports of processed potatoes in the years state was as follows:

	Tonnes (raw equivalent)
1980-81	149,000
1981-82	254,000
1982-83	345,000
1983-84	411,000

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he has taken and proposes to take to control the quality of imported new potatoes;

(2) what steps he has taken and proposes to take to control the quality of imported maincrop potatoes.

Mr. MacGregor: Following a comprehensive examination of the feasibility of extending quality controls to imported potatoes I have concluded that it would prove very difficult to take action.

Our approach would have to be piecemeal as there is no single piece of legislation which we could apply to cover imports of all potatoes. Moreover, the introduction of legislative measures would almost certainly carry with it the threat of Community legal challenge. To avoid challenge we should have to proceed on the basis of the lowest standard obtaining in other member states of the Community which would not necessarily help our growers.

Discussions with the Potato Marketing Board and the farmers' unions are continuing.

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what were the quota acreages of first early potatoes approved by the Potato Marketing Board for 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(2) what is the quota acreage of first early potatoes approved for planting by the Potato Marketing Board for 1984-85.

Mr. MacGregor: This is a matter for the Potato Marketing Board.

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the anticipated yield, in tons of first early potatoes resulting from the increase in approved quota acreage for 1984-85.

Mr. MacGregor: The allocation of quotas is a matter for the Potato Marketing Board. The special arrangements for the allocation of additional grants of quota to assist growers of first early potatoes will not enter into effect until the 1985 crop season.

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total domestic production of processed potatoes for the years 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83, and 1983-84.

Mr. MacGregor: Total domestic production of processed potatoes in the years stated was as follows:

	tonnes (raw equivalent)
1980-81	1,125,000
1981-82	1,158,000
1982-83	1,252,000
1983-84	1,252,000

Nuclear Attack (Farm Wardens)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give further information on the functions of farm wardens after a nuclear attack, the areas to be served by such wardens, and the sources from which such people might be drawn.

Mrs. Fenner: The function of farm wardens would be to link the farming community and the wartime agricultural departments by conveying information about the state of agriculture and its problems in the area concerned and advice and instructions about the action to be taken. Each warden would serve 20 or so farms, depending on the topography of the area. The wardens would be selected from persons already familiar with the farms and farming in their area and could be one of the farmers in the area or others appropriately qualified such as, for example, those holding positions in agriculturally related enterprises or organisations.

North-East Coast Drift Fishery

Mr. Soames asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people are employed in the north-east coast drift fishery.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not have detailed information on the numbers of people employed in this fishery and the ancillary industries. I am consulting the water authorities concerned and will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Soames asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many salmon were taken in the north-east coast drift fishery for each of the last five years.

Mr. MacGregor: The total catches of salmon recorded in the Northumbrian and Yorkshire water authority areas by both drift nets and inshore nets were:

	Number
1979	43,464
1980	45,790
1981	69,124
1982	50,167
1983	77,277

Mr. Soames asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licences were issued for the taking of salmon in the north-east coast drift fishery for each of the last five years.

Mr. MacGregor: The information for the last five years for which final figures are available is as follows:

	Number
1979	163
1980	158
1981	153
1982	154
1983	154

In some cases these licences cover the use of inshore nets as well as drift nets.

Mr. Soames asked the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will be bringing forward plans to curtail the taking of salmon in the north-east coast drift fishery.

Mr. MacGregor: As I said in reply to my hon. Friend on 24 January, we are reviewing the management arrangements in this fishery and will announce our conclusions when we have completed the review.

Veterinary Inspection Centre, Northamptonshire

Mr. Freeman asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has now reached a decision on the future of the Veterinary Inspection Centre at Moulton, Northamptonshire.

Mr. Jopling: At this stage I cannot add to the reply which I gave my hon. Friend on 6 December.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 8 February 1985

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid Programme

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will itemise the expenditure of the overseas aid programme during 1984; and how this compares with his proposals for 1985.

Mr. Raison: The breakdown of expenditure for 1984 calendar year is not yet available. Figures for 1983 are published in "British Overseas Aid 1985", copies of which are retained in the House of Commons Library. Information for financial year 1985-86 will be contained in the Main Estimates to be presented to Parliament in March.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all aid given by the United Kingdom to each country in central and south America in each of the last five years; and if he will list in each case whether the aid was provided *(a)* directly, *(b)* through an international organisation or *(c)* unconditionally.

Mr. Raison: Aid from Her Majesty's Government to countries in central and south America is provided either directly or through international organisations. 1983 is the latest year for which figures are available. Details of multilateral aid attributable to the United Kingdom are available for 1980-82 only at this stage.

Gross British aid through bilateral and multilateral channels was as follows:

Gross United Kingdom aid

£ thousand

	1979	*1980*		*1981*		*1982*		*1983*
	Total bilateral aid	*Total bilateral aid*	*Through multilateral agencies*	*Total bilateral aid*	*Through mulitlateral agencies*	*Total bilateral aid*	*Through multilateral agencies*	*Total bilateral aid*
	(a)	*(a)*	*(b)*	*(a)*	*(b)*	*(a)*	*(b)*	*(a)*
Central America								
Belize	7,454	4,450	200	4,781	140	2,885	240	6,098
Costa Rica	623	606	660	570	330	486	270	1,838
Cuba	2	—	220	—	110	—	180	—
Dominican Republic	77	144	980	139	810	139	500	176
El Salvador	448	265	480	41	680	13	560	—
Guatemala	14	35	570	15	520	4	330	—
Haiti	5	24	1,080	4	1,280	1	1,590	19
Honduras	230	335	1,720	5,002	1,910	2,272	2,120	6,670
Mexico	1,186	1,577	330	1,464	280	34,334	310	2,827
Nicargua	246	127	3,260	91	2,460	49	1,670	64
Panama	63	94	570	102	260	62	220	43
South America								
Argentina	5	30	410	2	340	2	230	—
Bolivia	888	1,158	850	1,052	1,690	988	1,270	1,199
Brazil	1,022	1,002	790	632	760	9,960	1,030	5,574
Chile	2,131	2,021	250	1,452	110	675	100	442
Colombia	1,242	848	1,040	765	870	617	710	635
Ecuador	1,897	945	500	762	660	1,046	480	783
Falkland Islands	915	1,015	—	1,058	—	4,025	40	9,053
French Guiana	—	—	270	—	280	—	1,590	—
Guyana	2,606	2,356	970	2,475	1,360	1,724	1,340	1,555
Paraguay	267	270	170	219	460	3,263	320	1,281
Peru	882	950	660	973	1,280	676	1,010	4,427
Surinam	—	—	440	—	170	1	310	—
Uruguay	35	37	130	9	60	11	70	16
Venezuela	—	—	130	—	120	2	90	3

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Additional Costs Allowance

Mr. Eggar asked the Lord Privy Seal what representations he has received from hon. Members with regard to the additional costs allowance.

Mr. Biffen: A number of hon. Members have approached me in recent months on the question of whether mortgage interest payments should be allowable against this allowance which is governed by the resolution of the House dated 20 December 1971.

In claiming this allowance the responsibility is upon hon. Members to satisfy themselves that any moneys claimed have been necessarily incurred in pursuance of their Parliamentary duties and that they met all the other requirements set out in the resolution. After further consultations, I have been advised that there is no reason

why Members should not claim mortgage interest payments against this allowance so long as the above conditions are met.

PRIME MINISTER

Public Bodies

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister what is, for each organisation covered by the publication "Public Bodies 1984" *(a)* the number of persons paid by public funds and the total number of all such persons and *(b)* the number of persons paid from public funds who are involved in those organisations listed in part (3) of the introduction as being excluded from "Public Bodies 1984"; and what was the cost of each organisation in *(a)* and *(b)* and the overall cost.

The Prime Minister: It is not possible to give all the information requested from material held centrally, and it would be disproportionately costly to provide information which is readily available on an itemised basis. Detailed information on both costs and numbers for the organisations concerned can, however, be obtained from Public Bodies 1984 (which gives staff numbers, expenditure, and public funding of National Health Service authorities and executive bodies), "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 to 1987-88" (Cmnd. 9428), Supply Estimatee, "Local Government Financial Statistics in England and Wales", the annual article in "Economic Trends", "Employment in the Public and Private Sectors" and from annual reports.

In category *(a)* the total number of people employed by NHS authorities and executive bodies which are wholly or partly financed by public funds is some 1,222,000. Advisory bodies and tribunals are generally staffed by sponsoring Departments and staff are therefore covered in central Government manpower totals. The 1,584,000 staff of nationalised industries and public corporations are paid by the bodies concerned, not from public funds, although some of these bodies receive money voted by Parliament.

In category *(b)* the organisations whose staff are paid from public are central Government Departments, the general criminal and civil court system, and local authorities. The total number of these staff (excluding staff paid from trading funds and bodies controlled by local authorities) is some 2,895,000.

GCHQ, Cheltenham

Mrs Renée Short asked the Prime Minister what discussions were held with the Council of Civil Service Unions prior to the introduction of the polygraph test at the Government communications headquarters.

The Prime Minister: The Government accepted the Security Commission's recommendation, following its inquiry into the case of Geoffrey Arthur Prime, that a pilot scheme should be undertaken in the Security Service and at the Government Communications Headquarters to test the feasibility of polygraph security screening in the intelligence and security agencies. The Head of the Home Civil Service held discussions with representatives of the Council of Civil Service Unions on two occasions before the pilot scheme began. No decision on whether the polygraph should be introduced as part of security screening in the intelligence and security agencies will be taken until the results of the pilot scheme have been evaluated.

Civil Service (Manpower)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Prime Minister if she will break down by Department the reductions in Civil Service numbers achieved in each year since 1979.

The Prime Minister: Figures can be obtained from the following documents:

(i) 1982-83 and 1983-84: Annual Reports from the Treasury to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee:
(ii) 1981-82: First Special Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee 1982-83 (House of Commons Paper No. 46);
(iii) 1980-81: Seventh Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee 1980-81 (House of Commons Paper No. 423);
(iv) 1979-80: Summaries of the Civil Service Quarterly Staff Returns. All these documents are available in the House of Commons Library. Figures for 1984-85 are not yet available.

Ministerial Cars (Parking Offences)

Dr. Marek asked the Prime Minister, of the parking offences committed by ministerial car drivers in 1984, how many penalties were met by the Government car service.

The Prime Minister: All the penalties incurred during 1984 were met by the Government car service.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Nellist asked the Prime Minister how many Sri Lankan service personnel are currently attending training courses in the United Kingdom; how many attended such courses in each of the last three years; and if she will give a breakdown between the services providing the training.

The Prime Minister: A small number of Sri Lankan students attend military training courses in the United Kingdom each year. It is not our practice to reveal details of such training since this information is confidential between Governments.

Nuclear Power Stations (Electricity Generation)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Prime Minister whether it continues to be the policy of Her Majesty's Government that all civil nuclear power stations and establishments in the United Kingdom should be operated in a manner which optimises the production of electricity.

The Prime Minister: The power stations of the CEGB and SSEB are operated to optimise the production of electricity. Research reactors in the civil nuclear programmes are operated to extend the understanding of nuclear power.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister what would be *(a)* the loss of revenue if tax and national insurance thresholds were raised to £3,250 per year for a single person and £4,250 for a married couple with an additional tax allowance of £780 for each child in 1985-86 and *(b)* the saving in expenditure if all benefits, including

child benefit, for those in full-time work were abolished in 1985-86; and if she will also estimate the net weekly spending power of a man with a wife and two children whose gross wages are £110 per week, given the assumptions in the tax/benefit model tables November 1984, if each of the above changes were introduced simultaneously.

The Prime Minister: The information required is as follows:

(a) The cost of increasing the single pension tax allowance to £3,250, the married man's allowance to £4,259 and of introducing child tax allowances of £780 per child is estimated at about £9·5 billion in a full year at 1985-86 levels of income, as compared with statutory indexation of personal allowances. The estimated reduction in national insurance contributions if the lower earnings limit was raised to £3,250 per year for single people and to £4,250 per year for married couples, in relation to their joint earnings, is £1·2 billion in 1985-86. This estimate assumes no change in the contracted-out rebate in respect of people remaining liable to contributions.

(b) The estimated saving in expenditure in 1985-86 if child benefit, family income supplement and housing benefit were abolished for those in full-time work is £3·8 billion.

After the changes specified the net weekly spending power of a married man with two children whose gross earnings were £110 a week would be £71·50.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister what would be the cost of raising tax and national insurance thresholds for 1985-86 to £3,500 for a single person and £5,000 for a married couple, with an additional tax allowance of £780 per child, and the saving in expenditure and the revenue benefit, by abolishing all social security benefits for those in work and abolishing mortgage tax relief, assuming current interest rates, for 1985-86; and if she will estimate the effect of these changes on the net weekly spending power of a married man with two children, man working only, with a gross wage of £125 a week *(a)* paying rent and rates with assumptions laid out in tax/benefit model tables and *(b)* with a mortgage of (i) £20,000, (ii) £25,000 and (iii) £30,000, assuming average levels of rates.

The Prime Minister: The cost of increasing the single person's tax allowance to £3,500, the married man's tax allowance to £5,000 and of introducing child tax allowances of £780 per child is estimated at about £12·5 billion in a full year at 1985-86 levels of income, as compared with statutory indexation of personal allowances.

The estimated reduction in national insurance contributions if the lower earnings limit was raised to £3,500 per year for single people and to £5,000 per year for married couples, in relation to their joint earnings is about £1·5 billion in 1985-86. This estimate assumes no change in the contracted-out rebate in respect of people remaining liable to contributions.

The estimated saving in expenditure in 1985-86 from abolishing child benefit, family income supplement and housing benefit for those in full-time work is £3·8 billion. The yield from abolishing mortgage interest relief in 1985-86 would be about £4 billion on assumptions of no change in interest rates and levels of mortgage lending.

The table shows the effect of these changes on the current net weekly spending power of a married man, with two children aged four and six, whose gross earnings are £125 a week, and with the specified rent-mortgage commitments. Although it illustrates the effects of these particular assumptions the table has no general application. Such levels of mortgage would not be consistent with normal building society policy of relating the size of loan to the mortgagor's gross income.

Net weekly spending power of a married man, with two children aged four and six, whose gross earnings are £125 a week

	Current position	*Position after changes outlined above*
	£	£
(a) Rent of £15·60 a week	83·82	85·15
(b) Mortgage of		
(i) £20,000	65·15	50·75
(ii) £25,000	56·40	38·25
(iii) £30,000	47·65	25·75

Assumptions:

1. Mortgages are in their first year.
2. Mortgage capital repayments are ignored.
3. Mortgage interest rate is 13 per cent.
4. Mortgage tax relief is given at source.
5. General rates are £5·85 and water rate £1·50 a week in all examples.
6. Except for the changes specified all other assumptions are as in the November 1984 DHSS tax/benefit model tables.

Security Vetting (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Maginnis asked the Prime Minister if she has transferred to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry responsibility for the operation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary special branch in relation to security vetting of British Telecom employees in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Tigre

Mr. Wigley asked the Prime Minister what response is to be made by Her Majesty's Government to the request of 4 February by the Relief Society of Tigre for international action on the present famine by way of a massive escalation of emergency aid, including food and transport.

The Prime Minister: The Government will continue to provide substantial relief directly and through voluntary agencies to all parts of Ethiopia and to encourage international action to this end.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Administration Costs

Mr. Proctor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the cost of administration of his Department expressed in constant prices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jopling: The total cost of administration for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food expressed in 1983-84 prices* in the last five years was:

	£ million
1979-80	194
1980-81	208
1981-82	199
1982-83	197
1983-84	203

This information is based on the Annual Scrutinies of Departmental Running Costs. The introduction on 1 April 1983 of full cost repayment to the Property Services Agency for accommodation added an extra £6 million to running costs in 1983-84 compared with 1982-83.

Corresponding figures for the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce are:

	£ million
1979-80	9
1980-81	10
1981-82	10
1982-83	12
1983-84	13

*Cash figures adjusted for general inflation as measured by the GDP deflator at market prices.

Lupin Grain

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date and for what purpose the introduction of a subsidy for the production of lupin grain was authorised by the EEC Council of Ministers.

Mr. MacGregor: An aid scheme for the inclusion of lupins in animal feeds was introduced with effect from 1 July 1984 in order to reduce the Community's dependence on imported protein and to encourage producers to switch out of crops that are in surplus.

Agricultural and Horticultural Co-operatives

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the savings *(a)* in 1984-85 and *(b)* in a full year resulting from the changes in the rates of grant for agricultural and horticultural co-operatives.

Mr. MacGregor: If demand is at the level currently expected the revised rates would produce estimated savings of about £0·3 million in a full year. No savings from these changes are expected in 1984-85.

Grain (Costs)

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a table showing for each year since 1977 expenditue on *(a)* capital grants other than for the storage and drying of grain, *(b)* capital grants for the storage and drying of grain and *(c)* other grants made under the agricultural and horticultural co-operation scheme expressed in terms (i) of current prices and (ii) of constant prices.

Mr. MacGregor: I regret that the information could be provided in the form requested only at disproportionate cost. However the following information shows the amount and categories of grant recommendations made to Ministers by Food From Britain and its predecessor the Central Council for Agricultural and Horticultural Co-operation.

Recommendations for grant made to Ministers under the agricultural and horticultural co-operation scheme for the period 1977-78 to 1984-85 (£'000)*

	Capital grants for storage and drying of grain		*Other Capital Grants*		*Non-Capital Grants*		*Totals*	
1977-78	667		563		219		1,449	
1978-79	599	(533)	283	(261)	95	(88)	977	(902)
1979-80	958	(764)	726	(579)	114	(115)	1,828	(1,458)
1980-81	1,035	(709)	1,157	(793)	186	(128)	2,378	(1,630)
1981-82	388	(239)	1,287	(791)	269	(165)	1,944	(1,195)
1982-83	2,711	(1,557)	1,371	(787)	373	(214)	4,455	(2,558)
1983-84	2,868	(1,571)	1,906	(1,044)	200	(110)	4,974	(2,725)
1984-85	448		1,585		280		2,313	

* Figures for 1984-85 are for 1 April 1984 to 31 January 1985 only.

Note: The figures are in current price terms. Constant prices cannot be calculated because sufficient detail of the elements in individual investments is not available. The figures in brackets show how the level of recommendations has moved in relation to changes in the Retail Price Index.

ENERGY

Coal Firing Scheme

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many applications were received for assistance under the coal firing scheme in each of the years 1983 and 1984.

Mr. David Hunt: In 1983, 371 applications were received for assistance under the coal firing scheme. In 1984, 190 applications were received.

EMPLOYMENT

Methyl Isocyanate

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) on 21 January, *Official Report*, column *283*, whether any of the four places where methyl isocyanate is stored for research purposes in the United Kingdom is in Wales.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No.

MSC Staff (Leave)

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to secure the withdrawal of the directive by the Manpower Services Commission that its staff cannot take annual leave to lobby their Member of Parliament on Tuesday 12 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: Individual members of staff are in general entirely free subject only to normal operational requirements, to use their annual leave to go and see their Member of Parliament. However, it is established practice in the Civil Service under successive Governments, not to

grant annual leave to staff to take part in an organised lobby clearly forming part of an overall campaign of protest, which has already included industrial action.

Clothing Industry

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment to what extent employment in the clothing manufacturing sectors of north-east England has declined since 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: The only available information is for the period from June 1978 to September 1981 when censuses of employment were taken. In that period there was a decline of 32 per cent., from 21,800 in 1978 to 14,800 in 1981, in the number of employees employed in the clothing manufacturing industries of north-east England.

Censuses of employment have been taken triennially since 1978 and the results of the current, September 1984, census are scheduled to become available in the autumn.

Adult Training

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what resources he plans to make available to the Manpower Services Commission to enable it to increase the numbers of participants on its adult training programmes.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Through more cost-effective use of resources and tailoring provision to meet specific needs, we intend to achieve this increase within the current level of expenditure on adult training. Forward provision for occupational and adult training programmes (excluding the Commission's expenditure on non-advanced further education) is £262 million in 1985-86 (excluding administration costs).

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all the nationalised industries, non-governmental organisations and agencies for which his Department either has responsibility or provides funding, as well as those sections of his Department, which provide services to the general public or to private organisations; and if he will indicate separately those which at present *(a)* charge no fees, *(b)* charge fees which do not fully cover the costs of providing those services, *(c)* charge fees which exactly cover the costs of providing those services and *(d)* charge fees which more than cover the costs of providing those services.

Mr. Peter Bottomley [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1985, c. *587*]: The Department of Employment provides funding for the Manpower Services Commission, the Advisory, conciliation and Arbitration Service, and the Health and Safety Commission, with its executive arm the Health and Safety Executive, which, together with the Department itself, form the DE group.

On the matter of services to the general public and private organisations, I list for the DE Group, the services whose full cost exceed £100,000 per annum.

(a) No fees are charged for a large number of services provided in respect of the DE Group's statutory functions. the major services are:—
1. Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.
2. Advice and information provided by the Health and Safety Executive on health and Safery matters.
3. Industrial Tribunals and Employment Appeal Tribunals.
4. Race Relations Employment Advisory Service.
5. Jobcentre service.
6. Employment Rehabilitation.
7. Services to Disabled People.
8. Sheltered Employment Procurement and Consultancy Service.

(b) The services for which fees are charged which do not fully cover the costs are:—
1. Sponsored Training.
2. Mobile Instructor Service.
3. Industrial Language Training.

(c) The services for which fees are charged which are set exactly to cover the costs are:—
1. Testing and Research work carried out by the Research and Laboratories Division of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).
2. Employment Medical Advisory Service provided by HSE.
3. Professional and Executive Recruitment Service.
4. Training within Industry.
5. Careers and Occupational Information Centre.
6. Training for overseas students.
7. Training for Redundant Steel Workers.
8. Instructor Training Colleges.

(d) The services for which fees are charged which at present more than cover the costs are:—
Licensing of Employment Agencies.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Importuning

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of prosecutions for importuning in the street which have been brought in each of the last five years in *(a)* the Metropolitan police district and *(b)* the rest of England and Wales; and in how many of these cases the prosecution's evidence was supported in court by the offended man or woman.

Mr. Mellor: The available information is given in the following table. Corresponding information for 1984 is not yet available. Information collected centrally on court proceedings does not include details of how the prosecution evidence was presented.

Persons proceeded against for offences of importuning under section 32 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 or section 1 of the Street Offences Act 1959 by area.

England and Wales — *Number of persons*

Year and Area	*Section 32 Sexual Offences Act 1956*	*Section 1 Street Offences Act 1959*
1980		
Metropolitan police district	384	1,559
Other forces	931	1,941
England and Wales	1,315	3,500
1981		
Metropolitan police district	317	2,046
Other forces	685	2,299
England and Wales	1,002	4,345
1982		
Metropolitan police district	308	3,225
Other forces	611	2,842
England and Wales	919	6,067

Year and Area	Section 32 Sexual Offences Act 1956	Section 1 Street Offences Act 1959
1983		
Metropolitan police district	337	5,611
Other forces	494	5,058
England and Wales	831	10,669

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the most recent guidance which he has given to the police for dealing with the arrest of men suspected of importuning.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis issued a force order in October 1984 to give greater prominence in the context of plain clothes operations to the existing principle laid down in paragraph 1.92 of the Home Office consolidated circular to the police on crime and kindred matters (a copy of which is in the Library of the House) that no member of a police force should counsel, incite or procure the commission of a criminal offence. The new order lays down that officers of the uniformed branch selected for duties in plain clothes must always be briefed by a senior officer to ensure that they avoid behaviour which could give rise to legitimate accusations that they had acted as agents provacateurs, as defined by the Royal Commission on Police Powers in 1928. The Royal Commission defined an agent provocateur as a person who entices another to commit an express breach of the law which he would not otherwise have committed and then proceeds or informs against him in respect of such an offence. HM Inspectors of Constabulary are drawing this new order to the attention of other chief officers of police.

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations or complaints he has received during the past 12 months concerning the policy of different police forces throughout the country in dealing with kerb-crawling and importuning; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have received representations about the enforcement of section 32 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 by officers of the Metropolitan Police and of one provincial police force. We have also received some representations of a general nature relating to the enforcement by the police of the law in relation to prostitution. As to male importuning, I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given today to his question concerning guidance to the police. As to kerb-crawling, the Government welcome the Sexual Offences Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes) which will enable more effective action to be taken.

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received any recent reports from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and other chief constables concerning the problem of kerb-crawling; whether chief constables made any recommendations or proposals in their reports on these matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The Association of Chief Police Officers and the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis submitted comments and proposals to the Criminal Law Revision Committee following publication of the Committee's working paper on offences relating to prostitution and allied offences. These comments were taken into account by the Committee when preparing its 16th report (Cmnd. 9329), on which the relevant provisions of the Sexual Offences Bill are based.

Subsequently, as the answer given today to another Question by my hon. Friend makes clear, we have been in correspondence with the Association and the Commissioner concerning the Bill.

My right hon. and learned Friend has also received, separately, a report from the chief constable of Merseyside, who has emphasised the inadequacies of the present law and who welcomes the prospect of new legislation.

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with chief constables and others on the question of kerb-crawling in connection with the Sexual Offences Bill; what conclusion he has drawn from these discussions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have kept the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis fully informed of developments on the Sexual Offences Bill, and have received helpful suggestions from them which we are considering. The general conclusion which we have drawn is that the police welcome the prospect of new legislation which will enable them to respond more effectively to pressure to deal with kerb-crawlers.

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from interested organisations on the question of kerb-crawling in relation the Sexual Offences Bill; if he will list those organisations in the *Official Report;* and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Numerous comments from organisations on the subject of kerb-crawling were submitted to the Criminal Law Revision Committee during the course of its review of the law on prostitution. The organisations which gave evidence to the Committee are listed in its 16th Report, "Prostitution in the Street" (Cmnd. 9329).

We have ourselves received a considerable number of representations in favour of more effective action against kerb-crawling, including representations from hon. Members.

Since the Sexual Offences Bill was introduced, we have received comments from the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Metropolitan Police, the National Association of Probation Officers, the Whalley Range Association and the Prosecuting Solicitors' Society. All these organisations acknowledge the extent of the nuisance caused by kerb-crawling. The National Association of Probation Officers expresses wide reservations about the Bill; others offer detailed comments.

Asylum

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of providing a written record of all interviews by his Department's interviewing officers with applicants for asylum.

Mr. Waddington: An unsuccessful applicant for asylum is already given brief reasons for the refusal of his application at the time of refusal. If the applicant has a right of appeal and exercises it, a full explanatory

statement is prepared setting out the reasons for refusal in detail. It is difficult to estimate the additional costs of giving fuller reasons at the time of refusal without undertaking a practice trial. It is planned to undertake such a trial in respect of cases where there is no right of appeal, when resources permit.

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of providing unsuccessful applicants for asylum with a written statement of the reasons for refusal.

Mr. Waddington: All interviews with applicants for asylum are recorded in writing. It is difficult to estimate the additional cost of making interview reports available to applicants without practical trials to determine how much extra work would be involved in checking and revising the reports.

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of tape recording all interviews by his Department's interviewing officers with applicants for asylum.

Mr. Waddington: No estimates have been made. Consideration is not being given to the possible use of tape recorders in immigration interviews in this country in advance of the review by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of their possible use in interviews by entry clearance officers abroad.

Prevention of Terrorism

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the statistics on the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act for the latest quarter are available.

Mr. Brittan: Statistics on the operation of the Prevention of Terorism Act in the fourth quarter of 1984 were published in Home Office statistical bulletin issue 1/85, on 30 January 1985.

Anti-police Progaganda

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to counter anti-police propaganda in London and elsewhere; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am confident that the great majority of people fully support the police, and therefore they will continue to ignore anti-police propaganda, but Ministers will continue to express their support for the police on all appropriate occasions.

Prisons (AIDS)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what investigations he intends to conduct on a nationwide basis into the possibility of acquired immune deficiency syndrome symptoms in prisons;

(2) when he expects the investigation into acquired immune deficiency syndrome at Chelmsford and Bullwood Hall prisons, which is being pursued by the communicable disease surveillance centre, to be concluded and its findings to be published.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) on 7 February at column *657*. There are no suspected cases of AIDS at either establishment. The role of the centre for the surveillance of communicable diseases has been to offer general advice about the disease to the director of the prison medical service and the district medical officer. We are considering what steps need to be taken in the prison system as a whole in the light of this case and will make a further statement in due course.

Iraq (Diplomats)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make an inquiry into the alleged activities of Iraqi security agents in the United Kingdom;

(2) what representation he has received alleging illegal activities of Iraqi security forces in the United Kingdom; what action he has taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: I have received a number of letters making allegations that the Iraqi embassy is behind acts of violence against opponents of the Iraqi Government living in the United Kingdom. These reports have been referred to the police for their consideration but I understand that they have so far been unable to find any firm evidence that embassy officials are involved.

Dr. Emad Hamoudi

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley constabulary on the investigation into the injuries caused to Dr. Emad Hamoudi who was found beside the M4 on 21 January; and if he will make a statement on the substance of the report.

Mr. Brittan: I have already received a report from Thames valley police on their initial investigations into injuries caused to Dr. Emad Hamoudi on 8 January 1985. The police inquiries are continuing, but I understand that the police have no evidence to suggest that this incident was politically motivated.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Fraud Prosecutions

Mr. Park asked the Attorney-General if he issues guidelines to the Director of Public Prosecutions as to the criteria to be used in deciding whether to prosecute in fraud cases; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: No. I meet the Director of Public Prosecutions regularly to discuss the work of his Department. The scope of those discussions includes the handling of fraud cases generally as well as the operation of the newly established fraud investigation groups and individual cases of particular difficulty or importance. The guidelines as to the criteria for prosecution which I published in March 1983 are of general application and no advantage would be gained by the issue of formal guidelines relating to specific categories of criminal offences.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General how many cases in 1984 involving persons injured by plastic

bullets in Northern Ireland have been considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland; and what action was taken in each case.

The Attorney-General: Figures for cases considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland involving persons killed or injured by the alleged use of baton rounds in 1984 are as follows:

	Number
Cases	12
Person injured	13
Persons killed	0
Prosecution directed	0
No prosecution directed	6

In six cases a final direction pends the outcome of other proceedings or the submission to the director of additional evidence.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rosebank House, Donaghee

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the existing front boundary wall to the rear of the pavement which is within the curtilage of Rosebank house, Millisle road, Donaghee, is part of a listed building.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am advised that the boundary wall is no longer a part of the property which was listed in 1976.

It would be a matter for the courts to decide whether the wall still forms part of the listed building.

Wild Animals

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will extend the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 to Northern Ireland or introduce an Order in Council for Northern Ireland with similar effect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: No.

Community Physicians

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of community physicians in the training grades, registrar and senior registrar, within the Western health and social services board.

Mr. Chris Patten: Trainee community physicians usually spend time in more than one health and social services board during their training. At present one registrar is based in the Western board, and no senior registrars.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will detail the projected establishment of community physicians in the Eastern health and social services board for each of the next three years; and how many community physicians currently in post have passed the normal age of retirement.

Mr. Chris Patten: No specific projected establishment of community physicians has been determined for the Eastern health and social services board. It is recognised however that the present number needs to be increased and this will be done as suitable fully trained applicants become available. No community physicians employed by the Eastern board are past the age of retirement.

Republic of Ireland (Civil Servants)

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if civil servants employed by the public service of the Republic of Ireland are operating from social security offices administered by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: No.

Social Security Fraud

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the recent agreement between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland to prevent social security fraud.

Mr. Chris Patten: I last met my counterpart from the Republic of Ireland on 19 April 1984 when, among the various matters discussed, we reviewed progress on the control of social security fraud involving claimants on both sides of the border. There is no more recent agreement but the high level of co-operation between social security offices in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland continues.

Emergency Provisions (Arrests)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people were detained in the most recent full calendar year under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978; and how many were charged with scheduled offences under that Act and other Acts;

(2) in respect of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978, for the most recent full calendar year, what was the yearly total of arrests made under the Act; and how many persons arrested under the Act were detained for the following periods: *(a)* up to 12 hours, *(b)* 12 to 24 hours, *(c)* 24 to 36 hours, *(d)* 36 to 48 hours, *(e)* 48 to 60 hours and *(f)* 60 to 72 hours, indicating those numbers (i) not ultimately charged under the Act and released, (ii) those charged under the Act and (iii) those charged with an offence but not under the Act, indicating which offences, and (iv) those charged under the Act but not initially detained under the Act.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the statistics on the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act for the latest quarter are available.

Mr. Scott: The Northern Ireland statistics for the last quarter of 1984 were published on 24 January and copies have been placed in the Library.

Security Statistics

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the security statistics for 1984

are now available, together with details of persons charged with terrorist-type offences and convictions for scheduled offences for that year.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Prisoners

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the current size of the present prison population in Northern Ireland, categorised by age and by sex in the following groups: aged under 18 years, 18 to 25 years, 25 to 30 years, 30 to 40 years, 40 to 50 years, 50 to 60 years and over 60 years; and if he will give a breakdown of the length of sentence being served by percentage of the total prison population;

(2) what is the number of prisoners in Northern Ireland prisons, the age structure of convicted prisoners in the prisons of Northern Ireland and the number of convicted prisoners serving sentences for terrorist offences.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. member as soon as possible.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the manpower strength of the Royal Ulster Constabulary on 31 December 1984; if he will give details of the number of operatives since 1969 in each year for the following categories: Royal Ulster Constabulary full-time, Royal Ulster Constabulary full-time reserve and Royal Ulster Constabulary part-time reserve.

Mr. Scott: The combined strength of the Royal Ulster constabulary and its full-time and part-time reserves on 31 December 1984 was 12,566.

The strength of the RUC, RUC reserve (full-time) and the RUC reserve (part-time) each year since 1969 are set out in the table:

Year 31 December	*Royal Ulster Constabulary*	*Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve (full-time)*	*Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve (part-time)*
1969	3,044	—	—
1970	3,809	—	436
1971	4,086	—	1,284
1972	4,257	153	1,981
1973	4,391	290	2,224
1974	4,564	510	3,350
1975	4,902	661	4,158
1976	5,253	870	3,827
1977	5,692	1,002	3,684
1978	6,110	1,188	3,417
1979	6,642	1,305	3,209
1980	6,943	1,685	3,067
1981	7,334	2,060	2,810
1982	7,718	2,174	2,666
1983	8,003	2,295	2,198
1984	8,127	2,532	1,907

Non-scheduled Offences

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give separately for magistrates' courts and for Crown courts in each of the years 1980, 1981 and 1982 and to date, the number of court cases involving non-scheduled offences in which a plea of not guilty was entered; and in how many of these cases a verdict of not guilty was returned.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Weapons

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many weapons were found by the security forces in 1984 for each of the following categories: machine guns, rifles, shotguns, pistols and revolvers, rocket launchers, rockets and others.

Mr. Scott: The information is as follows:

	Number
Machine guns	20
Rifles	69
Shotguns	28
Pistols/Revolvers	70
Rocket launchers	—
Rocket rounds	1
Others	10
Total	198

Hijacked Vehicles

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the years 1983 and 1984 the following details: *(a)* the number of vehicles hijacked or taken and *(b)* the number not recovered at the end of each year, in each of the following police districts, separately: Musgrave street, Springfield road, Tennent street, North Queen street, Mountpottinger, Castlereagh, Newtownards, Newry, Portadown, Armagh, Enniskillen, Omagh, Strand road, Coleraine, Ballymena and Antrim.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Department of the Environment (Water Service)

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost to the Department of the Environment (water service) for *(a)* legal fees and *(b)* other costs concerned with contracts that have gone to arbitration since 1976.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1985, c. *502*]: *(a)* None; *(b)* £8,592.

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many companies have been unable to fulfil contracts awarded by the Department of Environment (water service) and have subsequently gone into voluntary liquidation since 1976.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1985, c. *502*]: Five.

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts awarded by the Department of the Environment (water service) since 1977 which are now complete *(a)* have final payments still not made to the contractor and *(b)* are the subject of arbitration.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1985, c. *502*]: Three.

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts awarded by the Department of the Environment (water service) since 1977 have been forwarded to arbitration and have been resolved; and what has been the cost to the Department on each contract over the agreed tender price.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1985, c.*502*]: No contracts awarded by the Department of the Environment (water service) since 1977 have been forwarded to arbitration and been resolved.

TRANSPORT

Freight Rates

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish his study of freight rate disparities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The objective of the study is to compare deep sea freight rates out of the Unite Kingdom and the Continent and to account for any differences observed. In the absence of ready sources of data, my Department has to rely heavily on interviews with shippers, forwarders and shipping lines. These are almost complete and I expect to receive a report shortly. Much information has been provided in confidence but I propose to make the general conclusions available in an appropriate form.

London Regional Transport (Disabled Travellers)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Transport what account he took, in drawing up his legislative proposals and financial arrangements for London Regional Transport, of the needs of the unit for disabled travellers.

Mrs Chalker: The London Regional Transport Act 1984 gave LRT a new statutory duty to have due regard to the transport needs of disabled people. LRT established their unit for disabled travellers in the light of that duty.

The Government's revenue support grant to LRT does not include any specific provision for disabled travellers or for the unit: it is a general grant towards all of LRT's needs.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Transport what funds were allocated to the unit for disabled travellers of London Regional Transport in 1984-85; and what is the amount planned for 1985-86.

Mrs. Chalker: Allocation of funds within LRT is a matter for their Board, bearing in mind their statutory obligations and the objectives set for them by the Secretary of State.

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had recently with London Regional Transport about providing a comprehensive public transport system for the disabled.

Mrs. Chalker: I have regular meetings with the chairman of LRT, Dr. Bright, and with his colleagues, and transport for disabled people is a frequent subject of discussions. I aim to ensure as far as possible that, whoever provides the services, transport for disabled people is sensibly co-ordinated.

Merchant Seamen (Health and Safety)

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will, in future, collect and publish statistical data in respect of the number of inspections of United kingdom-registered merchant vessels for purposes of ensuring the occupational health and safety of merchant seamen, the number of warnings, improvement notices and prohibition notices issued and the nature of the infringements for such action, the number of prosecutions mounted for statutory infringements, the nature of those offences and the outcome of the prosecutions, the direct and general costs incurred by that section of his Department which has responsibility for seafarer occupational health and safety and the number of fatal and non-fatal accidents investigated by the marine inspectors.

Mr. Ridley: Marine surveyors from my Department make general inspections of United Kingdom registered ships and in doing so they take into account those requirements affecting the occupational health and safety of seamen. The number of these inspections is recorded. My Department now also records data in respect of improvement and prohibition notices, prosecutions mounted for infringements of occupational health and safety legislation and accidents investigated by marine surveyors. Warnings delivered by surveyors are often verbal and advisory and little would be gained by requiring them to be recorded.

Shipboard accident statistics are already published and, depending upon its general usefulness to the industry, additional information relating to the topics mentioned above will either be published or made available to the industry on request.

The costs in promoting occupational health and safety are incurred across a wide range of activities and to separate them would not be cost effective.

A34 (Gore Hill) and Newbury Bypass

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work to begin on widening the A34 at Gore Hill; and what progress has been made with plans to build a Newbury bypass.

Mrs. Chalker: Subject to the completion of the statutory procedures, it is hoped to start work this summer on the East Ilsley to Chilton improvement of the A34.

Design of the proposed Newbury bypass, based on the preferred route announced last June, is continuing. I hope to publish draft orders under the Highways Act later this year.

M25 (Service Areas)

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Transport if it is still his intention that there will be two motorway service areas fully open on the M25 motorway by the time that motorway is completed.

Mrs. Chalker: All being well, I expect the service area at South Mimms to open by the time the M25 is completed. The timing of the opening of the other three service areas on the M25 depends on the completion of planning and compulsory acquisition procedures, as well as engineering works; but these service areas will follow as quickly as possible.

Toll Charges

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the increases in toll charges on individual bridges and tunnels on roads within his responsibility which have been implemented in each year since 1979.

Mrs. Chalker: The increases made by the undertakings concerned are as follows:

Crossing	Date of increase	Increase		Toll	
		Cars Pence	HGVs Pence	Cars Pence	HGVs Pence
England					
Severn Bridge	29 April 1979	8	28	20	40
Dartford Tunnel	1 April 1979	10	25	35	85
	16 December 1980	5	15	40	100
	1 March 1982	10	30	50	130
	1 January 1984	10	30	60	160
Mersey Tunnel	8 September 1979	5	10	30	70
	21 September 1981	10	30	40	100
Tyne Tunnel	20 January 1979	5	10	20	50
	3 January 1981	10	10	30	60
	4 July 1982	10	20	40	80
Tamar Bridge	7 July 1979	15	20-40	30	80-140
	1 January 1982	10	10-40	40	90-180
Middlesbrough Transporter Bridge	5 November 1979	10-16	33	27	63
	1 November 1981	8	19	35	82
	1 May 1983	5	13	40	95
Aldwark Bridge, North Yorkshire	1 November 1980	4	4p per ton	8	8p per ton
Clifton Suspension Bridge, Avon	1 January 1982	10	10	20	20
Selby Bridge, North Yorkshire	15 August 1982	1	1p per ton	5	5p per ton
Shard Bridge, Lancashire	1 January 1981	3	10p per ton	8	30p per ton
Scotland					
Erskine Bridge	1 November 1981	15	30	30	80
Forth Bridge	2 August 1982	15	30	30	80
Tay Bridge	8 March 1981	7½	10	20	60
	19 August 1984	10	15	30	75
Wales					
Cleddau Bridge	1 April 1979	5	10	35	70
	1 October 1983	5	10	40	80

Privatisation (Safety Monitoring)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent he plans to increase the level of inspecting staff for the purpose of monitoring safety standards resulting from his proposed privatisation of public transport services.

Mr. David Mitchell: We are currently assessing the Department's requirement for vehicle examiners in the light of the proposals in the Transport Bill.

Transport Services (Operating Licences)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of privately run transport services have had their operating licences revoked during the the last five years.

Mr. David Mitchell: Public service vehicle operators' licensing was introduced on 1 April 1981. Statistics of revocations are collected for April-March years. In 1981-82 the traffic commissioners revoked 19 licences, in 1982-83, 17, and in 1983-84, 16. These figures represent about 0·3 per cent. annually of the total number of PSV operators' licences held by private sector operators.

Rail Incident (Todmorden)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange for the publication of the Railway Inspecting Officer's report on the recent incident in Summit tunnel, Todmorden, when it is available.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Regulation of Railways Act 1871, under which the inspecting officer has been appointed to inquire into this accident, requires the publication of his report.

Transport Bill

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Transport what travel concessions will be available on taxis and minibuses under the Transport Bill.

Mr. David Mitchell: Under clause 85 of the Bill a local authority which established a scheme for travel concessions would be required to enter into arrangements with any operator of a registered local service who offered to participate in that scheme. Local services are defined in Clause 2 of the Bill, and are, broadly, those carrying passengers at separate fares on which passengers can travel for less than 15 miles. Such services operated by minibuses and taxis will be treated identically to those operated by large buses.

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether the dinner in the west midlands on Tuesday 5 February at which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of

State, the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Mr. Mitchell) was to discuss the Transport Bill with local newspaper editors and about which hon. Members were notified by his Department involved any expenditure of public funds.

Mr. Ridley: Yes.

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many dinners have been arranged between departmental Ministers and newspaper editors to discuss the Government's Transport Bill; where these meetings were held; who was present; and what was the total cost to public funds.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has met 86 editors in Manchester, Preston, Liverpool, Newcastle, Durham, Doncaster, Leeds, Nottingham and Birmingham as part of a series of visits which also involved meetings with representatives of local authorities. Officials were present on each occasion. The cost of the hospitality will be under £2,000.

I have arranged to hold a similar meeting with editors in Bristol.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax Allowances

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the gain in tax revenue of abolishing the wife's earned income tax allowance; and by how much (i) single person's tax allowance, (ii) married man's tax allowance, and (iii) both allowances could be increased if the amount of revenue gained by the abolition of the wife's earned income allowance were allocated in equal proportion to those other allowances at nil cost to the Exchequer.

Mr. Moore: The yield from abolition of the wife's earned income allowance is estimated to be £3·1 billion in a full year at 1984-85 income levels. This assumes that the wife's earned income election would not be available after the change to those couples who do not benefit from it at present. Without this restriction, the yield from abolition of the allowance would be reduced to about £1·9 billion. Both these estimates also assume no change in taxpayers' behaviour.

If the £3·1 billion was devoted to raising the single allowance, it could be increased by 58 per cent. above its 1984-85 level to £3,175 (this is £20 above the level of the married man's allowance). Alternatively, the married man's allowance could be increased by 28 per cent. to £4,045. If both allowances were raised simultaneously, they could each be increased by 18 per cent.—to £2,365 for a single person and £3,725 for a married man. These estimates all assume that the age allowances would be increased by the same percentage as the corresponding non-age allowances.

Merchant Navy (Tax Concessions)

Dr. Glyn asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, when he frames his Budget, he will take into consideration tax concessions to the Merchant Navy to encourage a strong merchant fleet.

Mr. Moore: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Common Agricultural Policy (Contributions)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the contributions which have been made by the United Kingdom to the common agricultural policy fund of the European Community in each single year since 1979.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Under the own resources system member states contribute to the financing of the Community budet as a whole rather than to individual policies such as the common agricultural policy.

Child Benefit

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what amount per week child benefit could be raised if it were taxed and the proceeds of taxation allocated to raising its levels.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1985, c.*592*]: On the assumption that the wife's earned income allowance could not be set against child benefit if it was brought into tax, the level of child benefit could be increased by about £2·40 per week above its average level in 1984-85.

Taxation

Mr. Silvester asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the loss of tax revenue if the limits on contributions to pensions from earned income were applied to husbands and wives both earning as if they were two single persons.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1985, c.*319*]: Nil. Individuals may contribute for a pension or retirement annuity up to a given percentage of their remuneration or relevant earnings. These limits are not aggregated in the case of a married couple, both of whom are working and making contributions.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Universities and Polytechnics (Grants)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the grant allocation to universities and polytechnics in each single year since 1979.

Mr. Brooke: Recurrent and capital grants made available to universities in Great Britain for each financial year since 1979-80, on the advice of the University Grants Committee and the Computer Board, were as follows:

Financial year	*Recurrent* £ *million*	*Capital (including equipment grant)* £ *million*
1979-80	741,190	101,271
1980-81	956,464	110,598
1981-82	982,335	116,308
1982-83	*1,193,333	118,926
1983-84	*1,240,181	117,615
†1984-85	1,268,564	124,334

* Includes redundancy and restructuring costs — £57,000,000 in 1982-83 and £38,800,000 in 1983-84.

† Estimates provision.

The figures are not readily comparable from year-to-year because of various funding changes, most notably made to reflect changes in the level of the home undergraduate tuition fee. The real value of this fee was halved for the 1982-83 academic year and further reduced for 1983-84. In both these cases, there were compensating adjustments in UGC recurrent grant. A minor adjustment was also made in 1984-85.

The total allocations for financial years from 1982-83 for polytechnics in England from the capped AFE pool for recurrent expenditure were as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1982-83	371,000
1983-84	377,555
1984-85	388,856

Separate allocations to polytechnics were not made before 1982-83. Capital expenditure on polytechnics is met from their maintaining authorities' total allocations of education capital expenditure, determined annually. Authorities have freedom under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 to determine their own distribution of capital expenditure within their total allocation.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the principal objectives of his Department for 1985.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Department's principal objectives for education are to raise standards and to achieve better value for money throughout the education system. In pursuance of these aims for schools I intend to make progress, in consultation with those concerned in the education service and outside it, in the formulation of broadly agreed curricular objectives; to publish the national criteria for the GCSE examinations and to make progress with the development of grade criteria for incorporation in the national criteria; to prepare for the introduction of records of achievement; to set a target for the removal of surplus places for March 1987 and beyond; and to make further progress in the field of teacher training.

In non-advanced further education the aim is to increase the responsiveness of the service to the needs of the employers while providing a sound education for young people and encouraging improved use of resources. In the short term, a key objective is to implement the decisions set out in the White Paper "Training for Jobs" (Cmnd. 9135).

In higher education the aims are to maintain access for those who want it and are suitably qualified, to promote the necessary improvements in the use of available resources and to encourage the system to be more responsive to the needs of employers. During 1985 it is intended to publish a Green Paper on higher education policy (and a consultative document on student support) setting out the Government's thinking on these matters in more detail.

In science, the Department's aim is to maintain and enhance the strength and quality of the science base in higher education and the research councils. Consonant with this, the objectives in 1985 are to encourage: greater concentration and selectivity of research activities; closer and better working with industry and commerce; more funding from private sector sources; better management yielding greater value for money; and increased flexibility, enabling faster response to new scientific opportunities.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the principal achievements of his Department in the education field in 1984.

Sir Keith Joseph: The principal achievements have been to set in hand the processes needed for the raising of standards at all ability levels and to continue seeking better value for money throughout the education system. The following measures have been taken to these ends:

In the Schools

The definition, in the speech I made at the north of England Conference in Sheffield in January 1984, of longer-term objectives for the schools; and the consequential discussions and reactions;

The decision to introduce the General Certificate of Secondary Education within a framework of national criteria and criteria-related grades;

The decision to introduce, after pilot schemes, records of achievement for school-leavers of all abilities;

The issuing of a consultative paper proposing the introduction of Advanced Supplementary (AS) level examination.

The Green Paper "Parental Influence in Schools" (Cmnd. 9242), which proposed the reform of school government. The many comments received are now under consideration.

Teachers

The establishment of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, to evaluate teacher training courses;

The publication by the Department of a discussion paper on school-teacher numbers and deployment in the longer term.

Non-Advanced Further Education

The establishment of a scheme of in-service training grants for further education lecturers;

The establishment of College-Employer Links Projects in eight Local Education Authorities.

Higher Education

The admission to higher education of record numbers of students and also of full-time home students;

Endorsement of the plans of the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education for the funding and disposition of academic provision in 1985-86. These provide for a continuation of the significant shift towards science and engineering and other vocational subjects, and for the more efficient use of constrained resources generally, in the public sector of higher education.

Education Support Grants

The provision of grant to support up to £30 million of expenditure on selected activities of national education importance, as provided for under the Education (Grants and Awards) Act 1984.

Youth Services

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the circular on youth services for local authorities is due to be published.

Mr. Brooke: I expect this circular to be published very soon.

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he proposes any changes in staffing responsibilities within his Department in respect of those handling youth matters.

Sir Keith Joseph: Staffing levels are regularly reviewed, in the light of necessary constraints on Civil Service manpower.

National Youth Advisory Council

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what consultations have been made with the various youth organisations and youth services on the composition of the National Youth Advisory Council;

(2) what is the proposed composition of the National Youth Advisory Council.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend stated on 11 July 1984 at column 1036 that he intends to appoint, in conjunction with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, individual members to the youth service advisory body in a personal capacity. In making choices for membership, he will have regard to the broad range of interests in the youth service field and to advice he may receive on membership from those active within it. Due account will be taken of all representations received.

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects the National Youth Advisory Council to be established.

Mr. Brooke: It is hoped to announce the arrangements for an advisory body on youth service matters in the near future.

Medical Students

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of medical students claiming a full year clinical grant for the current academic year; and what are the comparable figures for the period since the academic year 1974-75.

Mr. Brooke: This information is not collected by the Department.

Secondary Schools (Ministerial Visits)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what further visits he proposes to make to secondary schools to ask pupils to assess standards of teaching similar to that which he made recently in a school in Coventry.

Sir Keith Joseph: I shall continue to take frequent opportunity to visit schools and to talk when possible with groups of pupils. When referring to teaching standards I have always as I did at Coventry emphasised that I seek no names or identifications.

Iraqi Security Agents

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice his Department gives to universities and other higher education institutions over the presence of Iraqi security agents posing as students.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend has received no requests for such advice, which should in any case be sought not from him but from the local police.

ENVIRONMENT

Acid Rain

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list those studies which have been carried out by his Department to establish what relationship exists between the development of nuclear resources and reductions in the deposition of nitrous oxides and sulphur dioxide; and whether he will place copies of these studies in the Library.

Mr. Waldegrave: No such studies have been carried out.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made any estimate of how many additional nuclear power stations would be required to achieve reductions of *(a)* 15 per cent., *(b)* 30 per cent. and *(c)* 60 per cent. in the total emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxides in the United Kingdom assuming that the present number of coal-fired stations was reduced in order to achieve such reductions and that no other measures were taken to achieve these objectives and over what timescales such reductions could be achieved.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government believe that nuclear power will form an increasing component of the country's future electricity supply. This, together with new technologies being developed for cleaner and more efficient fossil fuel combustion, will help to contain future emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxides from power stations. But no estimate of the kind suggested has been made. Achievement of reductions in future emissions is dependent on a number of variables in addition to any increase in the proportion of nuclear generated electricity. These include, for example, the rate of growth of the economy and associated electricity demand.

Conservation

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, following the Government's response to the Countryside Commission's document "A Better Future for the Uplands," he will make it his policy to give grants for the maintenance and improvement of features such as dry-stone walls or small woods.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Countryside Commission, which is financed by grant-in-aid from my Department, operates grant schemes which encourage land management practices that assist conservation.

In addition, higher rates of grant are now available for certain conservation works such as shelter belts, dry stone walls and other traditionally built boundaries under schemes operated by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if Her Majesty's government will impose a moratorium on the deregistration of commons until after the Commons Land Forum has reported, and the recommendations made in its report have been considered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend has no power to impose such a moratorium. However, following representations I have had from the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who is Chairman of the Open

Spaces Society, my Department will consider, with the Common Land Forum means of monitoring applications to deregister common land.

Council House Building

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received about the level of funding available to maintain council home building *(a)* generally and *(b)* to provide specialised accommodation.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about the level of resources for public sector housing. The Government's public expenditure plans allow for over £3 billion of public sector investment in housng in each of the next three years. Local authorities have been asked to concentrate their investment on providing for those people in greater need, including those requiring specialised accommodation.

Newcastle upon Tyne

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate how much Government grant Newcastle city council would receive if no penalties were levied upon it under the new system of distribution; and what would be the consequent rate rise on a standstill budget.

Mr. Waldegrave: For a budget of £138 million, the estimated grant before holdback for 1985-86 is £33,706,000. Rate poundage changes depend on the city council's decision on use of reserves.

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate how much grant aid the city of Newcastle upon Tyne would receive if the Government paid grant to the level of the city's grant-related expenditure, without penalties or negative grant; and, on a standstill budget, what rate rise that would necessitate.

Mr. Waldegrave: If grant were paid in 1985-86 on the assumption that all authorities spent at the level of their grant related expenditure assessment, it is estimated that the city of Newcastle's grant would be £39.421,000 before holdback. Rate poundage changes depend on the city council's decision on use of reserves.

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate how much grant aid, in cash terms, the city of Newcastle upon Tyne would receive if the Government provided the same level of support as in 1980-81; and by what percentage the city then could reduce its rates.

Mr. Waldegrave: If the 1985-86 percentage of total estimated relevant expenditure met by aggregate exchequer grant had been the same as in 1980-81, it is estimated that the city of Newcastle's grant in 1985-86 would have been £21,756,000 after holdback for a budget of £138 million. Rate poundage changes depend on the city council's decision on use of reserves.

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the rate increase required by the city of Newcastle upon Tyne to maintain a standstill budget of £138 million; and what would be the amount of central Government grant contribution in cash terms.

Mr. Waldegrave: For a budget of £138 million, the estimated grant after holdback for 1985-86 is £6,106,000. Rate poundage changes depend on the city council's decision on use of reserves.

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the original rate support grant estimate for the current financial year for the city of Newcastle upon Tyne; and what the next year's rate increase would have been, on a standstill budget, had the original grant estimate been adhered to.

Mr. Waldegrave: The original grant estimate for 1984-85 was £40,327,000. This related to a budget equal to target of £122,256,000. Rate poundage changes depend on the city council's decision on use of reserves.

Lea Valley Ice Skating Centre

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money the Sports Council has grant-aided the Lea Valley ice skating centre in *(a)* capital grants and *(b)* revenue grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Lea Valley ice centre received a Sports Council capital grant of £1 million towards a total project cost of £2·6 million. No revenue grant was given.

Streatham Ice Rink

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what public funds have been made available to continue public use of the Streatham ice rink.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Sports Council has made available £100,000 for this purpose.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment for what purpose the Sports Council grant-aided the Streatham ice rink to the extent of £50,000; and if he is satisfied that the necessary criteria set for receipt of this money have been met.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The grant was offered to secure the continued availability of the facility, which the Sports Council recognised as having strategic importance in the development of both recreational and competitive ice skating. I understand that the Sports Council's normal conditions of grant apply. In particular, the facility will be kept operative for a minimum period of 10 years (from 29 February 1980). If closed within this period, or if any of the grant conditions are not met, an appropriate proportion of grant will be refunded to the council.

Sports Council

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment who is the accounting officer of the Sports Council.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Mr. John D. Wheatley, the Director-General.

Voluntary Bodies (Salaries)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what instructions are issued by his Department regarding the use and accountability of public funds for paying voluntary body salaries.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Department administers several programmes of direct grants to voluntary organisations. Under each there are established procedures for ensuring that all expenditure, including that on salaries, is reasonable and that public funds are properly accounted for. In the case of grants awarded by the Department's sponsored agencies, it is the responsibility of each agency to ensure that there are proper financial controls over the voluntary organisations they fund. No special instructions about paying voluntary body salaries have been issued by the Department.

National Skating Association

Dr. John Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each year since 1981 the amounts of grant paid to the National Skating Association under the headings of *(a)* coaching, *(b)* international and *(c)* administration and development.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The grant paid was as follows:

	1980-81 £	*1981-82* £	*1982-83* £	*1983-84* £	*Total* £
Administration	55,024	32,061	53,043	118,599	258,727
Training	42,579	60,000	42,500	85,500	230,579
International	39,500	41,595	10,000	65,939	157,034
	137,103	133,656	105,543	270,038	646,340

Fairs

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the use of land for fairs without prior planning permission in all circumstances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: No. Temporary planning permission is available in the General Development Order 1977 for the use of land for fairs for up to 28 days in total in any calendar year, and I have no reason to suppose that any changes in these arrangements are necessary.

Permitted Development

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the categories of development permitted without prior planning permission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: We published for public consultation last year a number of proposals to amend the General Development Order 1977, including changes to some of the categories of permitted development set out in that order. Details of our conclusions in respect of telecommunications development were outlined in a reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 25 October 1984 at column *689-90*. I am currently considering the results of the consultations on the other proposals. Our overall aim is to keep or reduce planning controls over development to the necessary minimum, while ensuring that they are effective in operation.

Greater London Enterprise Board

Mr. Ground asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will decline to provide financial support for the Greater London enterprise board unless the board either allows its business tenants in Frampton road, Hounslow, to purchase their premises or provides them with suitable alternative accommodation.

Mr. Kenneth Baker [*pursuant to his answer*, 6 February 1985, c. *628*]: The Department has received an application from the GLC for consent under the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 for the provision by the GLC of funding for GLEB amounting to £19,991,500 in 1985-86. This application is receiving very careful consideration and my right hon. Friend will take full account of all relevant factors in reaching a decision.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Personal Portable Pensions

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to publish his conclusions on the public consultation over personal portable pensions.

Mr. Whitney: Our personal pensions proposals are being developed in the light of responses to the consultative document and in the broader context of the Social Security Review. We hope to announce proposals for change following the review in the course of the next few months.

Rheumatology

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each district health authority in England the number of consultants, doctors and nurses employed specifically in the treatment of rheumatology; and if he will express these numbers for each authority on the basis of the number living within the district per employee.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Information in the form requested is not available centrally. Figures for medical staffing for each English region at 30 September 1984 are set out in the table.

Region	Doctors in the specialty of rheumatology: All grades† (wtes ‖)	Consultants‡ (wtes ‖)	Population* per whole-time equivalent rheumatologist: All grades† (1,000 population per wte ‖)	Consultant‡ (1,000 population per wte ‖)
Northern	27·7	14·2	110	220
Yorkshire	17·4	7·3	210	490
Trent	28·7	15·1	160	300
East Anglia	21·9	9·5	90	200
North West Thames	47·4	23·7	70	150
North East Thames	52·4	28·5	70	130
South East Thames	46·5	24·5	80	150
South West Thames	28·9	14·4	100	200
Wessex	38·2	20·0	70	140
Oxford	32·9	9·7	70	240
South Western	12·1	6·6	260	470
West Midlands	24·4	5·5	210	940
Mersey	8·2	3·0	300	810
North Western	38·9	17·1	100	230
London Post-graduate teaching hospitals	4·1	1·3	na	na
ENGLAND	429·7	200·4	110	230

* Managed population at mid-1983 (later figures not yet available).
† Including hospital practitioners and paragraph 94 appointments.
‡ Including senior hospital medical officers with allowance.
‖ wte = Whole Time Equivalent.

Baby Care (Conference)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what response he has had so far to the invitation from his Department to the conference of doctors and pathologists which it wishes to arrange on the care of babies.

Mr. John Patten: The conference has been arranged to focus attention on post neonatal mortality following the publication of the report of the multi-centre study funded by the Department. The response so far to invitations sent to national organisations, representatives of the health professions, individual researchers, and others with a particular interest in their field is very encouraging.

Board and Lodging Payments

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what reply he has sent to the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders in response to its submission to the Government objecting to proposals to reduce the level of board and lodgings payments to social security claimants.

Mr. Whitney: We have received a copy of representations made to the Social Security Advisory Committee by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders. These will be taken into account, along with all the other representations received, when we are considering the comments of the Social Security Advisory Committee on our proposals.

Mr. Anderson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the estimated numbers of supplementary benefit claimants receiving board and lodging benefits in the following age groups in each of the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984: *(a)* 16 and 17 years, *(b)* 18 to 25 years, *(c)* 26 years to retirement age and *(d)* over retirement age.

Mr. Whitney: All the information in the form requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The available information is as follows:

Supplementary benefit claimants in ordinary board and lodging accommdation (including hostels and common lodging houses)

	1979	1980	1981	1982	*1983
Aged 16–17	—	—	—	4,000	7,000
Aged 18–25	—	—	—	19,000	30,000
Aged 26–pensionable age	—	—	—	48,000	58,000
All under pensionable age	34,000	45,000	58,000	71,000	95,000
All over pensionable age	15,000	10,000	11,000	14,000	14,000

*Provisional.
Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries.

Supplementary benefit claimants paid as boarders in private and voluntary Residential Care Homes and Nursing Homes

	1979	1980	1981	1982	*1983
Under pensionable age	1,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	3,000
Over pensionable age	11,000	12,000	12,000	14,000	23,000

* Provisional
(Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries)

Ambulancemen

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the levels of pay earned by ambulancemen each year since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: Estimates, derived from various sources for each year except 1982 , of average gross weekly earnings (excluding London allowance) of all ambulancemen in Great Britain are as follows:

June of	£
1979	93·92
1980	129·95
1981	141·56
1983	153·55
1984	160·46

Homeless Young People

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to assess the effect on the number of 16 to 17-year-olds registered as homeless of his proposals to withdraw their benefit allocations.

Mr. Whitney: I assume the hon. Member is referring to our proposals to reform the arrangements for making board and lodging payments under the supplementary benefit scheme. It would be premature to make plans at this stage for monitoring the effects of implementing proposals on which the comments of the Social Security Advisory Committee and the Government's response have yet to be published.

Hospital Expenditure (Outside Contractors)

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of total hospital expenditure in England and Wales was accounted for by contracted-out services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Contracted out services accounted for 2·35 per cent. of health authorities total current expenditure in 1983-84. We have defined total current expenditure for this purpose to exclude expenditure on National Health Service Central Services and also payments made to doctors, dentists, opticians, and chemist contractors providing family practitioner services. The information in health authorities accounts does not enable us to give a separate percentage for hospital services within the total, which also includes expenditure on services such as ambulances and community health.

Prescriptions

Dr. Mawhinney asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each of the past five years the total number of prescriptions and their total cost, at 1984 prices, written by general practitioners; and what assumption he has made for planning purposes of the total number and total cost for each of the next three years, at 1984 prices *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding any limited list effect.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Pensions

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the United Kingdom population is in receipt of statutory retirement pension; and how this figure compares with other European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Whitney: It is estimated that in mid-1983 some 17 per cent. of the population of the United Kingdom were in receipt of a state retirement pension. This estimate excludes pensioners living outside the United Kingdom and relates to receipt of either contributory or non-contributory retirement pension.

Because of variations in pension age between member states of the European Community, information is not available centrally on the proportion of people over specific retirement ages receiving a state retirement pension. Such information as is available is contained in the publication "Eurostat: Demographic Statistics: 1984", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the United Kingdom population is of pensionable age; and how this compares with other European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Whitney: The most up-to-date and readily available information† is as follows:

Country	*Percentage of population of pensionable age**
United Kingdom	18
Federal Republic of Germany	18
France	16
Italy	16
Netherlands	14
Belgium	16
Luxembourg	16
Ireland	13
Denmark	17
Greece	16

* To facilitate comparison, the population of pensionable age has been defined as the number of females aged 60 and over plus the number of males aged 65 and over.

† Figures for countries other than United Kingdom have been compiled from Eurostat "Demographic Statistics", Statistical Office of the European Communities (1984). All figures relate to 1982 except United Kingdom (1983), Italy (1981) and Greece (1981).

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the United Kingdom Government spending goes to paying for pensions for retired persons; and how this compares with other European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Whitney: It is estimated that in the financial year 1984-85, some 14 per cent. of United Kingdom Government expenditure relates to pensions for retired persons. The definition of public expenditure is that used in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1985-86 to 1987-88" (Cmnd. 9428); pensions for retired persons are defined to include state retirement pensions, supplementary pension, the rent element of housing benefit and includes retirement pensions payable to people outside the United Kingdom. Comparable estimates for other member states of the European Community are not readily available and I shall write to the hon. Member.

AIDS

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to announce the outcome of his review of the public health implications of making acquired immune deficiency syndrome a notifiable disease.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We hope to make an announcement shortly.

Private Pensions

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the United Kingdom population is in receipt of private pension; and how this figure compares with other European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that information is not available in the form requested. The following estimates, derived from the family expenditure survey, show the number of occupational pensions in payment in Great Britain in 1982.

They include pensions for widows and dependants and those awarded in early retirement. They do not include pensions which people have arranged for themselves. We are not aware of any similar estimates for other member states.

	Estimated number of pensions in payment of 1982 (millions)
Payable to people under pension age	1·0
Payable to people over pension age	3·0
TOTAL	4·0
	per cent.
Pensions in payment as a percentage of total estimated Great Britain population in 1982	7·4

Doctors (Prescribing Habits)

Dr. Mawhinney asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out the criteria which determine when a general practitioner's prescribing habits are subject to scrutiny and review.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The prescribing costs of all National Health Service general medical practitioners are examined annually on the basis of information provided by the Prescription Pricing Authority.

Agency Nurses (Liverpool)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many nurses were employed on an agency basis by the Liverpool health authority at the latest available date; how this figure compares with those for each of the three previous years; and what was the principal source of these agency nurses.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Figures for 1983, the latest date for which district figures are available, and 1982, the only previous year for which district figures are available, are shown in the table. We do not collect detailed local information centrally on the source of supply of these nurses.

Liverpool Health Authority
Number of Agency Nurses (whole time equivalents)

September 1983	17
September 1982	4

NHS (Private Contracts)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what interventions he has made in decisions taken by district and regional health authorities to award National Health Service hospital contracts to private firms; and what consultations he sought with hospital union staff when this action was taken.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have intervened only when there were good reasons to believe that health authorities had taken or intended to take decisions which were not in the best interests of patients. We do not consider that it is necessary for us to consult the unions on these matters.

Contraceptive Sponge

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he intends to conduct in respect of cancer risks emanating from the use of the sponge device in girls under the age of 16 years who do not obtain contraceptives through a doctor.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None. When the Committee on Dental and Surgical Materials recommended the granting of a licence for the spermicidal sponge, "Today", they took account of all the available evidence and were satisfied as to the safety of this product for the proposed use. The spermicide in the sponge is also used in a number of other licensed contraceptive products.

Wintex '85

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what part he expects nurses, doctors and other health workers to play in the Wintex '85 exercises.

Mr. John Patten: There are no plans for nurses, doctors or other health workers to play a part in the exercise.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if representatives of the regional health authorities have been involved in the preparations for the Wintex '85 exercises.

Mr. John Patten: Regional health authority representatives have not been involved in the preparations for this exercise.

Supplementary Benefit

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what recent representations he has received resulting from his proposals to terminate the entitlement to supplementary benefit to claimants under the age of 18 years.

Mr. Whitney: None. We have made no such proposals. Entitlement of young people to supplementary benefit is one of the issues being considered in the review of social security, the outcome of which we hope to announce in the course of the next few months. Representations were invited on this issue following the announcement of the review in April last year, and all those submitted are being carefully considered.

Health Authorities (Land)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why nearby local residents were not consulted by Waltham Forest district health authority before it decided to lease its land opposite Leyton green for the purpose of a fair; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The conditions of the licence restricted the hours in which the fair could operate and required that the site would be kept clean and tidy and that the volume of generators and music would be kept low. As, additionally, the licence required the fair operator to obtain all necessary permissions from the local authority and as officers of the health authority discussed the licence with officers and councillors of the local authority, the health authority did not consider it necessary to consult local residents before granting the licence for the fairground.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what dates *(a)* the police and *(b)* the London

borough of Waltham Forest were informed by Waltham Forest district health authority that a fair would be operating on its land opposite Leyton green with effect from 4 February.

Mr. John Patten: The police were not informed of the decision to grant a licence. An initial discussion with the local authority took place on 30 January and was followed by subsequent discussions at the health authority's offices and at the site.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the decision of Waltham Forest district health authority to enter into a lease to use its land opposite Leyton green for the purpose of a fair was *(a)* an administrative one, *(b)* authorised by the chairman or *(c)* agreed by the health authority members board.

Mr. John Patten: In line with the authority's standing orders and standing financial instructions, it was an administrative decision.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will issue guidelines to health authorities not to lease or rent out their land without first consulting nearby local residents, the police and other relevant public authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Health authorities are authorised to act on behalf of the Secretary of State in land transactions and they are responsible for ensuring that any necessary consultation is carried out. However, in the light of the case which the hon. Member has raised I will consider the need for guidelines and will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Drugs Bill

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the drugs bill as a proportion of total National Health Service spending in each year since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The proportion of total National Health Service expenditure attributable to the cost of drugs (excluding the cost of dispensing) was:

Year ended 31 March	*Per cent.*
1979	10·6
1980	10·3
1981	9·6
1982	9·8
1983	10·4
1984	10·9

Benefits and Pensions (West Midlands)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of claimants of unemployment and supplementary benefits and pensions in the west midlands region in each year since 1979-80.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Benefits

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he intends to take to prevent incorrect benefit payments being allocated to claimants of social security.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her on 7 February.

Hospitals and Community Health (Expenditure)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which individual areas will benefit from the extra spending to be devoted towards hospitals and community health in 1985-86.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Regional health authorities will determine the distribution to health districts of the nearly £500 million additional cash this Government have made available in 1985-86.

NHS (Private Beds)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the charges for private beds in National Health Service hospitals in each year since June 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We determine charges for private resident patients in health service hospitals for each period of 12 months beginning 1 April. The amounts are shown in the tables, but changes in the classification of hospitals mean that yearly comparisons are not valid in many cases.

1 April 1979 to 31 March 1980

	Daily charge for private resident patients who are not paying consultant separately		*Daily charge for private resident patients who are paying consultant separately*	
	Single Room	*Other Accommodation*	*Single Room*	*Other Accommodation*
	£	£	£	£
Class A (long-stay hospitals)	31·20	28·50	29·80	27·10
Class B (psychiatric hospitals)	19·10	17·50	18·30	16·60
Class C (acute and other hospitals in teaching and non-teaching districts)	52·50	47·90	50·30	45·70
Class D (hospitals in London teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A, B and C))	78·80	72·00	74·40	67·60
Class E (hospitals in provincial teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A, B and C))	61·60	56·30	58·20	52·90
Class F (London post graduate boards of governors hospitals)	83·30	76·20	78·70	71·60

1 April 1980 to 31 March 1981

	Daily charge for private resident patients who are not paying consultant separately		*Daily charge for private resident patients who are paying consultant separately*	
	Singe Room	*Other Accommodation*	*Single Room*	*Other Accommodation*
	£	£	£	£
Class A (long-stay hospitals)	43·60	39·80	41·70	37·90
Class B (psychiatric hospitals)	26·90	24·60	25·70	23·30
Class C1 (mainly acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	65·80	60·10	63·00	57·20
Class C2 (acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	75·70	69·20	72·40	65·90
Class D (hospitals in London teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B)	101·30	92·60	95·60	86·90
Class E (hospitals in provincial teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B)	83·10	75·90	78·40	71·30
Class F (London postgraduate boards of Governors hospitals)	113·10	103·40	106·80	97·10

1 April 1981 to 31 March 1982

	Daily charge for private resident patients who are not paying consultant separately		*Daily charge for private resident patients who are paying consultant separately*	
	Single Room	*Other Accommodation*	*Single Room*	*Other Accommodation*
	£	£	£	£
Class A (long-stay hospitals)	50·20	45·80	48·10	43·70
Class B (psychiatric hospitals)	32·90	30·00	31·50	28·60
Class C1 (mainly acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	75·40	68·80	72·20	65·60
Class C2 (acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	86·70	79·10	83·00	75·40
Class D (hospitals in London teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B)	118·10	107·90	111·70	101·60
Class E (hospitals in provincial teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B)	97·60	89·20	92·30	83·90
Class F (London postgraduate boards of governors hospitals)	131·80	120·40	124·60	113·30

1 April 1982 to 31 March 1983

	Daily charge for private resident patients who are not paying consultant separately		*Daily charge for private resident patients who are paying consultant separately*	
	Single room	*Other accommodation*	*Single room*	*Other accommodation*
	£	£	£	£
Class A (Long-stay hospitals)	56·60	51·60	54·30	49·40
Class B (Psychiatric hospitals)	37·10	33·90	35·60	32·30
Class C1 (Mainly acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	85·60	78·10	82·10	74·70
Class C2 (Acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	97·50	89·00	93·50	85·00
Class D (Hospitals in London teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B))	133·60	122·00	126·90	115·30
Class E (Hospitals in privincial teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B))	106·50	97·30	100·90	91·80
Class F (London postgraduate teaching hospitals managed by Boards of Governors and Special Health Authorities except the hospitals managed by Hammersmith Special Health Authority)	157·20	143·60	149·40	135·80
Class G (Hospitals managed by Hammersmith Special Health Authority)	139·40	127·40	132·00	120·00

1 April 1983 to 31 March 1984

	Daily charge to private resident patients who are not paying consultant separately		*Daily charge to private patients who are paying consultant separately*	
	Single room	*Other accommodation*	*Single room*	*Other accommodation*
	£	£	£	£
Class A (Long-stay hospitals)	58·50	53·40	56·10	51·00
Class B (Psychiatric hospitals)	44·90	40·90	43·00	39·10

	Daily charge to private resident patients who are not paying consultant separately		*Daily charge to private patients who are paying consultant separately*	
	Single room £	*Other accommodation* £	*Single room* £	*Other accommodation* £
Class C1 (Mainly acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	89·80	82·00	86·00	78·20
Class C2 (Acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	102·40	93·50	98·20	89·20
Class D (Hospitals in London teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B))	142·50	130·20	134·90	122·60
Class E (Hospitals in provincial teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B))	113·60	103·80	107·60	97·80
Class F (London postgraduate teaching hospitals managed by Boards of Governors and Special Health Authorities except the hospitals managed by Hammersmith Special Health Authority)	176·60	161·40	167·20	152·00
Class G (Hospitals managed by Hammersmith Special Health Authority)	163·10	149·10	154·40	140·40

1 April 1984 to 31 March 1985

	Daily charge to private resident patients who are not paying consultant separately		*Daily charge to private patients who are paying consultant separately*	
	Single room £	*Other accommodation* £	*Single room* £	*Other accommodation* £
Class A (Long-stay hospitals)	59	54	57	52
Class B (Psychiatric hospitals)	47	43	45	41
Class C1 (Mainly acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	100	91	96	87
Class C2 (Acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts)	114	104	110	100
Class D (Hospitals in London teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B))	148	135	140	127
Class E (Hospitals in provincial teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B))	122	111	115	105
Class F (London postgraduate teaching hospitals managed by Special Health Authorities (other than hospitals in Class G))	177	161	167	152
Class G (The hospitals for Sick Children and the National Heart and Chest Hospitals)	203	186	192	175

Leukaemia (West Cumbria)

Dr. John Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about the progress of investigations and research recommended in the Black report about the incidence of Leukaemia in west Cumbria.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have commissioned research projects which will implement the first three recommendations of the report and expect to commision a further project shortly to implement the fourth recommendation. Work is under way and the results of this research will become available over the next three years.

We are still discussing with other Government Departments, outside bodies and clinicians from West Cumbria the best means of carrying out the other research and investigations recommended in the report.

Employment of Children Act 1973

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what resources he intends to make available to local authorities to enable them to implement the Employment of Children Act 1973.

Mr. John Patten: As the hon. Member is aware, local authority associations were consultated in 1975 and 1977 on the implementation of the Employment of Children Act 1973. It was concluded, that, because of the resource implication for local authorities, the introduction of the Act's provisions could not be justified. It is still considered to be inappropriate to impose further responsibilities on local authorities.

Deaf Students

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many deaf students have completed courses at residential training courses for the disabled and Manpower Services Commission skillcentres in each of the past five years; how many such students were placed successfully in employment; and within what periods.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have been asked to reply. I regret that this information is not available.

DEFENCE

Northern Ireland

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the strength of the Army in Northern Ireland on 31 December 1984, broken down as between the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Regular Army and the Territorial Army.

Mr. Stanley: The information is as follows:

	Strength of Army
Ulster Defence Regiment	6,468
Regular Army	9,110
Territorial Army	3,479
	19,057

The figures for the Ulster Defence Regiment includes full time and part time soldiers. Soldiers of the Territorial Army are not used in support of the RUC in counter-terrorist operations.

Pay

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, rank by rank, the pay increments allocated to service men in the Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force since June 1982.

Mr. Stanley: Full statistics relating to the pay of service men can be obtained from the annual reports of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body and the Top Salaries Review Body which, following their consideration by the Government, are published and made available to the House. However, for ease of reference the following table provides details of the maximum and minimum daily rates of pay for male officers and soldiers in the Army. The maximum rates for soldiers include the highest level of lengths of service increment payable to each rank. The rates of pay for Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel are broadly equivalent rank for rank. Rates of pay at 1 April 1982 are given so that the increase since June 1982 can be seen.

Daily rates of pay for Army male personnel

	From: 1 April 1982	1 April 1983	1 April 1984*	1 November 1984†
Private				
Maximum	18·60	20·06	20·69	21·52
Minimum	11·34	12·03	12·43	12·87
Lance Corporal				
Maximum	20·60	22·18	22·88	23·80
Minimum	13·98	14·87	15·37	15·94
Corporal				
Maximum	22·97	24·69	25·46	26·58
Minimum	17·08	18·15	18·76	19·51
Sergeant				
Maximum	25·29	27·24	28·09	29·35
Minimum	19·92	21·27	21·98	22·91
Staff Sergeant				
Maximum	28·95	31·32	32·30	33·55
Minimum	21·23	22·61	23·36	24·35
WO II				
Maximum	30·50	33·08	34·11	35·43
Minimum	22·63	24·17	24·97	26·03
WO I				
Maximum	32·24	35·04	36·12	37·52
Minimum	24·12	25·88	26·74	27·87
Second Lieutenant				
Maximum	17·12	17·76	18·34	19·14
Minimum	12·05	12·50	12·74	13·22
Lieutenant				
Maximum	23·15	25·18	26·01	27·27
Minimum	20·95	22·78	23·53	24·67
Captain				
Maximum	30·49	33·18	34·27	36·08
Minimum	26·23	28·56	29·50	31·04
Major				
Maximum	39·72	43·25	44·67	46·89
Minimum	33·16	36·13	37·32	39·13
Lieutenant Colonel				
Maximum	49·48	53·93	55·70	58·83
Minimum	44·76	48·81	50·41	53·23
Colonel				
Maximum	57·53	62·76	64·82	68·17
Minimum	52·05	56·80	58·66	61·69
Brigadier				
Maximum / Minimum	62·33	68·31	70·55	74·25
Major General				
Maximum / Minimum	68·49	‡75·82	78·31	80·82
Lieutenant General				
Maximum / Minimum	82·88	‡93·58	96·65	100·00
General				
Maximum / Minimum	103·42	‡116·80	120·63	124·66

* 3 per cent. staged award.
† Full award.
‡ Full award paid from 1 January 1984.

Wintex-Cimex '85

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the countries that will take part in the Wintex '85 exercises; which countries will have forces in the United Kingdom; and what activities will take place in the northern region;

(2) if he will make a statement on the activities of Wintex-Cimex '85 that will take place in the north-east of England.

Mr. Stanley: As I said in my reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) on 30 November 1984 at column *597*, Wintex-Cimex '85 is a NATO-wide command post exercise conducted by Alliance members; as such, United States headquarters personnel in the United Kingdom will participate. In the north and north-east of England staff in service headquarters and selected lower formations will be involved. Details of the scenario for the exercise and the play itself are classified. All members of the Alliance will be involved in the exercise, apart from Greece which is not participating on this occasion. Since France and Spain are not part of the integrated military structure they will be involved only as observers.

Nuclear Tests (Radiation)

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Defence what efforts are being made to examine medically all civilians involved in Christmas Islands atomic tests.

Mr. Butler: The health study currently being undertaken by the National Radiological Protection Board includes civilians who were involved in the British atmospheric nuclear weapon test programmes in Australia and the South Pacific, and is intended to show whether participants, as a group or groups, have been disadvantaged by their involvement in the tests. As many of the civilian participants were and have since continued to be radiation workers, they have received regular medical examination in the course of their normal duties. However, no medical examinations are involved directly as part of the NRPB study, which is being conducted on the basis of existing records.

Departmental Staff (Outside Appointments)

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's and armed services' staff have applied for positions in defence industries in the United Kingdom and the United States of America by year from 1979 to the present; how many were successful; and if he will list in the *Official Report* the organisations or industries to which they moved.

Mr. Butler [*pursuant to his answer*, 5 February 1985, c. *512*]: The number of applications received in respect of proposed appointments with British and American defence companies is as follows:

	United Kingdom defence companies				*USA defence companies in contractual relationship with the Ministry of Defence*			
	Applicants	*Numbers approved*	*Conditions imposed*	*Refused*	*Applicants*	*Numbers approved*	*Conditions imposed*	*Refused%*
1979	113	87	4	1	—	—	—	—
1980	131	57	14	1	2	2	—	—
1981	177	112	9	1	2	2	—	—
1982	340	239	18	2	4	4	—	—
1983	475	395	22	—	6	6	—	—
1984	605	456	12	1	3	3	—	—

A comprehensive list of companies associated with these applications is not readily available, and could be only obtained at disproportionate cost and staff effort.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

COCOM

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will introduce an export control order to implement the recent COCOM agreement; and if he will make a statement concerning the delay which has elapsed.

Mr. Channon: Details of the new rules on exports on computers, software and telecommunications switching equipment were finally agreed by all the COCOM member states on 1 January 1985; and the details of the new rules on other items on the COCOM lists only on 1 February. My intentions to implement in United Kingdom law all the new arrangements at the same time by means of the new Export of Goods (Control) Order, which my right hon. Friend hopes to make in March.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to make the Export of Goods (Control) Order putting into effect the COCOM agreement.

Mr. Channon: My right hon. Friend expects to make the order towards the end of March and expects that it will come into force some weeks later.

Weights and Measures

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the hourly fees charged by his Department for the examination of weighing machines submitted for type approval represents the wages of examiners, travel and accommodation costs and overheads, respectively.

Mr. Fletcher: The hourly rate for pattern examination work is made up as follows, based on 1983-84 costs:

	Per cent.
Examiner staff costs	37
Supervisory and support staff costs	11
Accommodation	21
Other costs	31

Travel and subsistence expenses are invoiced separately to submitters. The staff costs include superannuation and employers' national insurance contributions.

Imports and Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing imports and exports from and to the EEC Six for the years 1962 to 1984 together with the trading surplus or deficit and the respective share of total United Kingdom imports and exports of manufactures;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each year since 1962 imports and exports of manufacturers from the present European Free Trade Association countries plus Denmark, the resultant surplus of deficit and the respective share of total United Kingdom imports and exports of manufactures.

Mr. Channon: The information is in the tables. The data are on the "Overseas Trade Statistics" basis, that is, imports include freight and insurance costs, while exports do not.

United Kingdom trade in manufactures with European Free Trade Association† plus Denmark*
Overseas trade statistics basis £ million

	Exports	*Percentage of total*	*Imports*	*Percentage of total*	*Crude balance*
1962	424	13·0	216	14·7	+208
1963	442	12·9	243	15·5	+199
1964	502	13·9	318	15·8	+184
1965	554	13·5	343	15·2	+211
1966	612	13·9	396	16·0	+216

	Exports	Percentage of total	Imports	Percentage of total	Crude balance
1967	638	14·5	500	17·6	+138
1968	729	13·5	648	17·2	+81
1969	911	14·6	731	17·7	+180
1970	1,078	15·8	946	20·7	+132
1971	1,160	15·1	1,077	21·9	+82
1972	1,231	15·3	1,321	22·1	−91
1973	1,506	15·0	1,902	21·9	−396
1974	1,910	14·4	2,364	20·2	−453
1975	2,177	13·6	2,481	19·9	−305
1976	2,779	13·5	2,978	18·1	−199
1977	3,566	13·8	3,601	17·5	−36
1978	3,322	11·9	4,450	18·3	−1,128
1979	3,852	12·5	5,104	17·2	−1,252
1980	4,698	13·5	4,954	15·9	−256
1981	3,912	11·2	4,727	14·8	−815
1982	3,988	10·7	5,239	14·1	−1,252
1983	4,454	11·1	6,353	14·1	−1,899
1984	5,123	11·0	7,584	14·3	−2,461

Notes:
*Standard International Trade Classification Sections 5 to 8.
†Current membership.
Source:
Overseas Trade Statistics.

United Kingdom trade in manufactures with European Community†*
Overseas trade statistics basis £ million

	Exports	Percentage of total	Imports	Percentage of total	Crude balance
1962	601	18·5	440	30·0	+161
1963	675	19·6	478	30·5	+197
1964	697	19·3	589	29·3	+108
1965	771	18·8	638	28·3	+133
1966	840	19·1	708	28·7	+132
1967	850	19·4	817	28·7	+33
1968	1,065	19·7	1,031	27·3	+34
1969	1,283	20·5	1,111	26·9	+171
1970	1,453	21·4	1,292	28·3	+162
1971	1,553	20·2	1,519	30·9	+34
1972	1,776	22·0	2,034	34·1	−258
1973	2,307	23·0	3,088	35·6	−781
1974	3,283	24·8	4,444	38·1	−1,161
1975	3,818	23·9	4,935	39·5	−1,117
1976	5,496	26·7	6,848	41·6	−1,352
1977	6,979	27·1	8,799	42·6	−1,820
1978	7,821	27·9	10,905	44·8	−3,084
1979	9,608	31·1	13,973	47·1	−4,365
1980	10,936	31·4	13,727	44·0	−2,792
1981	10,419	29·9	14,233	44·5	−3,814
1982	11,394	30·5	17,060	46·0	−5,666
1983	12,481	31·1	20,967	46·7	−8,486
1984	15,043	32·2	24,007	45·4	−8,964

Notes:
*Standard International Trade Classification Sections 5 to 8.
†Original six members.
Source:
Overseas Trade Statistics.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the percentage increase in United Kingdom imports of manufactured goods in 1984; and how this compares with the increase in world trade.

Mr. Channon: The volume of imports of manufactures into the United Kingdom rose by 10 per cent. in 1984, in line with recent estimates of the increase in world trade.

Exports

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the percentage of world trade taken by the United Kingdom's exports for the years 1974 to 1984, inclusive, and his forecast for the current year.

Mr. Channon: The United Kingdom share of world trade is normally taken as the United Kingdom's share of exports of manufactures by the main manufacturing countries. Details of these shares are given in table E1 of the latest edition of the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" and the "Annual Supplement No. 5 (1984)", copies of which are in the Library. Forecasts of these figures are not available.

Comecon (Trade Statistics)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the United Kingdom's trade figures with the individual Comecon member states in each year since 1981.

Mr. Channon: The information is as follows:

Value £ million

	1981 United Kingdom		1982 United Kingdom		1983 United Kingdom		1984 (provisional) United Kingdom	
	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports
Soviet Union	427	408	645	356	730	445	854	735
German Democratic Republic	94	83	134	64	168	61	198	92
Poland	134	176	152	133	177	152	267	170
Czechoslovakia	71	71	82	70	101	69	117	78
Hungary	41	84	44	77	54	92	76	101
Romania	47	150	51	115	59	82	226	72
Bulgaria	13	34	21	46	12	45	17	56
Vietnam	—	1	—	1	1	1	1	2
Mongolia	5	—	4	—	1	—	5	—
Cuba	17	28	18	64	14	46	13	64

Source: Table 1B of the United Kingdom Trade Statistics
Notes:
(a) Imports are valued cif, exports are valued fob
(b) — = nil or less than £0·5 million

Pit Closure Areas (Employment)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he intends to make for the purpose of providing alternative sources of industrial employment in regions affected by the coal pit closures proposed by the National Coal Board.

Mr. Trippier: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Pirate Radio Stations

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many pirate radio stations are operating within the United Kingdom; how many are operating offshore or otherwise outside the United Kingdom; and if he will list them.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 6 February 1985, c. *580*]: Since the beginning of 1984, my Department has monitored 74 unlicensed broadcasters on radio, including two marine stations located beyond United Kingdom territorial waters which aim their transmission at the United Kingdom. In addition, one unlicensed broadcaster on television has been monitored. Some 23 of these have been known to broadcast continuously for considerable periods on a daily basis. The rest transmit only intermittently. It would not be cost effective to monitor all frequencies of the radio spectrum continuously and there may be more unlicensed users of broadcast frequencies who transmit occasionally and who have not come to the attention of the Department.

The names and locations of unlicensed broadcasters on radio who have been monitored since the beginning of 1984 are as follows:

LAND BASED
- Abbey Radio—Suffolk
- Ace Radio—London
- Alice's Restaurant (Phoenix)—London
- Alyson Radio—London
- Amanda Radio—London
- Andromeda Radio—Pennines
- Arabia Radio—London
- Asian People's Radio—London
- Atlantis Radio—Peterborough
- BIB Radio—Bedfordshire
- British Greek Community Radio—London
- Central Radio Int—Liverpool
- Cherry Radio—Northern Ireland
- Country Radio—Rowley Regis
- DBC Radio (Radio 103)—London
- Douglas Valley Radio—Wigan
- E S T—Birmingham
- Eleanor (Merseyside)—Merseyside
- Floss Radio—London
- FM 103—London
- Free City Radio—Edinburgh
- Gapp Radio—London
- Greek Voice of London—London
- Grooves Radio—London
- Harringey Radio—London
- Horizon Radio—London
- Imagine Radio—London
- Invicta Radio—London
- Radio Jackie—London
- JFM—London
- KFM—Stockport
- London Greek Radio—London
- London Town—London
- London Weekend Radio—London
- Metropolitan Radio—London
- Nova Radio—Leicester
- Our Radio—London
- Radio Contact—London
- Radio Gel—London
- Radio Reflex—Maidenhead
- Radio Revenge—Leeds
- Radio Sovereign—Sussex
- RIK—London
- Rugby Community Radio—Rugby
- SCR—Merseyside
- Sheffield Peace Radio—Sheffield
- Shoestring Radio—London
- Sina Radio—London
- Skyline Radio—London
- Solar Radio—London
- Sounds Alternative—Birmingham
- South East Sound—London
- Southside Radio—Manchester
- Sovereign Radio—London
- Spinach Radio—London
- St. Mary Radio—London
- Sunderland I/Knome—Sunderland
- Sunshine Radio (STR)—Glasgow
- Sunshine Radio—Ludlow
- Thameside Television—London
- The Wireless Company—Lincolnshire
- Turkish Community Radio—London
- Venus Radio—London
- Voice of Cyprus—London
- Voice of London Turk—London
- Voice of the Immigrant—London
- WBCR—Sussex
- West London Radio—London
- Wirral FM—Merseyside
- No Call Sign (89·9 MHz)—London
- No Call Sign (97·4 MHz)—Worksop
- No Call Sign (104·5 MHz)—London
- No Call Sign (105·5 MHz)—London

OUTSIDE TERRITORIAL WATERS
- Radio Caroline
- Radio Laser

SCOTLAND

Management Grants Scheme

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will consider introducing a similar grants scheme in Scotland to the management grants scheme operated under the special grants programme of the Department of the Environment in relation to local voluntary action;

(2) if he will produce a guide to grants for voluntary bodies working in environmental fields similar to that produced by the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend has already noted this proposal for consideration when his officials have completed a review of the exercise of powers to grant aid to such bodies in Scotland. Until a decision has been reached, it seems premature to consider the question of producing a guide to financial sources.

Oil Industry (Habitat Scotland Report)

Mr. Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to comment on the Habitat Scotland report on the environmental impact of North sea oil-related developments on Scotland.

Mr. Ancram: I wrote to the director of Habitat Scotland on 5 February with comments on the report. I have placed a copy of my letter in the Library.

Scottish Development Agency (Tourist Projects)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the Scottish Development Agency's service industries division's projects being considered for financial support are related to tourism.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1985, c. *205*]: The planning and projects directorate of the Scottish Development Agency is examining 15 possible projects with a tourism component with a view to establishing their potential viability.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear-free Zones

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards efforts by other countries to establish nuclear-free zones; and what is the policy concerning such zones when they are established.

Mr. Luce: We believe that the establishment of nuclear weapon-free zones in certain parts of the world could contribute to regional security, to non-proliferation and to disarmament in general, provided that nuclear weapons do not already feature in the security of the region involved and all states concerned are prepared to participate on the basis of agreements freely entered into and in keeping with internationally recognised principles. The zone created by the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America of 1967 is a good example. We give that Treaty our full support, as is evidenced by our ratification in 1969 of Additional Protocols I and II. We would like to see all the states which are entitled to do so become parties and to see the treaty enter into force in the entire region.

Syrian Nationals (Deportation)

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Syrian Government regarding the four men holding Syrian passports who were arrested by the Metropolitan police and deported on 29 January on the grounds that their presence in the United Kingdom was not conducive to the public good.

Mr. Luce: The Syrian charge d'affaires was summoned to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 5 February. He was left in no doubt of our grave concern about the circumstances which led to the deportation of the four men and was asked to provide clarification of a number of specific points.

Grenada

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part his Department has played in the work of the Commonwealth study group, set up after the upheaval in Grenada, to consider the future defence of small states; what assistance Her Majesty's Government is prepared to give in any regional forces that may be set up; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: My right hon. and learned Friend sent an analysis of the security problems of small states and of high potential remedies to the Commonwealth Secretary General at the outset of the study last year. The Secretary General subsequently established an independent, non-governmental group to assist his study, the British member of which is Sir A. Parsons.

We provide substantial assistance to small states. This amounted to over £60 million of development aid and military training assistance to 29 Commonwealth small states in 1983-84. We also support the establishment of regional security arrangements among small states and give considerable assistance to the countries belonging to the regional security system in the eastern Caribbean. On 30 October last year, we announced the grant of £1·2 million for the construction of shore facilities for coastguard patrol vessels in six of these countries. I refer my hon. Friend to my Department's memorandum published by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 19 July 1983 (HC 541) for further details of our approach.

Peter Nadin

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in the light of the answer given to the hon. Member for Islington, North by the Lord Privy Seal on 10 January concerning the death of Peter Nadin in Greece in July 1984, *Official Report*, columns 911-12, he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: Her Majesty's embassy in Athens is seeking the co-operation of the Greek authorities and is asking them to review the investigations already made to see what scope there may be for further inquiries into the circumstances or Mr. Nadin's death.

Iraq (Diplomats)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representatives of the Iraqi Government have accredited diplomatic status in the United Kingdom; and if any of these are active on security duties.

Mr. Luce: 28. None of these, so far as we know, are engaged on duties related to the security of embassy premises.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings his Department has had with the ambassador from Iraq concerning the activities of security forces from that embassy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: There have been no such meetings. The activities of all diplomatic missions in London are kept under review. We do not hesitate to make representations when we have clear evidence of unacceptable activities by their members. Should we receive such evidence concerning the embassy of Iraq, we would take appropriate action with the Iraqi ambassador.

Libya (British Hostages)

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the release of the four British hostages in Libya.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am delighted at the safe return of the four British Citizens detained in Libya since mid-May 1984.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear in the House, the Government are deeply grateful to the Archbishop of Canterbury for undertaking this humanitarian mission and pay tribute to his special representative, Mr. Terry Waite. We have co-operated closely with Mr. Waite in his efforts, and are grateful to those friendly Governments who intervened at our request, particularly to the Italian protecting power.

We have consistently made clear that there was no question of bargaining over the freedom of our hostages. We have, however, said that after their release we would be willing to consider ways of improving relations.

We are now ready to hold a meeting between Libyan and British officials under Italian auspices to discuss matters of concern to each side. As a humanitarian gesture the British interests section in Tripoli will also be authorised to accept visa applications in certain urgent medical and compassionate cases.

The welfare of the remaining British community in Libya of about 5,000 is still major concern. Their treatment will be an important measure of Libyan intentions. I would remind those British citizens who travel or work abroad that there are limits to the consular protection we can provide. Those who go to Libya do so on their own responsibility and that of the Libyan authorities to whom we look to ensure their safety.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 72**

SESSION 1984–85

28th January—8th February 1985

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There will, however, be headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one will find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc., under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speakers ruling and statement'.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading 'Speaker'.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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